

**T.C.**  
**TURKISH- GERMAN UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**A COMPERATIVE ANALYSIS OF RELIGION**  
**AS A DRIVER OF TURKISH &**  
**RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Onur Can AKYOLCU**

**ADVISOR**

**Prof. Dr. Hartmut MARHOLD**

**ISTANBUL, January 2024**

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# **PROLOGUE**

The journey to articulate the intricate interplay of religion in the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia has been both challenging and enlightening. This thesis, emerging amidst a backdrop of profound geopolitical shifts, seeks to unravel the nuanced ways in which religious undercurrents shape international relations post-Iron Curtain. The endeavor, while intellectually stimulating, was not without its difficulties. Navigating the vast ocean of existing literature, discerning credible secondary sources, and synthesizing complex historical and contemporary narratives posed significant challenges.

Hereby, extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the valuable faculty members of the program European and International Affairs at Turkish- German University.

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# **ABSTRACT**

## **A COMPERATIVE ANALYSIS OF RELIGION AS A DRIVER OF TURKISH & RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

This MA thesis presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the role of religion in shaping the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia following the collapse of the Iron Curtain. The research is grounded in qualitative data drawn from secondary sources, including academic journals, books, and expert analyses. By examining the interplay between religion and foreign policy in these two geopolitically significant nations, the study sheds light on the nuanced ways in which religious factors contribute to the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

The analysis begins with an historical overview of the evolution of religion's influence in both Turkish and Russian political spheres. In Turkey, the synthesis of Islam and national identity has played a pivotal role, especially in the context of its secular governmental structure. Contrastingly, the Russian experience, marked by the Orthodox Church's resurgence, reflects a different trajectory where religious identity intertwines with nationalistic sentiments and geopolitical ambitions.

Through a methodical examination of key foreign policy decisions and diplomatic endeavors, the thesis identifies and compares the religious underpinnings in both countries' international strategies. Particular attention is given to how religious rhetoric, symbolism, and affiliations are employed by Turkish and Russian leaders to justify or promote foreign policy objectives. This includes an analysis of how religion influences bilateral relations, regional dynamics, and engagement in conflict zones where religious identities are prominently at play.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that while religion is a significant driver in the foreign policies of both Turkey and Russia, its role is multifaceted and intersects with other political, cultural, and historical factors. The comparative analysis reveals both similarities and distinct differences in how religion is integrated into the foreign policy frameworks of these nations, reflecting their unique historical and cultural contexts. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of religion's role in international relations, particularly in the context of post-Cold War geopolitics.

**Key Words: Religion, Turkey, Russia, Foreign Policy, Realism, Constructivism**

**Date: 22. January.2024**



# ÖZET

## TÜRK VE RUS DIŞ POLİTİKALARINDA DİNİN ETKİSİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ

Bu Yüksek Lisans tezi, Demir Perde'nin çöküşünün ardından Türkiye ve Rusya'nın dış politikalarını şekillendirmede dinin rolünün kapsamlı bir karşılaştırmalı analizini sunmaktadır. Araştırma, akademik dergiler, kitaplar ve uzman analizleri dahil olmak üzere ikincil kaynaklardan elde edilen nitel verilere dayanmaktadır. Bu iki jeopolitik olarak önemli ülkede din ve dış politika arasındaki etkileşimi inceleyerek, dini faktörlerin dış politikanın formülasyonu ve uygulanmasına katkıda bulunduğu nüanslı yolları ortaya koymaktadır.

Analiz, her iki ülkede dinin siyasi alanlardaki etkisinin evrimine tarihsel bir genel bakış ile başlamaktadır. Türkiye'de, özellikle laik hükümet yapısı bağlamında, İslam ve milli kimlik sentezi önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Buna karşılık, Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin yeniden canlanmasıyla işaretlenmiş Rus deneyimi, dini kimliğin milliyetçi duygular ve jeopolitik hedeflerle iç içe geçtiği farklı bir yol izlemektedir.

Tez, anahtar dış politika kararlarını ve diplomatik girişimleri yöntemsel bir şekilde inceleyerek, her iki ülkenin uluslararası stratejilerindeki dini temelleri tanımlamakta ve karşılaştırmaktadır. Türk ve Rus liderlerin dış politika hedeflerini haklı çıkarmak veya teşvik etmek için dini retorik, sembolizm ve bağlantıları nasıl kullandıklarına özel bir dikkat verilmektedir. Bu, dini kimliklerin öne çıktığı çatışma bölgelerindeki ikili ilişkiler, bölgesel dinamikler ve angajmanların nasıl etkilendiğine dair bir analizi de içermektedir.

Sonuç olarak, tez, dinin her iki ülkenin dış politikalarında önemli bir sürücü olduğunu, ancak rolünün çok yönlü olduğunu ve diğer siyasi, kültürel ve tarihsel faktörlerle kesiştiğini savunmaktadır. Karşılaştırmalı analiz, dinin bu ülkelerin dış politika çerçevelerine entegre edilme biçimlerinde hem benzerlikler hem de belirgin

farklılıklar ortaya koymaktadır, bu da onların benzersiz tarihi ve kültürel bağlamlarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu çalışma, özellikle Soğuk Savaş sonrası jeopolitik bağlamda uluslararası ilişkilerde dinin rolüne dair daha derin bir anlayışa katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler: Din, Türkiye, Rusya, Dış Politika, Realizm, Yapısalcılık**

**Tarih: 22 Ocak 2024**

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**JDP:** Justice and Development Party

**MENA:** Middle East and Northern Africa

**PKK:** The Kurdistan Workers' Party

**YPG:** The People's Defense Units

# **1. CHAPTER**

## **1.1.INTRODUCTION**

International relations are significantly impacted by religion, especially in nations whose religious identity has a strong influence on diplomacy and national policy. This is particularly interesting in the case of Turkey and Russia, whose distinct religious environments have an influence on their approaches to foreign affairs. In the evolving landscape of international relations post the Cold War, the complex interplay between religious identities and foreign policy has emerged as a pivotal yet underexplored dimension in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. This thesis aims to delve into the complex ways in which the religious identities of these two historically and culturally significant nations have shaped their diplomatic engagements and bilateral relations, especially within the context of Muslim-majority regions such as the Balkans, the Middle East Central Asia and Caucasus after the collapse of the Iron Curtain and limits the scope of the analysis with Russia's invasion in Ukraine.

Turkey, with its deep Ottoman Islamic heritage, and Russia, with its Orthodox Christian roots interspersed with a significant Muslim minority, present unique case studies to explore how religious affiliations intersect with foreign policy objectives. The research question, "To what extent have the religious identities of Turkey and Russia shaped their bilateral relations and diplomatic engagements, particularly in Muslim-majority regions like the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus?" seeks to unravel the extent to which religious identity acts as a driving force or a diplomatic tool in these regions and examines the intricate balance both nations maintain between their inherent religious affiliations and the overarching geopolitical strategies. This comparative analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship

between religion and foreign policy, offering insights into how these factors shape the dynamics of international diplomacy in a region marked by a rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity.

This MA thesis sets out to explore the hypothesis that Turkey and Russia exhibit a pragmatic approach in balancing their religious affiliations with their broader geopolitical strategies, often prioritizing political and economic interests over religious congruence, particularly in regions with significant Muslim populations. This hypothesis posits that while religious identities may inform the foreign policies of these nations, they are not the primary driving forces. Instead, it suggests that Turkey and Russia strategically maneuver their religious affiliations to support wider geopolitical and economic objectives. By examining case studies and specific foreign policy decisions in Muslim-majority areas such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, this thesis aims to critically analyze the extent to which religious identity is integrated or sidelined in favor of more pragmatic concerns. This investigation will not only shed light on the complex interplay between religion and realpolitik in the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia but also contribute to a broader understanding of how states navigate religious identities within the intricate web of international relations.

