

Radia Layada, 2020

Volume 6 Issue 2, pp. 552-567

Date of Publication: 8th October 2020

DOI-<https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2020.62.552567>

This paper can be cited as: Layada, R. (2020). Examining the Faith-Based Us Foreign Policy of G.W. Bush in Executing Middle Eastern Affairs. PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 6(2), 552-567.

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EXAMINING THE FAITH-BASED US FOREIGN POLICY OF G.W. BUSH IN EXECUTING MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS

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Abstract

The eager towards maintaining all initiatives linked to globalization and international power has permitted nations to interrupt the use of religion in framing its foreign policy agenda. Such use, though some countries consider as a part of the nation's defense strategy, has characterized the new millennium by a massive disorder threatening international political stability. This geopolitical situation forces researchers to go further in questioning the intercourse between the faith-based foreign policy constructing process and the soft, hard, and smart powers used by nations. The present paper highlights the presence of religion in skeletoning the US foreign policy under the George W. Bush presidency and its effect on the US- Middle Eastern political relationships. With the implication of Bush's faith, the paper identifies how the president's foreign policy has been ultimately characterized by an evangelical presidential style and addressed domestically or internationally by extensive use of religious rhetoric.

Keywords

Religion, Religious Rhetoric, The United States, Bush Administration, Middle East

1. Introduction

Political legitimation of religion has long been a debatable challenge for scholars of international relations. While proponents of secularization and modernization have ultimately

underscored the efficiency of religion in the nation's public life (Ammerman, 1990; Wald, Silver & Fridy, 2005), the 21st-century researchers' assessments highlight the increasing potential of the significance that religion master when it comes to international politics. In an attempt to answer crucial problematic about the means and mechanisms through which religion affects the US foreign policy, those assessments have assumed a set of hypothesis among them: was presidents' faith relevant or irrelevant to their foreign policies? Was presidents' foreign policy determined by the variation of their faith interpretation or the geopolitical circumstances or both?

In regard to the complexity of understanding the consistency of international relations challenges, examining the US foreign policy towards the Middle East along religious lines is a complicated task. The US- Middle Eastern international relations have been longstanding during the 20th century and further invigorated during the 21st century. The 9/11 attacks were important not only in characterizing the new millennium but also as a geopolitical stimulus in deepening the US involvement in the Middle East. In response to the attacks and as a president of the nation, Bush tended to draw a foreign policy agenda in respect of the US interests in the region including oil, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, Israel, and promoting democratization (Byman & Moller, 2016).

The extensive efforts conducted by the Bush administration to preserve US security relationships in the Middle East have encouraged sociologists to enhance their literature about the individual nation-states' concern over power and influence (Ryan & Haugaard, 2012). They categorize presidents' foreign policies into: hard, smart, and soft. Since the war on terror was the direct response of Bush toward the 9/11 attacks, his foreign policy is categorized under hard power. In contrast, the resistance of US military commitment in the Middle East in parallel with the pervasive diplomatic attempts in the region has characterized Obama foreign policy with adopting soft and smart powers (Ari, 2020).

The present research contributes to the contextualization process of variant international relation's theoretical frameworks linked to religion and aimed to obtain a better understanding of its implementations on the US foreign policies. The historical relationships between the United States and the Middle East form an interesting scope for investigating the possibilities of the religion's interference in structuring these international relations. The assessment of this paper is achieved by first analyzing the needed alternatives as an examination of the theoretical framework, and second identifying how Bush's foreign policy towards the Middle Eastern countries namely Iraq, Iran, and Syria is characterized by religion.

2. Theoretical Framework

Religion legitimacy in the dynamics of US foreign policy agendas has been a critical security challenge for the 21st-century scholars. Since religion is related to persons' beliefs and assumptions, empirical studies on the positivity of religion- US foreign policy neutralization has been a dilemma that is ended, typically under his presidency, with the coming of George W. Bush. The latter was not only the leader of the United States but also radically diverged the nation's liberal multilateral internationalist strategy previously adopted advocating that the old strategy was no longer appropriate to represent the international aspirations of the American people. Both the religious reflections of the "Bush Doctrine" and the eventual dependence on the religious terminology have increased the potential of the existence of a faith-based foreign policy under the 43rd president of the country.

