

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Embedding religious engagement and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) into foreign policy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Fabio Petito	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in International Relations	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/09/2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Until recently, religion has either been neglected, or viewed as the ultimate threat to security by foreign policy makers. Petito's research on postsecularism has contributed to a change in the policy mind-set and practices of the Italian, UK and other Western governments by questioning foreign policy makers' secular blind spots and by developing action-oriented proposals that enable policymakers to better integrate religion into foreign policy. In particular, Petito's work on religious engagement has significantly impacted on Italian foreign policy strategic planning, while his innovative approach to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) promotion has influenced European governments, as well as international organisations such as the EU & OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), leading them to develop new initiatives.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research Petito's research on the role of religion in International Relations (IR) spans two decades. Initially leading the first ever research project on 'Religion and IR Theory' (1999-2004), Petito has since contributed to setting up a new reflexive research agenda to challenge the secularist bias of International Relations and the predominant assumption that the politicisation of religion is always an inescapable threat to security and inimical to modernity.</p> <p>Since joining Sussex, Petito has expanded this line of interpretation, by exploring the theoretical implications of the postsecular debate for thinking about IR. Challenging secularisation as the master narrative of modernity and highlighting the 'secular' as a site of exclusion, his work has advanced the postsecular as a normative plea for new models of global politics able to include religious views [3.1]. He has also demonstrated the need to develop a postsecular sensibility in understanding international politics and in shaping foreign policy by removing what the diplomatic community has been increasingly acknowledging as 'secular blind spots' and creating new forms of secular-religious partnerships to respond to global challenges [3.2].</p> <p>Moving his research to more applied work, he has focused on two new policy areas of growing interest to the foreign policy community: 1) religious engagement in foreign policy - how governments can engage with religious leaders and communities abroad to promote different foreign policy objectives, from development and human rights to peace building [3.3] [3.4]; and 2) the protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) through foreign policy - how governments can respond to the global trend towards greater religious persecution and discrimination [3.5] [3.6]. Petito's research has developed innovative frameworks and action-oriented proposals to enable policymakers to better face the policy challenges above.</p> <p>On religious engagement in foreign policy, two important contributions have been made as a result of this research. One is an innovative conception of religious engagement in foreign policy, which emphasizes the construction of a knowledge base for foreign policy generated through encounter and dialogue with religious communities and religious non-state actors [3.3]. The other is an Italian model of religious engagement in foreign policy. This is based on the idea that Italy, as the country which hosts the Holy See, has a unique geo-religious position as the hub of a global network of religious connections which it can use to develop a special model of religious engagement based on the unparalleled mass of Rome-based religious non-state actors as a forum of consultation and policy advice [3.4].</p>		

On the protection of FoRB through foreign policy, there have been two important results of this research that together call for a change in the dominant approach by governments and international organisations in response to the global crisis of FoRB. The first identifies the need for FoRB-promotion policies to emphasise bottom-up developmental strategies by balancing high-level declaratory statements and government-to-government diplomacy with engaging local stakeholders and developing activities in response to local concerns [3.5]. The second research insight taken up in policy here is the idea that religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as the victims, or the perpetrators of FoRB violations, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB and to foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace. In particular, interreligious engagement through dialogue and collaboration can be a useful policy tool to advance FoRB and combat intolerance based on religion or belief [3.6].

3. References to the research

[3.1] Petito, F. & Mavelli, L. (2012), "The Postsecular in International Relations: An Overview", *Review of International Studies*, 38:5, 931-42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051200040X>

[3.2] Petito, F. & Mavelli, L. (2014), eds., *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power*, New York: Palgrave, 288 pages. Available from HEI on request.

[3.3] Petito, F. & Thomas, S. (2015), "Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy", *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 13: 2, 40-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2015.1039303>

[3.4] Petito, F. & Ferrara, P. (2016), "An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects", *The International Spectator*, 51: 1, 28-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2016.1120955>

[3.5] Petito, F., M. Evans, J. Rehman & Thane, K. (2017), *Article 18: From Rhetoric to Reality*, Report of the UK APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, 1-56.