Turkey has historically managed to balance Islam and secularism at the intersection of its predominantly Muslim people. Despite the establishment of a secular state by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideals in the early 20th century, religion continues to play a significant role in Turkish politics and society. Islam has been increasingly important in public life and foreign policy under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (JDP). Turkey's growing leadership role in the Muslim world and its increased engagement with Muslim-majority nations demonstrate this, and they have an effect on Turkey's foreign policy.

Russia, predominantly Orthodox Christian, has also witnessed a resurgence of religion in public and political life, especially under President Vladimir Putin. The Russian Orthodox Church, closely aligned with the state, has become a significant player in shaping national identity and foreign policy. This relationship is evident in Russia's approach to its 'near abroad' – the post-Soviet states – and the Middle East, where religious affiliations often guide diplomatic and military interventions. For example, Russia's involvement in Syria can be partly understood through the lens of protecting Orthodox Christians and projecting Russian power in a region with historical and religious significance (Cygankov 2019, 80).

Understanding the religious dimension is crucial for analyzing the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia for several reasons:

1. National Identity: Religion is intertwined with national identity in both countries. In Turkey, the balance between Islam and secularism shapes its self-perception and external relations. Russia's identity, influenced by Orthodox Christianity, drives its approach to regional conflicts and global diplomacy.

2. Domestic Politics: Domestic religious dynamics significantly influence foreign policy decisions. In Turkey, the JDP's Islamic orientation affects its approach to issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict. In Russia, the Orthodox Church's support bolsters Putin's domestic legitimacy, which in turn reinforces his foreign policy decisions.

3. Geopolitical Strategies: Both countries use religion as a tool in their geopolitical strategies. Turkey's appeal to Islamic solidarity can be seen in its relations with countries like Pakistan and its stance on the Kashmir issue. Similarly, Russia leverages its Orthodox identity in Balkan politics and its influence in Eastern Europe.

4. Soft Power: Religion is a component of soft power. Turkey's and Russia's religious connections enable them to exert cultural and religious

influence, extending their soft power in regions sharing similar religious affiliations.

5. Conflict and Alliance Formation: Religious affiliations and conflicts influence alliance formations and hostilities. The sectarian dimensions in the Middle East, for instance, impact Turkey's and Russia's alliances and interventions.

The post-Cold War epoch, inaugurated by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, holds significant pertinence to the research question above examining the impact of religious identities on the bilateral engagements and foreign policy formulations of Turkey and Russia, particularly within Muslim-majority locales. This critical juncture heralded the cessation of the Cold War's dominant secular ideology, which primarily emphasized political and military contention. This historical transition facilitated an environment in which Turkey and Russia could more freely reassert and reinterpret their religious identities within the global sphere, identities which had been either repressed or downplayed during the Soviet epoch. Concurrently, this period was characterized by an escalation in globalization, engendering the proliferation of transnational religious movements. Navigating these emergent dynamics became a focal point in the foreign policy agendas of both nations, especially in their interactions with the Islamic world, where such movements frequently assume a substantial role.

Furthermore, in this context the era subsequent to 1991 is especially significant as after the collapse of the Iron Curtain both Russia and Turkey experienced a renaissance of religious identities and nationalism. In Russia, the dissolution of the Soviet Union heralded a reinvigoration of Orthodox Christianity as a pivotal element of its national ethos. Analogously, Turkey witnessed a gradual resurgence of its Islamic heritage, shifting away from the rigidly secular principles of Kemalist ideology. This revival exerted profound implications on their respective foreign policies.

Moreover, the post-Cold War landscape was marked by a reconfiguration of international alliances, with Turkey and Russia actively seeking new partnerships and spheres of influence. In this milieu, shared religious identities and cultural connections emerged as pivotal instruments in cultivating relationships, notably in regions like the Middle East and Central Asia, where Islam is the dominant faith.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union also precipitated the emergence of new, independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus, many of which have Muslim-majority populations. These areas assumed strategic importance for both Turkey and Russia, not solely for their energy resources but also as zones of cultural and religious resonance, thereby shaping their foreign policy orientations. Furthermore, this era was characterized by the eruption of numerous regional conflicts in Muslim-majority areas, including the wars in Chechnya, the Syrian conflict, and tensions in the Caucasus. The religious dimensions of these conflicts, coupled with the historical and cultural connections of Turkey and Russia to these regions, have substantially influenced their diplomatic and military engagements.

In summary, the post-Cold War era, following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, offered a unique and transformative context where the religious identities of Turkey and Russia could more prominently shape their foreign policies. This period marked a significant shift from the secular, ideologically driven diplomacy of the Cold War to a more complex interplay of religion, culture, and geopolitics, particularly evident in their engagements with Muslim-majority regions.

This MA thesis will undertake its analytical expedition by employing the dual theoretical frameworks of realism and constructivism, a methodological choice aimed at elucidating the complexities of Turkish and Russian foreign policies post the collapse of the Iron Curtain. The realist perspective, rooted in the principles of power politics and state-centric analysis, will serve to dissect the pragmatic, interest-driven aspects of both nations' foreign policy maneuvers in



their overlapping spheres of influence. In juxtaposition, the constructivist approach will provide a lens to explore how the identities, norms, and historical narratives of Turkey and Russia shape and are shaped by their diplomatic engagements. This dual-framework analysis will be conducted through a meticulous examination of qualitative data derived from secondary sources. These sources, ranging from scholarly articles are pivotal in offering a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter. By integrating these theoretical paradigms with robust qualitative analysis, the thesis aims to contribute a multifaceted perspective to the academic discourse on post-Cold War Turkish-Russian relations.

The MA thesis will adopt a case study methodology, focusing on diverse geopolitical contexts within Muslim-majority regions such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, to provide a granular understanding of Turkish and Russian foreign policy approaches in these areas. These regions, characterized by their unique historical, cultural, and political landscapes, offer a fertile ground for examining the dynamic interplay of Turkish and Russian foreign policy maneuvers. The Balkans, with its complex inter-ethnic and religious dynamics, serves as a critical juncture for analyzing the influence-peddling strategies of both states. The Middle East, a region beset with geopolitical rivalries and conflicts, offers insights into their tactical alliances and confrontations. Central Asia, with its post-Soviet transformation and strategic importance, provides a backdrop to assess their engagement in energy politics and regional security. Lastly, the Caucasus region, a flashpoint for ethnic and territorial disputes, presents a scenario to scrutinize their diplomatic and military interventions. By dissecting these case studies, the thesis aims to uncover the patterns, consistencies, and divergences in Turkish and Russian foreign policies, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their roles and strategies in Muslim-majority regions post the Iron Curtain era. This comparative analysis will not only enrich the theoretical debates within international relations but also

offer practical insights into the conduct of foreign policy in complex regional settings.

The evolving significance of religion in the context of international relations represents a relatively underexplored subfield, a gap that is increasingly incongruent with the complex realities of global politics. Traditionally, the discipline of international relations has been dominated by rather secular focus on state-centric power dynamics and economic interests, often sidelining the multifaceted influences of religion. This oversight is notable given the profound impact that religious beliefs, identities, and institutions can have on shaping state behavior, diplomatic engagements, and the formulation of foreign policies. In regions such as the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, religion intertwines with ethnic and national identities, influencing conflict dynamics, alliance formations, and peace processes. Furthermore, the resurgence of religious-based political movements and the role of transnational religious organizations highlight the necessity to integrate religion into the analytical frameworks of international relations. The underrepresentation of religion in international relations scholarship can be attributed to the secular biases inherent in the field and the methodological challenges of quantifying religious influence. Consequently, a more deliberate inclusion of religion as a critical variable would not only enhance the explanatory power of international relations theories but also reflect a more accurate portrayal of the contemporary geopolitical landscape, wherein religion plays a significant and often decisive role in shaping the contours of global affairs. Consequently, the Master's thesis will concentrate on this particular facet of international relations.