2.1. International Relations Theories and Religion's Interpretation in the US Foreign Policy

The complexity of understanding the mechanisms through which religion is affecting the nation's foreign policy apparatus can be relieved when overlapping sets of international relation theories naming: constructivism, liberalism, post-structuralism, and the agent-based theory. Simultaneously, the present research uses targeted categories which are: nation institutions, ideas/religious heritage, interest groups and recognizes the interceding effect of causal agents between these alternatives and foreign policy through adopting the convention of "mapping" applied by C. M. Warner and S. G. Walker (professors of political science).

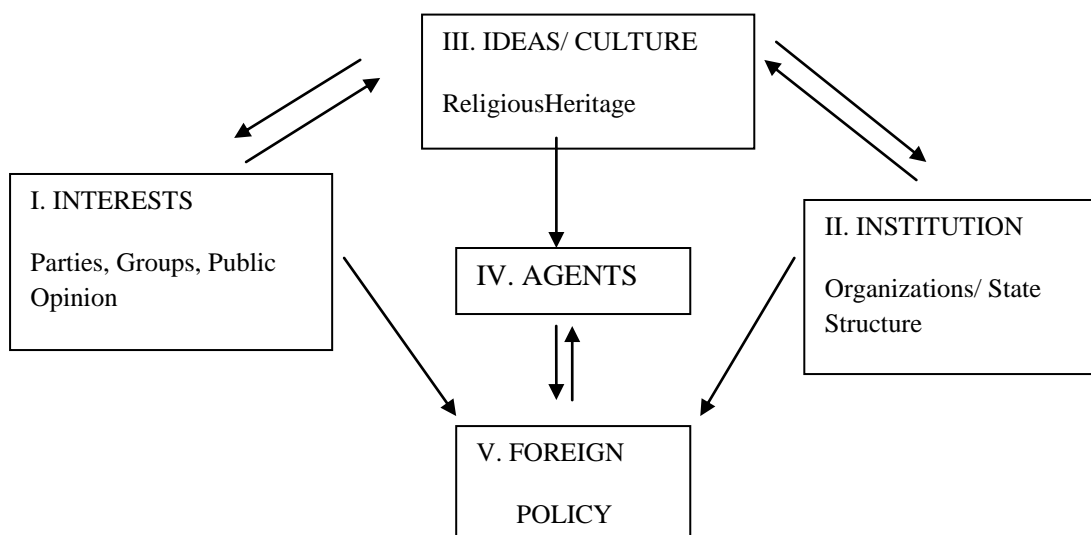


Figure 1: A Macroscopic Map of Religion and Foreign Policy

Warner and Walker assessed six conceptual boxes that some of them are connected within each box whereas other arrows connect one concept with another concept. This paper,

clarified in the earlier figure, examines five boxes of theoretically derived causal pathways that lead to foreign policy. Box IV and V, being the reciprocal relationships between agents and actions, represent the impact of a leader's belief and intentions on foreign policy versus the maintaining effects of feedback from actions on those beliefs and intentions. Then, the possibility of holding a local direct effect of religion on foreign policy is embodied in the beliefs and intentions of the agents of foreign policy. If the environment feedback is to have a similar local learning effect on religion, it must reinforce the beliefs and intentions of the agents. The presence of religion in the mutual dynamic relation between agents and foreign policy has another phase of interference which is the culture of the society (box III) traveling through the causal pathways of institutions (box I) and linking groups (box II). The impact of feedback from the external environment to reach agents can also follow these pathways.

Post-structuralists contend that the eager towards holding knowledge and assumptions has to remain renewable and challengeable to the concepts of facts and truth (Foucault, 1984). Upon this base, proponents of the theory assert the importance of the affecting role does explicit actors in a society perform in regard to their knowledge. Those actors are referred to the elites who occupy power and authority in the society and control the way, dimensions, and alternatives of that knowledge by imposing it upon others (Morrow, 2017).

Theologically, religion is defined as the ultimate prescribed aspect of ideas. In its turn, liberal international relations theory assumed that ideas contribute a set of concepts and beliefs about a political issue including foreign policy by performing in a limited way (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993). Policymakers who can be a person of a nation's institution, interest groups, and parties use their ideas in executing preferred political decisions. A perspective that is argued by Douglass North "one has to model the decision-maker as holding a mental model." (Quoted in Legro, 2005). Once religion is affecting ideas, it is too affecting variant policies whether domestically or internationally.