<https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/Article-18-report-1710.pdf> Research-based report co-authored with two world-leading academic authorities on FoRB; peer reviewed by established scholars in the field (p2). Has since become a reference point for international religious freedom policy-oriented research (see [5.9]).

[3.6] Petito, F. (2020), "From Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Advocacy to Interreligious Engagement in Foreign Policy", *Global Affairs*, 6:3, 269 - 286.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1845098>

Funding from British Council/Henry Luce Foundation 'Bridging Voices' ('Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and Foreign Policy', PI: Petito, 09/2014 - 08/2015, \$24,000).

4. Details of the impact

Since 2013, Petito's research has enabled Western policymakers to: 1) integrate religious literacy and engagement in foreign policy, and 2) design and implement innovative strategies to promote FoRB through foreign policy. These two areas of impact were respectively developed through two major programmes and platforms for engagement led by Petito: The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) initiative on 'Religions and International Relations' (2012-2017), institutionalised in 2018 as a programme based at the leading Italian think tank Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI); and the *FoRB & Foreign Policy Initiative* at the University of Sussex, started as a British Council/Luce Foundation funded project (2014-16) with a transatlantic focus, and officially launched in 2017 as a research and policy programme partnered with the FCO, the UK Parliament, the EU and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Influence on attitudes and religious engagement capacity of Italian MFA (and beyond)

In his testimonial, [text removed for publication] states: "it is very clear that within the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], Petito is regarded as the preeminent thought leader with respect to the question of how religion fits into contemporary Italian diplomacy. Through my frequent interactions [text removed for publication] with the [text removed for publication] [Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs], I saw the very clear impact of Petito's influence with respect to how Italy was approaching the challenge of integrating greater awareness and outreach capacity on religion into its day-to-day work. Indeed, it is not too much of an exaggeration to credit him as the person responsible for giving rise to and nurturing these impulses within the ministry" [5.1].

Since 2012, when Petito was officially nominated as the lead scientific coordinator of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA's) initiative on Religions and International Relations, he has partnered with its Policy Planning Unit in co-designing a programme convening a yearly policy dialogue with policymakers and religious representatives, as well as other faith-based actors and experts. Each year the meetings considered a different issue of the postsecular agenda [3.1] drawing on a concept paper researched and drafted by Petito in dialogue with the Policy Planning Unit: in 2013, state-religions arrangements; in 2014, religious engagement; in 2015/16, the Middle Eastern crisis; in 2017, the refugee crisis; in 2018, sustainable peace; in 2019, interreligious engagement; in 2020, inclusive citizenship (for example concept paper, see [5.2]).

This work has raised awareness and improved the understanding of the global resurgence of religion and the postsecular predicament [3.2] in the Italian foreign policy-making community. The current [text removed for publication] states in his testimonial that "Petito has contributed many valuable insights and lines of interpretation, which have been tested through yearly events and a number of documents, and have then been translated into valuable policy recommendations"; and he concludes that "the initiative has had a remarkable impact on the analysis and considerations of the Policy Planning of the Ministry... as a consequence of these activities, the religious factor has progressively been embedded in the internal discussions of the Ministry and the opportunity to more intensively engage with religious actors is meeting increasing consensus among Italian foreign policy practitioners" [5.3]. The research has been used to design "a specific policy and action-oriented approach... thus contributing to more nuanced and effective policy-making" [5.3].

Petito's research has also influenced the conceptual frameworks and practical tools mobilised by Italian diplomats. In his testimonial, [text removed for publication] referred to Petito's postsecular framework [3.2] as "an invaluable tool in the exercise of my diplomatic functions and an added value in my official and informal contacts, in a country where violent religious extremism hit tragically during the '90s"; he has also confirmed that "Petito's research influenced in a decisive manner my way of thinking about my diplomatic functions. In particular, I owe him the concept of religious engagement [3.3], a new idea on how diplomatic agents should relate to religious actors in order to bring about justice and stability in a troubled world" [5.4].