## **2. CHAPTER**

### **2.1.HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: RELIGION'S ROLE IN IR**

The end of the Cold War marked a pivotal shift in the dynamics of international relations (IR), unveiling a landscape where the influence of religion has become increasingly prominent and consequential. This period, characterized by the erosion of bipolar world order, has witnessed the resurgence of religious identity and ideology as significant drivers in global politics. The decline of ideologically charged superpower rivalry paved the way for religious narratives and actors to fill the void, challenging the secular foundations of traditional IR theories. In regions such as the Middle East, the Balkans, and parts of Asia, religion has emerged not just as a component of cultural identity but as a potent force shaping state policies, regional alliances, and conflict dynamics. This rise in religious influence has been further catalyzed by globalization, which facilitates the transnational movements of ideas and beliefs, thereby entwining local religious issues with global political agendas. Consequently, the post-Cold War era necessitates a reevaluation of IR frameworks to incorporate the nuanced ways in which religion intersects with and impacts state behavior, geopolitical strategies, and international diplomacy. This evolution underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of religion's role in shaping the contours of contemporary international relations.

Scholars in the field of international relations are increasingly acknowledging the significance of religion in global political dynamics. This recognition has been spurred by a series of events, including the Iranian Revolution, the September 11 attacks, the prevalent use of religious rhetoric in global politics, the emergence of Al-Qaeda as a notable international entity, and

ethno-religious conflicts in regions such as the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and Iraq (Sandal & Fox 2013, 2).

The electoral successes of religiously affiliated political parties and groups worldwide, ranging from the Christian Democrats in Europe to the Bharatiya Janata Party in India, further underscore the growing international prominence of religion. Additionally, there is an escalating awareness of the influence of religion on individual policy-makers and the global impact of religious figures like the Pope and the Dalai Lama. While the Iranian Revolution is often cited as an early, prominent example of religion's influence on contemporary international relations in the IR literature, persuasively argue that the international significance of religion has been on the rise since the 1960s (Sandal and Fox 2013, 5).

In contemporary international relations (IR), religious actors can be categorized into two principal groups: state actors (governments) and non-state actors. State actors encompass the governments of nearly 200 nations, most of which are secular. However, the foreign policies of a few countries, including India, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the USA, are influenced by religious concerns. This influence often reflects the input of domestic religious actors, demonstrating a broader interest in the interplay between material concerns, such as national security, and the realm of ideas encompassing norms and values.

As noted in the literature, ideas play a critical role in political dynamics, as policy changes are frequently preceded by shifts in the underlying ideas and the capacity to influence societal preferences can significantly impact the pace and direction of institutional reform. Non-state religious actors fall into three primary categories: individuals, movements, and institutions. Prominent religious figures like Desmond Tutu, Pope John Paul II, Oscar Romero, Osama bin Laden, and the Dalai Lama exemplify individual actors. Transnational religious movements, such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Evangelical Alliance, represent another category. Additionally, there are transnational

religious institutions like the Holy See/Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church (Haynes 2021, 5-6).

In the field of International Relations (IR), three distinct modes of thought are identifiable in shaping perceptions of religion and foreign policy. These modes represent different logics, which scholars apply either exclusively or in combination. The first mode views religion as a critical resource in formulating foreign policy. The second mode considers religion as a tool for advancing hegemonic interests. The third mode integrates the principles of both engagement and interrogation in examining religion's role in foreign policy practices. It is crucial to acknowledge that the references, sources, and points of view mentioned do not belong to a single, coherent "school" of thought, highlighting the fact that other, sometimes contradictory, presumptions also have an impact on how religion is conceptualized in foreign policy. The logics underpinning each mode interact in both conflicting and complementary ways. Drawing inspiration from Weaver's concept of the 'mutual serviceability' of IR paradigms (Weaver 1996, 142; as cited in Haynes 2021, 41), the intrinsic logic of each mode is initially delineated independently, then contrasted with others, fostering a multifaceted understanding of religion and foreign policy.

Hereby this MA thesis will briefly explain each mode and an analysis how it applies to important facets of Turkish Russian foreign policy making will follow in upcoming chapters of the MA thesis. Since the more integrative style of accommodation is built upon the forms of engagement and questioning, they receive special attention:

#### Engagement Mode: Religious Traditions Strengthen the Foreign Policy Agenda

This engagement mode operates under a substantivist understanding of religion, defined as "a collection of beliefs, practices, and communities related to the supernatural and transcendental, distinctly set against secular ideologies,

practices, and actors". This mode posits that religious traditions possess unique ethical and instrumental values, making religion a vital factor in comprehending the ideational and social environments where foreign policy is executed. It also suggests that religion offers strategic assets for policymakers in advancing their objectives. Proponents of this approach advocate for the inclusion of religion as a consistent component in the formulation of state foreign policy. The engagement logic commences with an examination of religious traditions, exploring how the resources within these traditions may impact state actions and shape foreign policy in various geopolitical contexts. This mode is important at every step of the foreign policy cycle—formulation, implementation, and evaluation—but it is most noticeable when formulation and implementation are close to one another (Haynes 2021, 43).

#### Interrogation Mode: Hegemonic Interest Uses Religion as a Construct

Contrary to the prevailing definitions of religion utilized in the engagement mode, the interrogation mode commences with the premise that religion is an inherently unstable category. "This perspective challenges the unexamined dichotomy typically assumed between religious and secular in IR scholarship". This mode perceives religion as an outcome of historical and politicized identity formation processes, often intertwined with hegemonic interests. Consequently, within critical IR frameworks, religion is often regarded as a problematic tool in foreign policy. In the literature scholars operating within the interrogation mode propose varied approaches to religion in foreign policy. Some argue for the complete abandonment of religion as a category in favor of more universally applicable concepts. Others perceive a detrimental confluence of religious and state interests, perpetuating a history of violent dominance. The primary focus of this mode is on religion as a mechanism of control, particularly examining "secular settlements" that categorize religion in a manner serving the explicit and implicit norms of Western (Christian) secular states. Key areas of

examination within this mode include Western advocacy of religious freedom, the Western origins of legal frameworks for controlling religion in non-Western contexts, and the biased representation of religion in the humanitarian assistance policies of states (Haynes 2021, 43).

In the interrogation mode, the examination of the four fundamental elements of foreign policy begins with a nuanced analysis of national interest, approached through a dual-layered hermeneutic of suspicion. The first layer reinterprets the concept of “transformative state simplifications”, which suggests that states mold religion to fit their requirements for public order.

The second layer examines the relationship between the sovereign structuring of religion and Western colonialism. Specifically, in foreign policy analysis, the focus of critique is on the national interests of Western Christian-majority states, wherein secular agendas are more accurately seen as continuations of the “religio-political legacies of Latin Christendom”. Proponents of this mode highlight the historical link between “religion” and colonization as a pattern for contemporary states' hegemonic behavior in the global order. The literature articulates this perspective by noting that secularism's Euro-American roots have fostered its association with colonialism and binary oppositions like "secular/religious" and "modern/primitive," which perpetuate power imbalances and inequalities in global politics. From the interrogationist viewpoint, foreign relations involving religion are often reflective of deep-seated, colonial-influenced perceptions of the other. Critical scholarship, particularly regarding Western interventions in Muslim-majority regions like Iraq and Afghanistan, underscores the secular mindset characterizing the approaches of countries like the US and UK. Importantly, the focus is on the misinterpretations or misunderstandings of religion within the realm of foreign policy, rather than on accurate readings (Haynes 2021, 44).