Since handed decision units within the government itself are constructing the nation's foreign policy, the elite power embodied in knowledge/ ideas is considered by the agent-based theory supporters as crucial factors or channels through which the policy decision-makers identify, decide, and implements foreign policy (Hermann, 2001; Keohane & Martin, 2003). The agent actor scholars assert the integration of the moral status and the belief system of who is in charge of the decision-making process in characterizing the moral status of their decisions. At this point, religion interfered in the process of structuring foreign policy agenda by its influence on leaders' belief system (Carlsnaes, 1992). While the influence of the religious beliefs of leaders is constrained by nation structures, considerations of geopolitical

forces, and domestic political interests, the religious beliefs of leaders can be influential in shaping leaders style (Warner & Wenner, 2006).

Any political researcher who looks for a deeper apprehension of the building process of the US foreign policy during the post World War II till the present day can easily distinguish the increasing religion's interference in many modern presidents' international apparatus. The latter is identified by many scholars as to the "Evangelical" or "Wilsonian" style of presidential leadership. The first and the second can be categorized under the same umbrella since both share the same alternatives concerning the integration of personal faith in handling the US executive branch (Berggren and Rae, 2006). Wilsonian style, referring to the president Woodrow Wilson, emphasizes the moralistic vision in dealing with various political issues characterizing them with selective religious rhetoric and ideal leadership towards global unique democracy and international peace. In doing so, Wilson highlighted a unique approach compared with his predecessors when it comes to international affairs (Hutcheson, 1988; Alley, 1977).

A better understanding of the mechanisms through which religion is interrupted in the US foreign policy can be maintained through Anthony Giddens' structuration theory. The theory brought answers to some sociologist's questions about the nature of the relationship between the structure referring to the external factors and the agency referring to the internal motivation. The structuration theory examines the correlation between "ontological security" and "existential anxiety". By the former, Giddens travels in the individual's deep sense of protection and his or her tendency towards holding the trust of surrounding people. At this status, psychological stability and prosperity are enhanced avoiding existential anxiety. When Giddens' standards are contextualized in analyzing the religion-US foreign policy, the ontological security refers to the relief status and mutual trust that individuals handle under sharing the same belief on God's compassion (38-39). The seeds for the establishment of the structuration theory help Giddens to give a deeper perception of the new role of religion in constructing the US foreign policy.

Another crucial pillar in the convergence of religion in the structuring of the US foreign policy is the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act. The Act enforces the right of the United States to preserve international peace through the essential made efforts to promote religious freedom defending the religiously persecuted people abroad and to preserve the standard human rights under a collaborative work with foreign governments (Annicchino, 2016). The intended aim is emphasized by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' report in 2010 in which it highlighted the significant patterns that enforce the use of religion in the US foreign policy building process. The patterns are: the influence of religious

groups; the change of religious identification in the world is having significant political implications; the effect of globalization in benefiting and transforming religion but it also has become a primary means of organizing opposition to it; the important role of religion in framing public opinion; the use of religion to deal with other communities' tensions, and the enhance of the political significance of religious freedom as a universal human right and source of stability (Appleby & Cizik, 2010).

3. Methodology

At the methodological level, different methodologies and analyses are applied in the research. The presentation of historical events such as the 9/11 attacks, war on terror, invasion of Iraq, and other incidents related to the subject of this work needed the use of the historical analysis. The manipulation of sociologists' views on a set of social alternatives to understand religion political legitimating necessitates the application of the discourse analysis. As the paper is based on the empirical study of religion-US-Middle East foreign affairs that imposes the adoption of the qualitative approach, statistics and graphs are included in the assessment.

4. Result and Discussion

To examine the implication of religion in George W. Bush foreign policy, the present study highlights the main pillars formed by the Bush administration. The “Bush Doctrine” incorporates the president’s international policy devices.

4.1 Bush Doctrine

After the 9/11 attacks and as a president of the country, G.W. Bush introduced his foreign policy under what is called the “Bush Doctrine”. The first of its principles is unilateralism (Santos &Teixiera, 2013). By the latter, Bush extensively accelerated the notion of unilateralist “America- First” policy. He called all countries to welcome the leadership of a great and noble nation; a “distinctly American internationalism” (Dietrich, 2005). The new foreign policy had come to reinforce the American mission of spreading freedom.