The new model of religious engagement developed by Petito in the context of this Italian initiative (outlined in an internal concept paper [5.2], later expanded and published as [3.3] & [3.4]) has generated impact beyond Italy. The proposal was welcomed with interest by the Holy See, which first replied through its semi-official voice of *Civiltà Cattolica* – the only journal directly overseen and approved by the Secretariat of State of the Holy See – stating "this orientation is indicative of a new relationship between religion and states, which the Catholic Church appreciates" [5.5]. Petito subsequently accepted an invitation to attend a high level international conference in March 2016 with its top diplomat, the Secretary for the Relations with States, who in his remarks responded point-by-point to the proposals Petito had outlined in the framing document for the meeting [5.6]. The [text removed for publication], described the above conference "as a key milestone in the developing thinking of a number of foreign ministries (including the Holy See)" and went on to observe that "Petito's research and publications during this period, alongside the conferences/events he organised, had significant impact on my and the FCO's developing thinking in this area, and from my observation similarly on the work of other foreign ministries, in particular those of Italy, Germany, and the European Action Service (EAS)" [5.7].

Impact on FoRB-promotion strategies of FCO, Western governments, OSCE & EU

From 2014 onwards, Petito brought together policy makers and other stakeholders from North America and Europe to discuss how to strengthen transatlantic cooperation on FoRB-promotion. Following two successful closed-door dialogues at Wilton Park and Georgetown University, a Policy Brief [5.8] was launched at a policy dialogue at the House of Lords, which brought together numerous major international policy stakeholders. As a result, Petito was invited to be part of the newly established All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) IFoRB (International FoRB)

academic advisory board, to input into the revision of the FoRB FCO toolkit and, more instrumentally, to co-author a new major APPG report [3.5] aimed at raising the priority to protect FoRB internationally in UK Government policy, and arguing for new, bottom-up developmental strategies. Launched in Parliament in October 2017, it has already resulted in revisions to UK Government policy, via their adoption of three of the report's major recommendations:

- a) Requirements for all embassies to report on FoRB and use the new toolkit [5.9].
- b) The inclusion of the promotion of FoRB in DFID's strategic priorities. The 2018 UK Aid Connect call allocated £12m for a pilot programme to promote FoRB [5.10].
- c) The appointment in July 2018 of the Prime Minister's new Special Envoy on FoRB, FCO Minister, Lord Ahmad, whom to recognise Petito's contribution gave his first speech setting the vision for his new role in a meeting in Parliament convened by Petito on 12 July 2018 [5.11].

In a personal letter to Petito, the [text removed for publication] stated that "the report has been praised by Government Ministers and Parliamentarians and was referenced several times during the APPG Westminster Hall's debate on International FoRB day. It was also profiled by 15 media organisations, including BBC Radio 4... After the report's launch, the [relevant] FCO Ministers of State re-issued the FCO toolkit on FoRB to all British embassies and high commissions... and asked them to report on what they are doing to advance FoRB." [5.9]

In 2018 Petito led a year-long major multi-stakeholder consultation process under the patronage of the 2018 Italian OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Chairmanship to co-produce innovative knowledge on interreligious engagement as a policy tool to advance FoRB and combat intolerance based on religion or belief [3.6]. The key message of the final report of the consultation (presented and discussed on 6 Dec 2018 at the 25th OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan) was adopted, almost *verbatim*, as one of the points of the 2018 OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office Conclusions on FoRB, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. It offers "the warmest encouragement of initiatives to promote interreligious dialogue and partnerships, also through the inclusion and engagement of religious and belief communities in public discussions...as partners in building long term strategies to advance FoRB for all and foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace." [5.12]

Three policy outcomes have emerged from the dissemination of this research [3.6]:

- a) The OSCE/ODIHR convened in Oct 2018 its Panel of FoRB Experts, regarded as one of the major international mechanisms focusing on FoRB together with the UN special rapporteur on FoRB, to draft guidelines on Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue and Partnerships. In that context, Petito's findings were presented to inform their work. Furthermore, in recognition of this work in June 2019 Petito was appointed for a 3-year term as the UK representative to the 16-member panel of FoRB experts selected from the 57 OSCE participant states and is currently a member of the working group writing the above guidelines.
- b) The model of interreligious engagement was endorsed by senior diplomats with relevant portfolios, such as the Advisor for Religious Affairs of the French MFA and the Finnish Ambassador-at-Large for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Processes in a series of video-interviews given at the recent meeting convened by the Italian MFA in partnership with the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy [5.13]. As a result, Petito was hired as a consultant (2019-20) by the German Ministry for International Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to assist the German Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion with the design of its first ever FoRB pilot programmes. Currently Petito has been developing in partnership with Wilton Park (FCO) and United States Agency for International Development (US AID) a follow-up policy dialogue initiative on FoRB & the SDGs (UN Sustainable Development Goals) now rescheduled for early 2021 [5.14]. All initiatives delayed by COVID.
- c) Petito was invited by Jan Figel, the EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of FoRB outside the EU, to chair the final high-profile stock-taking event of his temporary mandate (2016-

19) (Brussels, 19-20 Oct 2019) and to assist with the drafting of the related final report for the newly appointed president of the European Commission. The report [5.15] specifically endorses Petito's ideas as the third of only five action-oriented recommendations put forward and emphatically states its "support [for] the model of 'interreligious engagement' put forward by a recent report of the *FoRB & Foreign Policy Initiative* of the University of Sussex" (p. 10). On 9 July 2020 the EC announced the official renewal of the Special Envoy mandate.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] [text removed for publication].

[5.2] Petito, F., & Thomas, S. (2014). "Foreign policy and religious engagement: the special case of Italy", Concept Paper, Italian MFA-ISPI, October 2014, Milan, 1-10.

https://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Concept_Paper_religion.pdf

[5.3] [text removed for publication]

[5.4] [text removed for publication].

[5.5] Pierre de Charentenay, 'Religione e politica estera: Il caso Italia', *La Civiltà Cattolica* (2015): 238-46. https://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/CivCatt_deChartenay.pdf

[5.6] Arch. Paul R. Gallagher, "Religious Engagement in the Current Mediterranean Crisis: What can be done?", speech at the conference 'Religion and Diplomacy: A New Strategic Pillar for a Comprehensive Mediterranean Dialogue', Farnesina, Rome, 17 March 2016.

[5.7] [text removed for publication].

[5.8] Petito, F. et al., "Recognising our differences can be our strength: Enhancing transatlantic cooperation on promoting FoRB", Policy Brief, University of Sussex, 2016, 1-4.

http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/69060/1/FoRB_Transatlantic_policy_briefing_2016.pdf

[5.9] [text removed for publication].

[5.10] UK DFID (8 November 2018), *Government commits £12 million to champion freedom of religion or belief worldwide*, Press Release. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commits-12-million-to-champion-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-worldwide>

[5.11] UK Government (4 July 2018), *Lord Ahmad appointed as PM's Special Envoy to promote religious freedom*, Press Release. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-ahmad-appointed-as-pms-special-envoy-to-promote-religious-freedom>

[5.12] 2018 OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office Conclusions, "Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination", MC.GAL/9/18, Milan, 7 December 2018.

https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2018/12/mcgal0009_cio_conclusions_freedom_rel_belief_tol_non-discr.pdf

[5.13] Video-interviews with selected participants to the policy dialogue 'At the Intersection of Interreligious Engagement, FoRB & SDGs', Italian MFA-ISPI, Bologna, 6-7 Mar 2019.

<https://www.ispionline.it/en/eventi/evento/intersection-interreligious-engagement-freedom-religion-or-belief-forb-sustainable-development> - pdfs + videos available on request

[5.14] Wilton Park, *Freedom of Religion or Belief & Sustainable Development Goals*, Concept & Provisional Programme.

[5.15] EU Special Envoy on FoRB outside the EU, European Commission (2019), *The mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union: activities and recommendations (May 2016-Nov 2019)*, Report, Brussels, Nov 2019, 1-16. PDF