The interrogation mode is pertinent across all phases of the foreign policy cycle, but its influence is most pronounced at the critical intersection of policy formulation and evaluation. However, in the literature the critique on the religious freedom policies highlights that the incorporation of religion in the international system not only fails to mitigate violence, persecution, and discrimination, but often exacerbates the divisions that render such conflicts conceivable, and in extreme scenarios, inevitable. This perspective poses a fundamental challenge to both the conceptual understanding and practical application of religion within the realm of international policy-making (Haynes 2021, 45).

#### Accommodation Mode: Moving Towards an Integrated Approach to Foreign Policy and Religion

The concluding section introduces a third perspective, the mode of accommodation, shifting from a competitive framework to one of cooperation. This mode recognizes the contentious nature of religion as a category but avoids a monolithic interpretation concerning state power, whether in Western contexts or globally. While acknowledging the potential for states to exploit religion for hegemonic purposes, this mode also values religious actors and interests for their capacity to challenge dominative interests, thereby contributing constructively to foreign policy. The accommodationist approach advocates for engaging with religion on its own terms while being cognizant of the pitfalls associated with misinterpretations. In contrast to the engagement mode, which starts with the agency inherent in religious traditions, and the interrogation mode, which focuses on power discourses, the accommodation mode originates from policy considerations. It integrates insights from the other modes to refine foreign policy approaches, harnessing religion and other political cultural elements.



The characteristics of the accommodation mode are briefly examined in relation to key foreign policy aspects such as national interest, foreign relations, and the combined operational domain/policy cycle. Each aspect is approached through a specific question and a key reference, inviting further exploration (Haynes 2021, 45).

In the context of national interest, and from a comprehensive viewpoint, both transnational and domestic religious actors are recognized as possessing distinct political capabilities. These include the ability to sanctify or denigrate political agendas, infuse political actions with moral or spiritual significance, and evoke tangible reactions among their followers, thereby “mobilizing public sentiment”. Within this framework, religious tradition is seen as a valuable source for understanding the communal ties and divisions both within a state's own milieu and in the environments of its international counterparts (Haynes 2021, 45).

As regards foreign relations aspect of the accommodation mode the literature focuses on understanding the influences of the global Christian movement and its power to transform the acknowledgment of religion into a strategic advantage for achieving foreign policy objectives centered on pluralism and inclusion (Haynes 2021, 45). On the other hand, in terms of operational domain or policy cycle, the literature concentrates on “principled pluralism” in the context of foreign policy as “the promotion of consensus-based (secular) principles, while allowing diverse public logics, whether religious or otherwise, to express support for these principles”. This concept clearly supports the accommodation mode, but it also embodies elements of both the engagement and interrogation logics. The engagement logic is reflected through the valued contributions of religious traditions to pluralism), while the interrogation logic is evident in recognizing the intertwined history of religion with other fundamental aspects of political life. Therefore, principled pluralism seems to encapsulate a comprehensive approach, integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies to achieve a balanced and inclusive foreign policy (Haynes 2021, 46).

## **2.2.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.2.1. REALISM**

According to dominant realist perspectives in IR theory, the anarchical structure of international relations, characterized by the absence of a supreme authority governing all states, compels each state to prioritize its survival based on its unique geopolitical circumstances. This involves “safeguarding its territory and asserting its sovereignty”. As a result, states primarily focus on power in both its military and economic dimensions (Warner and Walker 2011, 118).

States evaluate their interactions with other nations and make decisions to act with or against them based on a rational analysis of power dynamics and survival imperatives. Independent of their cultural or religious backgrounds, all states are subject to a similar security dilemma, stemming from the challenges posed by power balances and geographical factors.

From this perspective, religion, in any form, is seen as having minimal influence on the security dilemma faced by states and their strategies for addressing it. However, in the IR literature it has been recognized that there are diverse strategies for states to ensure their survival, safeguard their interests, and bolster their power, suggesting that other factors should not be hastily overlooked. Among these factors are "values," which can be manifested through culture. It is posited that states sharing common cultural values are less inclined to engage in warfare with each other. Similarly, it can be inferred that states sharing common religious values might also be less prone to conflict with one another (Warner & Walker 2011, 118).

Even while it may not be the deciding or dominating factor, religion may play a part in international conflicts. It can be anticipated that a country's religious affiliations might influence its interactions with other nations, varying based on whether they share the same or different religious beliefs. The underlying causal mechanism of this argument suggests that countries sharing a religion may possess a considerable degree of ideological alignment. States with similar religious backgrounds or heritages perceive a shared cultural connection, fostering a sense of common identity. This shared identity can help lessen the “us versus them mentality” often prevalent in the international system. This causal mechanism might also be evident in the realm of realpolitik, where a state could leverage shared heritage claims to build alliances. Such dynamics can result in peaceful, collaborative, or cooperative foreign policies. However, they might also lead to aggressive actions if a state exploits a common religious heritage as a pretext for annexing another country or to support foreign insurgencies and civil wars.

In contrast, for countries with differing religions, the absence of ideological affinity could hinder cooperation. At the level of realpolitik, religious disparities may be strategically utilized as a rationale for aggressive actions, noncooperation, or to back foreign insurgencies and civil conflicts. Thus, religious legitimacy could be viewed as a type of authority and influence (Warner & Walker 2011, 120).

Furthermore, from the neorealist perspective, the constraints imposed by the international system's structure are paramount, dominating foreign policy decisions, especially in ensuring the primary goal of state survival. This perspective does not entirely dismiss the influence of religion, but in critical foreign policy situations, neorealists posit that external and strategic factors predominantly guide state decisions regarding security. According to neorealism, a state's sense of security is not necessarily derived from improved relations with religiously similar neighbors, but rather from possessing adequate military power to deter, preempt, or defend against threats. Consequently, in the neorealist view,

the role of religion in foreign policy is largely restricted by the international system's structure, as reflected in geopolitical positioning and power distribution. Therefore, while religion may play a role in a state's foreign policy, its influence and the resulting foreign policy outcomes are primarily determined by the structure of the international system (Sadik 2012, 297).

### **2.2.2. CONSTRUCTIVISM**

In the field of international relations, religion is often considered a component of culture, and its impact is analyzed within this cultural context. Key advocates for considering culture as a significant factor in international relations are constructivist theorists. They propose that the fundamental nature of a state is rooted in its identity, which in turn is shaped by its culture (Sandal and Fox 2013, 53).

Therefore, a country's national identity, influenced by its religious traditions and institutions, is expected to play a role in defining its foreign policy interests. State behaviors on the international stage are seen as emanations of this identity, as stated in the IR literature, "The identity of a state implies its preferences and consequent actions." The reason states may respond similarly to comparable threats and foreign policy scenarios, regardless of their identity or culture, is attributed to the "background of social/discursive practices and meanings" that have become standardized within the international state system. While this approach marks a significant improvement over essentialist arguments like Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, it still requires a framework to understand how culture or identity influences policy across different domains (Warner and Walker 2011, 120).

Additionally, for constructivists, foreign policy behavior is understood as the result of a complex process involving various factors like interests,

institutions, practices, and identities. The context in which this process occurs is crucial, as it significantly influences the actions of the participants and the eventual outcomes. The identities and cultures of the involved actors are particularly important, as they shape the behavior of these actors, thereby influencing the nature of the process and its outcomes in foreign policy. Constructivists view identities as actors' perceptions of their similarities and differences with others, while culture encompasses the collective values, rules, and models that define the identities of actors, their functions, and interactions. In this framework, religion is often seen as an integral part of culture and is therefore theorized within the context of cultural influences in international relations. Leading advocates of culture as a key variable in international relations are constructivist theorists, who argue that a state's essence is its identity, derived from its culture (Sadik 2012, 300).