The second principle of the Bush doctrine is a war on terror. The president declared: “The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of wars” (Bush, 2001). Though many US citizens had welcomed the strategy considering it as a logical response to the threat, Bush’s task was not as easy as it appeared since the nation cannot be at war with terrorism per se; indeed the latter can be a person, an organization, or a political regime. Since the threat’s nature is ambiguous,

the doctrine invoked the pre-emptive actions which are based on eliminating dangers before occurring in order to ensure the national security (Snauwaert, 2004).

Promoting democracy formed the third principle of the Bush doctrine. Under this principle, the US foreign policy was able to influence regime change in rogue states which were harboring terrorism. The adoption of democracy in these states would transmit safety not only to the United States but also to the world (Santos & Teixeira, 2013). As a result, Congress passed the Advance of Democracy Act in 2005 which issued: “Wars between or among democratic countries exceedingly rare, while wars between or among non-democratic countries are commonplace, with nearly 170.000.000 people having lost their lives because of the policies of the totalitarian governments” (qtd in. Owens, 2008).

4.2. Contextualizing the Presence of Religion in Bush’s foreign Policy

When scrutinizing US presidents’ use of religious language, the president G. W. Bush shared with them if not a similar degree but a considerable connection with the religious rhetoric in his variant addresses. Whether his aim was informing the US citizens with a domestic and a foreign issue of convincing them with, religion remained a key device in operating Bush’s agenda.

The use of religious terms varied from a president to another. The least number was for president J.F. Kennedy with almost 2 religious terms per thousand words. 4.5 religious terms per thousand, the highest number, was noticed for G. H.W. Bush whereas it was reached almost 4 for his son G.W. Bush. The analysis of the religious language use is categorized upon the domain of the speeches they were interrupted and divided into two pre-Reagan and post-Reagan in C. Hughes’ assessment of US presidents’ use of religious language. Between democratic or republican presidents, the utilization of religious terms did not differ so much. In the foreign affairs speeches, both presidents' parties post-Reagan shared the same rate which was 4 religious terms per thousand words. The interesting numbers were found in defense speeches. If 1.2 religious terms per thousand words were considered a high figure for democratic presidents post-Reagan, Republicans’ rate was on the top forming 1.4 (Hughes, 2019).

Findings mentioned above strengthen earlier literature about the customary eliciting religious imagery in American presidents’ speeches but Bush’s use has been considered a matter of criticism. The 9/11 attacks discerned the religious extremes of which Bush could be. On September 11, 2001, the delivered address to the nation was full of powerful religious reference as in the following excerpt:

Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all of those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me”. (qtd in Black, 2004, p. 10)

The president devoted himself to exporting compassion underdetermined and designed means as in his words “to rallying the armies of compassion in America, to help our fellow citizens in need, build a culture of life, and defend the sanctity of marriage” (Bush, 2004). Believing that serving the nation and took the burden of responses to the attacks are not just political actions but rather a religious call, Bush adopted Woodrow Wilson’s faith-based mission alternative to make the world safe for democracy:

America is a nation with a mission. We’re called to fight terrorism around the world, and we’re waging that fight. As freedom’s home and defender, we are called to expand the realm of human liberty. And by our actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, more than 50 million people have been liberated from tyranny. (Bush, 2004)

As a sense of mission is a defining character for an evangelical styled president, M.H. de Castro Santos (Associate Professor at IREL), together with U.T. Teixeira (PhD. Student) had analyzed 391 speeches of G.W. Bush Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice and Secretaries of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates to identify the unilateral preemptive actions and the exporting of democracy under the American foreign policy pillars of the post-Cold War period and in correlation with the Bush doctrine. These principles are: 1- democracy is not culturally bound. Therefore the promotion of democracy is for the good of mankind; 2- Democracies do not fight each other. Therefore, exporting means to promote regional or even global peace; 3- the promotion of democracy is linked to the security and the economic interests of the USA (Santos & Teixeira, 2013). Findings of the analysis are arranged in the following table.

Table 1: *The Relative Use of the Pillars of the American Foreign Policy In the Bush Administration*

Principles	1st	2nd	3rd	The American Mission	Total Number of Speeches
Bush’s first term	35	17	27	55	253
Bush’s second term	29	39	54	7	138

Total	64	56	81	62	391
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Source: Santos & Teixeira, 2013, p. 136.

