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**U.S. foreign policy: mission, message, means**

*Should U.S. policy get religion? Comments on "Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy," issued by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 23 Feb 10 (85 pages)*  
Admiration for this needed, competent, and bold document makes critiquing It a daunting challenge. I fear that my small 'no' will too deeply dent my huge 'yes.' But in continuing the conversation, I am complying with the Task Force's intention to help factor religion more intelligently and effectively into world affairs.

1.....*"Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God"*are the words Benjamin Franklin wanted on the Great Seal of the United States. Among our Founders, he had the greatest influence on the shaping of the American ethic and of American foreign policy. The secularist illusion that foreign policy can be conducted without consideration of religion has fast faded since 9/11 and the global increase of religion's valence in common and political life.

2.....The mission of any nation's foreign policy is to protect and promote the nation's self-perceived interests. In short, foreign policy is essentially "interested." But this "interest" is a fact of human life, not an immoral aberration. Realists assume it and get on with "the humanum," *the cooperative human task* of discovering and deploying the best means to free the nations to pursue their interests and communicate their messages.

3.....The less powerful suspect the motives of the more powerful. As still the most powerful nation, the U.S. can do nothing "foreign" without raising *suspicions* that we are expanding our imperium by directly or indirectly preaching our religion.

4....Our religion? It's our distinctive egalitarian version of the religion of the West, which is complex, but the best one word for it still is "*Christian*." In his Cairo speech, Obama was wise to deny that the U.S. had ever politically been a Christian nation. Since 1791 (the First Amendment), the American government's separation of political and religious institutions from each other has been official . But much of the world fails to accept or even see that distinction: they think that whatever the U.S. government does in the world is Christian missionary activity in the form of power rather than only persuasion, and Christians are widely persecuted accordingly.

5.....Primarily, religion is person-to-person, people-to-people, person to people. Many NGOs (non-government organizations) aim to improve relations between religions and peoples. Any government involvement in religion is secondary and subject to *suspicion*and corruption. In this light, the Chicago document is dangerous as well as necessary, bold, and hopeful.

6.....What makes the document bold and hopeful is its courageous statement of America's MESSAGE wisely adjusted to practical suggestions for the integration of "religion into U.S. foreign policy," including "engaging religious communities within and among nations." Our message is FREEDOM and the fact that our "liberties are the gift of God" (as Jefferson put it in his 1781 Notes on Virginia, warning of God's "wrath" if government violates these rights).

7....."*Religious freedom,*" says the document, is "a universal religious right and a source of social and political stability." It is the right both to practice and to promote one's religion without persecution by government. And it is to be understood in light of both the UDHR (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the IRFA (the International Religious Freedom Act).

8....PROBLEM #1: Religious freedom, as the document conceives it, includes *mobility in religion*, the freedom to leave one's religion for another and the freedom to witness to one's religion in hope of attracting converts to it. Death is the traditional Muslim punishment for both (assuming that the person who leaves is a Muslim and the person who so witnesses is a non-Muslim).

9.....PROBLEM #2: America's message mixes the cultural values of freedom with the political aim of world*democratization*: the message is a mission in the tradition of American exceptionalism; and the Chicago document suggests the National Security Council as the locus of its suggested program, which purposes "to undermine religious terrorism and promote stable democracy" "without strengthening anti-Americanism." A caution: by promoting democracy in Gaza in spite of the near certainty that Hamas would use it to seize power, we unwittingly furthered terrorism.

9.....PROBLEM #3: While several liberal Muslims were on the Task Force, the document's mind *profoundly differs from the Muslim mind*in most majority Muslim states. Footnote 82 acknowledges this: elementary and secondary educational exchanges between America and those states can't handle "the humanities and social sciences," for those states "would likely reject outside advice in these fields, viewing it as interference in their theological studies."

10.....In his book "Globalization and Grace," Max Stackhouse concludes a series of Princeton studies with an effort to use Christian values in the interest of globalization while disengaging them from partisan religious and political institutions. Implicitly, he asks all peoples & their institutions to ask themselves, "What have we to offer, alongside of others' offerings, in the service of our common humanity?" Modifying without replacing the traditional minds, a humbled and hopeful *world-mind*may emerge.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  FEBRUARY 25, 2010; 8:21 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:  [Send E-mail](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/emailalink?sent=no&link=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html&title=U.S.%20foreign%20policy:%20mission,%20message,%20means)   [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html&t=U.S.%20foreign%20policy:%20mission,%20message,%20means)   [Twitter](http://twitter.com/home?status=U.S.%20foreign%20policy:%20mission,%20message,%20means%20-%20http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html)   [Digg](http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html&title=U.S.%20foreign%20policy:%20mission,%20message,%20means)   [Yahoo Buzz](http://buzz.yahoo.com/buzz?publisherurn=washington_po284&guid=washington_po284:http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html)   [Del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us/post?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html;&title=U.S.%20foreign%20policy:%20mission,%20message,%20means%20-%20On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog;)   [StumbleUpon](http://www.stumbleupon.com/submit?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html)   [Technorati](http://technorati.com/search/http:/onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/02/us_foreign_policy_mission_message_means.html)    
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I would see the values of free movement in religion is contrary to christianity - should there be free movement away from salvation and governments support that? Do good christian families tell their children, seek out god in any way want for god will love you and not condemn you to eternal damnation no matter what religion you join?

No free movement in religions is a humanist, buddhist, hindu, non-mono-ideological construct.

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