Since religion is a fundamental aspect of a state's culture, it is believed to influence how a state shapes its institutions and defines its foreign policy interests. Accordingly, a state's actions in the international arena are a reflection of its identity, which dictates its preferences and subsequent actions (Sandal and Fox 2013, 149).

This perspective is further refined in a narrower constructivist approach, which suggests that culture provides the framework through which interests are rationalized and prioritized (Sandal and Fox 2013, 149).

A more focused interpretation within constructivist theory suggests that culture serves as the framework through which interests are justified and given precedence. Considering that religion is a component of culture, it can contribute to this framework, as religions are often defined by a set of beliefs, norms, and practices that offer guidance on ethical living. Religions possess systems of moral authority that can endorse and prioritize certain interests while rejecting others. To provide further detail, one could hypothesize that when a religion is perceived

as a fundamental part of a state's identity and specific mechanisms exist, governments are more inclined to consider religious factors in their foreign policy formulation. Conversely, in states where the identity is explicitly secular, such as in France, religious influences on foreign policy are likely to be significantly less (Warner and Walker 2011, 8).

### **2.3.RELIGION IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF REALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Under the governance of the JDP for more than 20 years, Turkey has witnessed the solidification of its Muslim identity at the governmental level, establishing a new hegemony and elite class. Despite the continued official secularism embedded in its legal and constitutional frameworks, this Islamic state identity facilitates a political approach centered on protecting the global Islamic community - known as the “umma” in Arabic and “ümme” in Turkish. Concurrently, there's a revival of the Ottoman identity, now manifested as neo-Ottomanism, which pays special attention to the Islamic world, including areas like Bosnia, Kosovo, and other Muslim regions formerly under the Ottoman Empire. The Islamic and Ottoman identities often intersect. While the Turkish identity has not been overtly discarded, there has been a reduced emphasis on the Turkish world. Additionally, the Western-oriented Kemalist identity, with its historical ties to Europe, has also diminished, partly due to divergent policies from the European Union and the United States towards Turkey. Ultimately, this has led to a new Turkey at the governmental level, characterized by a reshaped state identity. This transformation has significant implications for its foreign policy, leading to more unilateral and proactive actions within its regional sphere (Uzer 2021, 18).

Indeed, Islam has been instrumentalized by the current ruling elites of Turkey as an “appealing ground for constructing identity-based Turkish foreign

policy”. Like any ruling party, the JDP has had to navigate the international political, military, and economic landscapes. However, from a constructivist perspective, a thorough analysis of foreign policy also necessitates an understanding of the inclinations and political identities of the decision-makers. The current ruling elites being mostly devoted Muslims who advanced their values through their moderately Islamist political party, the JDP. Consequently, since their rise to power in 2002, ideology has gained prominence, rivaling geopolitics in the formation and execution of Turkey's foreign policy. In the JDP era, Turkey's strategic decisions are shaped not only by its military and economic might but also by its Ottoman past and the leaders' self-perception as representatives of a nation with a Muslim heritage. Leaders of the JDP firmly believe in the significant influence of Islam on Turkey's foreign policy and anticipate that Muslim countries will share and respond to their vision. The former Prime Minister, Davutoğlu used to be recognized as the intellectual force behind the JDP's foreign policy. In his influential book, *Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu asserts that Turkey's renewed acknowledgment of its historical and cultural ties to neighboring regions is transforming how these areas are perceived, based on a novel geographical understanding. This viewpoint is particularly noteworthy from a constructivist perspective, as Davutoğlu prioritizes the power of ideas and perceptions over traditional geopolitical limitations. He suggests that concepts such as historical roots and new geographical imaginations, indirectly referencing the role of Islam, are instrumental in enhancing relations with Muslim nations in the Middle East and elsewhere (Sadik 2012, 302).

The "conservative constructivism" of the JDP emerged as a critique of the conventional Turkish foreign policy, which was seen as “defensive, static, and passive”. This was particularly evident in relation to the Middle East, where Turkey’s traditional stance was shaped by a sense of “alienation and internal conflict” regarding the region’s culture and balance of power. Additionally, entrenched biases towards the Arab world, central to its foreign policymaking,

hindered Turkey's ability to adapt to regional developments. Historically, following the loss of Middle Eastern territories, the Turkish Republic adopted a stance characterized by oscillating between total dominance and complete withdrawal, effectively turning its back on the region. In contrast, the JDP proposed a new regional approach rooted in historical responsibility and experience, underpinned by consistent principles. In this framework, history and culture are viewed positively, not only facilitating Turkey's involvement in the Middle East but also presenting it as a necessary role. Turkey's historical and cultural identity, shaped by its geographical position, is believed to confer upon it a central role in the region. Davutoğlu emphasized frequently "Turkey's historical, strategic, and geographical depth" in the Middle East, positioning the country not just centrally but also in a situation where engagement in the region aligns with its best interests. However, this engagement is envisioned to be "dynamic, proactive, and Ankara-centered, indicating that it should not merely be an extension of Turkey's ties with the West". Additionally, Davutoğlu critiqued the notion of Turkey serving as a "bridge," arguing that such a role implies "passivity and diminishes Turkey's central significance in the Middle East"(Benli Altunışık 2009, 188) .

On the other hand, from the realist perspective Davutoğlu's concept of incorporating Muslim heritage into Turkey's policymaking as a significant element has been pivotal in shaping the country's foreign policy direction. However, the effectiveness of this approach hinges on the extent to which it is embraced by the target audience. Consequently, Davutoğlu's strategy of leveraging Islam to enhance relations with Muslim nations is a key driver in the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, with its success largely dependent on its reception among these countries. The efficacy of Turkish foreign policy can be deemed successful only if there is evident strengthening of political and economic ties with Muslim countries. Economically, Turkey's proactive foreign policy towards Muslim nations has started to yield benefits, as seen in increased trade



(excluding Iran and Qatar due to high energy imports), tourism, and foreign direct investments, particularly from wealthy Middle Eastern countries (Sadik 2012, 305).

Politically, however, Turkey continues to encounter significant obstacles despite a shift in its foreign policy discourse. From a realist standpoint, critics challenge Davutoglu's approach, arguing that the tangible results are minimal compared to the ambitious rhetoric of its advocates. These critics suggest that the ineffectiveness of this policy is apparent even without extensive scrutiny, from Malaysia to Morocco. In essence, Turkey's main points of contention with its Middle Eastern neighbors, particularly Syria, Iraq, and Iran, remain unresolved. Therefore, from a realist perspective, the utility of Islam as a tool in foreign policy is seen as limited, as evidenced by the ongoing diplomatic stalemates with these Muslim neighbors.

Following Turkey's disillusionment with the European Union accession negotiations, a shift occurred. It has been entangled in the issues of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. Whether by deliberate choice or not, Turkey has become embroiled in sectarian conflicts. It faces strained relations with Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Israel, leading to the withdrawal of Turkish ambassadors from Syria, Israel, and Egypt. Turkish authorities have described this challenging situation and growing isolation as "precious loneliness". This period of stagnation in Turkish foreign policy was merely caused by prompting a shift towards realist motivations. It is also crucial to note that this change was partly influenced by the domestic appeal of asserting Turkey's religious identity in international affairs and the notion of its leadership in the MENA region. The AKP government's active foreign policy, particularly its expanding influence in the MENA region and stance as a norm-setter, has been well-received and rewarded by the Turkish electorate. For the first time in its history, Turkey has utilized foreign policy as a means to bolster domestic electoral support (Gültekin 2015, 28).