After the 9/11 attacks, the president Bush has characterized his first term in office by a high attention to the first principle of the American foreign policy pillars which was the promotion of democracy with 35 % of the 391 speeches of Bush and his Secretaries of State and Defense increasing the percentage of the alternative linked to the American mission by 55%. Though these percentages were decreased in the president's second term either for the first principle or for the American mission with 29% and 7% respectively, the highest percentage was for the third principle forming 54%.

The political vision of Bush as a president embodied in the first principle had transformed his rhetoric to the messianic and crusading tones. He noticeably made the link between Christian beliefs and the US concept of freedom. He said:

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. (Bush, 2005)

The "good and evil" assumption dominated the president's religious rhetoric. Carrying out the American mission of spreading peace all over the world, Bush considered the US hegemonic power as the force of good over the evil. In May 2003, he noticed that "we are in a conflict between the good and evil, and America will call evil by its name" (Judis, 2005). Believing that this evil must be resisted and defeated since he became God's instrument in the battle between good and evil (Jacobson, 2006), Bush's use of the term "evil" had dramatically increased after the 9/11 attacks. In an analysis of the president's Bush religious rhetoric held by A.E. Black (professor in politics and international relations), the term was used two times before the attacks compared with 199 times in his foreign policy speeches after (2004).

Some politicians proclaim that there is a reciprocal relationship between the president's belief and his religious language including the use of the term "evil". Commerce Secretary, Don Evans, made the link between the religious belief of Bush and his use of "evil". In an interview, Evans explained that "belief gives [the president] something more than confidence...It gives him a desire to serve others and a very clear sense of what is good and what is evil" (qtd in Black, 2004, p. 4). For Howard Fineman, journalist and editorial director of the AOL Huffington Post Media Group, the impact of religion seems broad and deep in both president's personal story of faith transformation and his performance as a president of the nation. Fineman contends:

The president-the presidency- is the most resolutely' faith-based' in modern times, an enterprise founded, supported, and guided by trust in the temporal and spiritual power of God...But the Bush administration is dedicated to the idea that there is an answer to societal problems here and terrorism abroad; give everyone, everywhere, the freedom to find God, too. (qtd in Black, 2004, p. 3).

4.3 Analysis of Results and Discussions

Through presenting different results and discussions linked to the aim of the paper, a better understanding of the convention of “mapping” applied by Warner and Walker is provided. The box II of figure 1 which is representing the state structures is embodied in this research with the commander-in-chief and both the head of the state and the head of government the president George W. Bush. The president, together with the nation’s governmental institutions, structures the foreign policy agenda. The causal impact that allows the interference of religion in the decision-making process of the president’s foreign policy is the concept of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions (box III). Since the religious heritage of the president reflects his ideas and beliefs, a principle strongly defended by proponents of the agent-based theory, then religion characterizes either the Bush’s linguistic terminology or the context where it is used. The religious rhetoric had dominated the addresses’ speeches of the president as result they are considered as agents (box IV) in managing the Bush doctrine (box V).

September 11, 2001, marked the beginning of Bush’s democratic evangelicalism. The evangelical presidential style of Bush had deeply shaped the extremes to how much faith framed the foreign policy of the president (Gibbs, 2005). The latter adopted the tradition of Woodrow Wilson’s faith-based mission “to make the world safe for democracy”, and entered into wars against Iraq and Afghanistan as what he believes to be complementary parts of the “war on terrorism” (Berggren & Rae, 2006). These unilateral actions were a reflection of Bush’s belief that neither the identification of threats nor international actions taken would be decided by a multilateral institution but rather it would be led by an American president with an American means.

4.4 The Impact of Bush’s Faith-Based Foreign Policy on Executing Middle Eastern Affairs

The long-standing inter-relation between the United States and the Middle Eastern countries has been intensified since the 9/11 attacks and the evangelical presidential style handled by president Bush in executing international affairs. Spreading democracy in the region is too converged in Bush’s claim of supporting freedom all over the world. At West Point in June 2002, Bush argued, “The peoples of Islamic nations want and deserve the same

freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation” permitting a “forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East” (Gilley, 2013).