The country's escalating tensions with Israel, for instance, garnered unanimous backing from the majority of voters, uniting the nation around the ruling party. This was evident following the Davos Summit, where the Turkish Prime Minister's confrontation with Israel was met with a hero's welcome upon his return. Events like the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis further reinforced Turkey's ambitions for regional leadership. The Turkish public's growing desire for active involvement in regional politics, coupled with Turkey's increasing political and economic consolidation, heightened their expectations and demand, legitimizing the AKP's actions. To satisfy these expectations, Turkish leaders adopted increasingly harsh rhetoric against countries like Israel and Western nations. This overemphasis on foreign affairs in domestic politics created a feedback loop, where increased public demand for assertive and independent foreign policy led to grandiose rhetoric and rising tensions with other nations, ultimately damaging relationships. The negative response from Syria and Egypt to Turkey's policies came as a significant disappointment to the Turkish electorate, who had not anticipated such resistance from these sovereign nations. Turkey was confronted with the harsh realities of international relations in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In response to the obstacles and negative reactions faced due to its religion-identity-ideology-driven foreign policy, the Turkish state has recently found it necessary to reevaluate and transform its foreign policy approach. To comprehensively grasp this shift, it is essential to examine the identity and interests of the Turkish state through a realist lens, rather than a constructivist one, at both the systemic and sub-systemic levels. The need to reformulate the religion-identity-based foreign policy towards a more pragmatist realist perspective can be attributed to the following reasons (Gültekin 2015, 29):

- The worsening of relationships with an increasing number of countries highlighted the shortcomings of Turkey's recent foreign policy. This situation raised doubts about the practicality and viability of 'ummah' or pan-Islamist ideologies and values.

- A noticeable gap between the aggressive rhetoric and actions of Turkish leaders, along with Turkey's involvement in regional conflicts and internal matters of other nations, indicated that Turkey was moving away from being perceived as a benign, liberal power.

- Turkey's reliance on energy imports from Russia and Iran, coupled with the prioritization of energy in international politics, necessitated a more cautious approach in its confrontations with these countries, particularly concerning regional issues in Syria, Yemen, Crimea, and Armenia.

- The decline of Turkey's role as an exemplar in the region, due to the erosion of freedoms and democracy within the country as reported by independent sources, meant that Turkey could no longer position itself as a model for the MENA region. This necessitated a shift towards a more pragmatic and realist approach in its foreign policy (Gültekin 2015, 30).

Confronted with numerous transnational challenges in its immediate vicinity, Turkey has garnered significant attention from its developed allies, Muslim populations worldwide, and even domestically. The election of the AKP in 2002 has raised critical questions about Turkey's capacity to adapt to its evolving environment and, more importantly, the possibility of Turkey reshaping its foreign policy to enhance its adaptability. While it is premature to determine the full impact of these policy shifts, it is evident that a transformation in Turkish foreign policy is in progress. Ideational factors, such as religious heritage and historical-cultural connections, are central to driving this change. This evolution has undoubtedly sparked discussions regarding the direction of Turkish foreign policy and the influence of religion, both within Turkey and among its allies (Sadik 2012, 308).

Some scholars suggest that Turkey's 'zero problem policy' between 2002-2011, while seemingly a constructivist ideology-driven strategy for realist ends, was in fact fundamentally realist, incorporating elements of Realpolitik and

interest considerations. In realist terms, considering the structure of the political landscape in the region, Turkey's proactive diplomacy was well-received in a world leaning towards liberalism and pacifism. This allowed Turkey's initiatives and ambitions to be accommodated by other countries. The prevailing structure was a multipolar world order, where Turkey's actions in the region were permitted, particularly by major Western powers. During this period, there were few instances of direct power confrontation, with the notable exception of Iran's opposition to the USA. Post-Arab Spring, the international order returned to a multipolar state, but with greater involvement of superpowers in Middle Eastern politics. In the Syrian conflict, a near-perfect balance of power was established, with Turkey, Sunni Arab countries, and the USA on one side, and Shiite Iran, Russia, and China on the other. This realist balance of power politics sustained the civil war while maintaining a status quo regarding the Assad regime. The post-Arab Spring environment led Turkey to recognize the shift towards a power-centric game, where not only soft power is significant but also other factors like a country's wealth, energy resources, military capabilities, and the strength and cohesion of its regime (Gültekin 2015, 30).

## **2.4.RELIGION IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF REALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Russian International Relations and foreign policy thought are markedly different from Western paradigms, owing to Russia's unique position in the global political economy and geopolitics. Russia is classified as a "semi-peripheral" economy and occupies a "geopolitical borderland, straddling European and non-European countries". This distinct geographical positioning, along with Russia's historical and cultural context, sets it apart from the West. These international, geopolitical, and cultural factors are reflected in Russian IR debates, which encompass a wide array of topics including theory, foreign policy, and domestic

modernization. Often, the same intellectuals engage with these varied subjects. When examining Russian approaches to IR, it is therefore appropriate to employ a broad definition of IR theory, conceptualizing it as a systematically formulated and culturally informed worldview. Russian International Relations is not only unique on a global scale, but also exhibits considerable diversity within its own framework. This diversity is represented by three broad, historically enduring schools of thought, each reflecting different aspects of Russia's national identity. Given that national identity is dynamic and not fixed, it's common for these three schools to engage in ongoing discussions and debates, both amongst themselves and within their own groups. Through these debates, the distinctive underpinnings of Russian IR are revealed, grounded in Russia's unique culture, political system, and foreign policy objectives (Olga and Yurii 2022, 4).

The three main schools of thought in Russian International Relations from constructivist perspective emphasize different aspects of the nation's identity: its cultural and civilizational uniqueness compared to the West, its status as a great power, and the influence of Western-centric global dynamics in international politics. Historically, the most dominant group has been the Statists, who focus on national sovereignty and Russia's status as a great power on the global stage. This group is not inherently opposed to the West but seeks Western recognition through emphasizing Russia's economic and military strengths. The Statists encompass a varied array of viewpoints, ranging from proponents of aggressive foreign policies to those favoring more defensive stances, and including advocates for various alliance structures in world politics. The second group, the Civilizationists, views Russia as a distinct civilization with its own unique and authentic value system. Within this group, some advocate adherence to Orthodox Christian values, while others promote a vision of Russia as a synthesis of multiple religions, forming a unique "Eurasianist" identity that is distinct from both European and Asian cultures.

The third group, the Westernizers, highlights Russia's similarities with Western countries and regards the West as the most viable and progressive civilization (Olga and Yurii, 2022, 4).

The role of religion in shaping Russian Civilizationist Thinking, particularly in the realm of international relations, is a critical aspect that warrants scholarly attention. This thinking is deeply rooted in the Russian Orthodox Church, which plays a pivotal role in fostering a unique civilizational identity for Russia. This identity is frequently contrasted with liberal democracies in the West, with religion acting as the foundation for a unique moral and ethical code. The Russian Orthodox Church not only reinforces traditional values but also acts as a soft power tool in Russia's foreign policy, particularly in regions with a shared Orthodox heritage. This religious dimension is integral to understanding Russia's civilizational discourse, as it underpins the nation's perception of itself as a spiritual beacon and a defender of Orthodox Christianity on the global stage. The intertwining of religion and national identity in Russian Civilizationist Thinking has profound implications for its international relations, especially in how Russia positions itself in opposition to what it perceives as the secular, materialistic West.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been an observable increase in civilization or cultural relativism within Russian discourse. Prominent figures ranging from political outliers to mainstream leaders frequently discuss Russia's national interests in terms of its cultural and geopolitical independence. Prominent individuals, including Vladimir Putin promote the concept of a distinct Russian civilization in their public statements and writings. This idea is also supported by several Orthodox Church leaders, such as Patriarch Kirill, who advocate for Russia's unique civilizational identity centered around religion. Influenced by Samuel Huntington's views, many Russian intellectuals and scholars perceive their culture in terms of essentialism and ethnocentrism (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2021, 5).