A considerable literature has been developed in which scholars, criticizing one another, aimed at answering the question of what reasons are behind the freedom agenda of the United States towards the Middle East, but they agree on the definite political-economic actions the US executed under the umbrella of democratizing the region. U.S. Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) was one of them. In June 2003, Bush gave his agreement on the proposal as a part of a plan to fight terrorism in the Middle Eastern countries allowing the proliferation of democracy. To be a part of the MEFTA, countries of the region have to: join the World Trade Organization, participate in the Generalized System of preferences, accept trade investment framework agreements, be a member in bilateral investment treaties, accept free trade agreements with the US, and finally participate in trade capacity buildings (Bolle, 2005). The Bush administration did not stop at MEFTA, but rather issued a similar and a larger crucial economic agreement which was the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (Sharp, 2005).

Of all Middle Eastern countries, the present paper assesses the impact of the religious foreign policy executed by president Bush towards Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

4.4.1 Iraq

The approval of the Bush Doctrine has ultimately diverged the US-Iraqi international relation. Believing that the United States was dealing with enemies who were ready to strike first even if that means the use of the weapons of mass destruction after the 9/11, the Bush administration adopted the “anticipatory self-defense” as a strategy of preemption (Dockrill, 2006). Bush announced, “From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime”. Identifying the nation as an axis of evil, Iraq was invaded in 2003; a war had started due to potential intentions as the US suspected that Saddam Hussein would later develop nuclear programs (Dockrill, 2006). Saddam was accused by expressing efforts to advance his country towards using weapons of mass destruction and affording them to terrorists. Whether Saddam’s intention was true or not, Bush’s justification for his war on Iraq remained problematic.

4.4.2 Iran

Friction has been the almost character when politicians asked about the US- Iranian international relationships through history. For Bush administration, Iran’s Islamic system was either on revolutionary upheaval or near to fail. The 9/11 attacks had assured this vision since Bush diagnosed Iran as a part of an “axis of evil” together with Iraq and North Korea for its bolster to Palestinian militants. As a direct reaction, Iran had suspended its dialogue with

the USA over Afghanistan, a critical dimension of burgeoning cooperation between the two countries (Rubin & Batmanglish, 2008).

In addition, Washington's efforts towards spreading democracy in the region generally and in Iran particularly took a variant path compared with that of Iraq. The Bush approach yielded the burden of inspiring and advancing domestic opposition to the Iranian regime. In February 2006, the US administration announced \$75 million in funds to promote democracy in Iran (Rice, 2006). Tehran interpreted this initiative as an explicit endorsement of Washington's abiding commitment to regime change and responded with a severe crackdown on democracy activists, human rights advocates, and academics who maintained contacts with the international community (Maloney, 2008). Consequently, the US funds for promoting democracy in Iran had been expanded.

4.4.3 Syria

The sensitive geopolitical position occupied by Syria in the region accorded it a central role in Bush's alternative of freedom agenda towards the Middle East. Syria's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq, questions of arms proliferation, the course of Arab-Israel talks, Syrian role in Lebanon, and Syrian relation with terrorist activity were the presented files on the table when structuring the US-Syrian foreign policy under the Bush administration (Gilley, 2013). Though it had gone hand in hand with the United States' investigation with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda organization, Syria has been unwilling to sever connections with other terrorist organizations. Bush warned Syria for these intentions in May 2003 to be the second warning after the first which was in March of the same year to stop permitting transit of military supplies and volunteer fighters through Syria to Iraq (Prados, 2006). By the end of the year (December 12, 2003), the president signed the Syria and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act imposing extra sanctions on the nation only if it halts support for terrorism, ends its occupation of Lebanon, and stops its development of mass destruction. On November 4, 2005 Bush signed the Foreign Operations Appropriation Act which repeats the previous bans on US aid to Syria but includes a provision authorizing \$6.550.000 for programs supporting democracy in Syria and Iran (Sharp, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Although researches on the reciprocal relation between religion and US foreign affairs remain new, the present paper clarifies how religion can interrupt in frame working foreign policy agenda. Through overlapping specific international relation theories (constructivism, liberalism, post-structuralism, and agent-based theory), religion characterized Bush's foreign

policy generally and towards the Middle East specifically. Bush's ideas, beliefs, and assumptions were the tools of structuring the extent of his evangelical presidential style. Such style was performed more with extensive use of religious rhetoric by the president frequently when it comes to international affairs. With the integration of religion in both the concept and context of Bush doctrine, the US-Middle Eastern affairs have been typically noticed with war on Iraq, harsh sanctions on Syria, and a continuation of Washington's observations for Tehran with a critical eye.

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