In line with his focus on state-centric policies, Putin strategically employed civilizational concepts as a means to mold Russian values according to the Kremlin's vision. These concepts were instrumental in enhancing Putin's ability to cultivate deeper loyalty among the elite, offering an additional layer of justification and allegiance to the state. The rhetoric of national cohesion resonated with various segments of the elite and those who champion Russia's unique cultural identity. This approach effectively countered the allure of ethnic nationalism domestically, facilitated a constructive engagement with Islam, and simultaneously allowed for a critical stance against Western critiques of human rights. Furthermore, this strategy reinforced the Kremlin's connection with the general populace by aligning with the conservative majority that identifies with Russia's distinctive values, contrasting with the more globally-oriented and Western-inclined middle class (Cygankov 2019, 233).

On the other hand, the multifaceted connection between religion and realism in Russian foreign affairs can be comprehensively understood through the perspective of religion's strategic utilization within the framework of realist principles in international relations. Central to realism, which emphasizes power and national interest, religion is perceived not as an intrinsic motivator, but as a conduit for achieving state objectives. Russia's application of this connection is multi-dimensional, including the strengthening of state power and national interest, the instrumentalization of religion for geopolitical goals, the deployment of soft power and cultural diplomacy, the reinforcement of internal legitimacy and stability, and the establishment of a counterbalance to Western liberal values.

Primarily, in the realist tradition, state survival and the preservation of power are paramount. Russia harnesses religion, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church with its profound historical and cultural significance, as a means to bolster state authority and validate its domestic and international legitimacy. Additionally, realism recognizes the use of various instruments, including religion, in pursuit of state interests. Russia, in this vein, exploits religious

affiliations, especially in regions with Orthodox Christian populations or historical connections to Russian Orthodoxy, such as Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East, to expand its influence and challenge Western supremacy.

Moreover, realism acknowledges that power extends beyond military and economic capabilities, encompassing cultural and ideological dimensions. Russia utilizes religion as a soft power tool, fostering cultural ties and influencing other nations through shared religious and cultural values (Papkova 2011, 146).

This strategy is particularly evident in its engagement with Orthodox Christian and Slavic nations, aligning them with Russian foreign policy objectives. Further, realism underscores the necessity of a stable and legitimate state for effective foreign policy. By aligning with the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia cultivates national identity and social cohesion, essential for internal stability and international prowess (Papkova 2011, 146).

Lastly, from a realist perspective, states often strive to balance against perceived threats. Russia presents its support for traditional religious values as an antidote to Western liberal and secular ideologies, consolidating its internal position and appealing to other entities skeptical of Western influence. In conclusion, the interplay between religion and realism in Russian foreign affairs signifies the strategic employment of religion to further national interests, expand geopolitical influence, and sustain domestic stability. An approach which is consistent with the realist focus on power, state interests, and the pragmatic utilization of diverse tools in statecraft (Mankoff 2011, 270).



## **3. CHAPTER**

### **3.1.CASE STUDY: THE CAUCASUS**

#### **3.1.1. CHECHNYA**

The post-Cold War era witnessed significant geopolitical shifts, with the Chechen conflict emerging as a focal point of regional instability. The policies of Turkey and Russia in Chechnya serve as a notable illustration of how religion and diplomacy interact. While Russia's approach to Chechnya was primarily driven by territorial integrity and counter-insurgency, Turkey's policy was influenced by a blend of ethnic solidarity, religious affinity, and strategic regional considerations. Russia's policy in Chechnya was predominantly framed by the need to maintain territorial integrity and suppress separatist movements. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Chechnya declared independence, leading to two brutal wars (1994-1996 and 1999-2000). Russia's military intervention, spearheaded by then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was justified on grounds of counter-terrorism and maintaining the territorial sovereignty of the Russian Federation (Galeotti 2014, 42). The religious dimension, predominantly Sunni Islam in Chechnya, was seen by Moscow as a secondary factor, albeit one that contributed to the international jihadist support for the Chechen cause (Lieven and Bradner 1999, 34).

In contrast, Turkey's policy towards Chechnya was significantly influenced by ethnic and religious ties. Turkey, with its majority Sunni Muslim population, historically shared cultural and religious links with the Turkic and Muslim peoples of the Caucasus, including the Chechens. This affinity was further bolstered by the presence of a sizeable Chechen diaspora in Turkey. Ankara's approach was cautious, balancing its religious and ethnic solidarity with the Chechens against its strategic relationship with Russia. While there was sympathy

for the Chechen cause in Turkish society and among political factions, the Turkish government avoided direct confrontation with Russia, often limiting its support to humanitarian aid and mediation efforts (Cornell 1997, 345).

The role of religion in the Chechen conflict and in the respective policies of Russia and Turkey presents a complex picture. For Russia, the Islamic dimension of the Chechen separatist movement was seen as a threat to national security, especially as the conflict attracted foreign fighters and Islamic extremists. This securitization of religion enabled Moscow to frame its military intervention as part of a broader struggle against international terrorism, thereby seeking to legitimize its actions both domestically and internationally (Malashenko et al. 2004, 203). However, for Turkey, religion served as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it created a sense of solidarity with the Chechen people, propelling public and political support for their cause. On the other hand, it posed a diplomatic challenge for Ankara, as overt support for Chechen separatism risked damaging relations with Russia, a key economic and energy partner (Sezer 2000, 73).

In conclusion, the divergent policies of Turkey and Russia towards Chechnya were shaped by a complex interplay of geopolitical, ethnic, and religious factors. Russia's approach was primarily driven by concerns over territorial integrity and national security, with religion playing a secondary, yet significant role in the context of counter-insurgency. In contrast, Turkey's policy was more nuanced, influenced by ethnic and religious affinity with the Chechen people, yet constrained by pragmatic considerations in its bilateral relations with Russia. The Chechen conflict thus serves as a poignant example of how religion can both unify and divide, playing a pivotal role in the foreign policy decisions of nations.

### **3.1.2. GEORGIA**

The geopolitical landscape of the of the Caucasus, particularly the regions of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia, presents a complex interplay of international relations, where Turkish and Russian policies have been notably divergent. Russia's policy towards South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia has been predominantly shaped by strategic interests, aiming to maintain and extend its influence in the post-Soviet space. The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 marked a significant turn in this policy, as Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regions that had been seeking separation from Georgia. Russia's actions were driven by a mix of geopolitical objectives, including countering NATO's eastward expansion, and maintaining a sphere of influence in the Caucasus. The role of religion, predominantly Orthodox Christianity in Georgia and Russian Orthodoxy, played a marginal role, primarily serving as a cultural link rather than a primary policy driver (Cygankov 2019, 46).

On contrary, Turkey's approach to South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia has been characterized by a balancing act, attempting to maintain strong economic ties with Georgia while navigating its complex relationship with Russia. Unlike Russia, Turkey did not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, aligning with international law and supporting Georgia's territorial integrity. Turkey's policy in the region has been driven more by economic interests and the desire for regional stability rather than religious considerations. The religious factor, predominantly Sunni Islam in Turkey and Orthodox Christianity in Georgia, has played a limited role in Ankara's policy-making in this context (Özbay 2011, 83).

In the context of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia, religion has not been a primary factor in the foreign policies of either Turkey or Russia. For Russia, the Orthodox Christian bond with Georgia did not prevent Moscow from supporting separatist regions, indicating that strategic interests outweighed

religious affiliations. For Turkey, the religious difference with predominantly Christian Georgia did not hinder the development of strong bilateral relations, underlining Ankara's prioritization of geopolitical and economic considerations over religious factor. the policies of Turkey and Russia have been shaped more by geopolitical, strategic, and economic factors than by religion. Russia's approach has been characterized by a desire to assert its influence and counter Western expansion in its perceived sphere of influence. In contrast, Turkey's policy has been more cautious, focusing on maintaining economic ties and regional stability. The minimal role of religion in these policies highlights the predominance of pragmatic considerations in the foreign policies of both nations in the complex geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus.

### **3.1.3. NAGORNO- KARABAKH**

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an ethnic and territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has been a significant point of geopolitical tension in the South Caucasus. While Russia has historically played a role as a mediator and a security actor, Turkey has openly supported Azerbaijan, underpinned by ethnic and religious ties. Russia's approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been characterized by a careful balancing act. As a co-chair of the Minsk Group, Russia has sought to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus by positioning itself as a key mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moscow's policy is driven by strategic interests, including maintaining stability in its southern border regions and preventing the escalation of conflict that could draw in other powers. While Russia has a historical and cultural affinity with Armenia, predominantly Christian like Russia, this has not translated into outright support for Armenia in the conflict, underscoring the primacy of strategic interests over religious solidarity which include maintaining stability in its near abroad and controlling energy transit routes (Waal 2013, 211). In contrast, Turkey's policy in Nagorno-

Karabakh is heavily influenced by ethno-religious factors. Turkey shares ethnic Turkic ties and Muslim religious affiliation with Azerbaijan, factors that have significantly shaped Ankara's support for Baku. Turkey's stance has been more overtly partisan in the conflict, providing diplomatic, and during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, military support to Azerbaijan. This approach is underlined by Turkey's broader geopolitical strategy of expanding its influence in the Turkic world and countering Armenian claims in the disputed region. Furthermore, Azerbaijan is a key partner in diversifying Turkey's energy sources and routes, particularly through projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which reduces Ankara's dependence on Russian energy (Altunışık and Tanrisever 2018, 52).

The role of religion in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and in the respective policies of Turkey and Russia, is intertwined with ethnic and nationalistic factors. For Russia, Orthodox Christianity serves as a cultural bridge with Armenia, but this religious connection is secondary to Russia's strategic interests in the region. For Turkey, Islam forms a part of its broader ethnic and cultural affinity with Azerbaijan, significantly influencing its policy decisions. This highlights how religion, while not the sole factor, can intertwine with ethnic and nationalistic sentiments to shape foreign policy. All in all, the contrasting policies of Turkey and Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are shaped by a combination of geopolitical, ethnic, and religious considerations. Russia's policy is guided by strategic balancing and a desire to maintain influence in the South Caucasus, while Turkey's approach is driven by ethno-religious solidarity with Azerbaijan. This analysis underscores the complexity of the conflict, where religion intersects with broader geopolitical and ethnic dimensions to influence the foreign policies of regional powers.

### **3.2.CASE STUDY: THE BALKANS**

The Balkans, with its strategic position and diverse cultural landscape, has historically been a region of great power competition. Within the region, Russia is endeavoring to reestablish its dominance and counter Western expansion, whereas Turkey is focused on expanding its regional sway, capitalizing on its historical connections and membership in NATO. Russia's policy in the Balkans is deeply rooted in historical ties, particularly with Slavic and Orthodox Christian nations like Serbia. Post-Cold War, Russia has viewed the expansion of NATO and the European Union into the Balkans as a strategic threat, leading to a foreign policy that often opposes Western influence in the region. Moscow uses a combination of diplomatic, cultural, and economic tools to maintain its influence, seeing the Balkans as a crucial frontier in its broader contest with the West (Bechev 2015, 2).

Religion plays a significant role in Russia's Balkan policy. The shared Orthodox Christianity has been a cornerstone of Russia's soft power, particularly in fostering close ties with Serbia. However, Russia's engagement is not solely religious; it is also driven by strategic objectives to counter NATO's presence and to project power in Southeast Europe. Turkey's approach to the Balkans is often viewed through the lens of Neo-Ottomanism, a policy of re-engaging with regions formerly under Ottoman rule. This includes fostering cultural, economic, and political ties with Balkan states. Turkey's policy is characterized by a blend of historical nostalgia and pragmatic diplomacy, leveraging its role as a bridge between the East and the West (Özkan 2012, 113).

Religion, specifically Islam, plays a nuanced role in Turkey's Balkan policy. In countries with significant Muslim populations, like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, Turkey uses religious affinity to bolster its influence. However, Turkey's policy transcends religious outreach, as it also engages with Christian-majority countries, driven by economic interests and regional stability.

Turkey's NATO membership significantly influences its Balkan policy. As a NATO member, Turkey supports the Alliance's expansion and influence in the region, often positioning itself in opposition to Russian interests. This has led to a complex dynamic where Turkey's historical and cultural ties intersect with its commitment to NATO objectives (Özkan 2012, 125).

In conclusion, Turkish and Russian policies in the Balkans are shaped by a complex interplay of historical ties, religious affiliations, geopolitical strategies, and alliance dynamics. Russia's approach is driven by strategic concerns and opposition to NATO, leveraging Orthodox Christianity as a tool of influence. Turkey's policy, while also influenced by religion, is more diversified, encompassing economic interests, historical connections, and its role within NATO. The Balkans thus remains a region where historical legacies and modern geopolitical strategies converge, reflecting the broader contestation between East and West.

### **3.3.CASE STUDY: TURKIC STATES**

Central Asia, a region of strategic geopolitical importance and rich in natural resources, has been a focal point for both Turkish and Russian foreign policies. Russia is focused on preserving its traditional sphere of influence, whereas Turkey is striving to build more robust cultural and economic connections, utilizing its common ethnic and linguistic heritage with Turkic states. The Russian approach to Central Asia is deeply rooted in its historical connections and strategic interests. As a former imperial and Soviet power, Russia views Central Asia as a vital component of its near abroad, critical for its security and economic interests. Strategically, the region's energy resources, particularly natural gas and oil are the main drivers of Russia's energy diplomacy, as Moscow seeks to control key energy corridors to maintain its status as a major energy

supplier. Religion plays a limited role in Russia's policy towards predominantly Muslim Central Asia. Instead, Russia's focus is on maintaining political stability and countering external influences, particularly from the West and radical Islamist groups. The primary driver is geopolitical: asserting influence, maintaining security, and controlling energy routes (Pomfret 2019, 265).

On the other side, Turkey's policy in Central Asia is influenced by its Pan-Turkic aspirations, aiming to strengthen ties with Turkic-speaking states based on shared cultural and linguistic heritage. This approach, often termed "Neo-Ottomanism," seeks to reinvigorate historical connections and establish Turkey as a leading power in the Turkic world. Religion, specifically Sunni Islam, forms a cultural bridge between Turkey and Central Asian states, facilitating closer relations. However, Turkey's engagement goes beyond religious affinity; it is also driven by economic interests, particularly in developing trade links and accessing the region's energy resources. Turkey views energy corridors from Central Asia as crucial for diversifying its energy sources and reducing dependence on Russian energy (Robins 2004, 3). In summary, comparing Turkish and Russian policies reveals both converging and diverging interests. Russia's primary goals are to maintain its historical influence, control energy corridors, and ensure regional stability. In contrast, Turkey's objectives include cultural diplomacy, economic integration, and energy diversification. While both nations seek to access Central Asia's energy resources, their approaches differ: Russia aims to maintain control, while Turkey seeks alternatives to Russian energy.

### **3.4.CASE STUDY: SYRIA**

The Syrian War, a multifaceted and prolonged conflict, has drawn significant international involvement, notably from Turkey and Russia. These two regional powers have pursued distinct policies in Syria, influenced by a complex



mix of geopolitical objectives, security concerns, and religious factors. Russia's intervention in the Syrian War has been driven primarily by strategic interests. Moscow's support for the Assad regime is rooted in a desire to maintain its influence in the Middle East, preserve its naval facility in Tartus, and project power on a global scale. Russia views its involvement in Syria as a means to counter Western influence, combat jihadist groups that pose a threat to Russian security, and demonstrate its capability as a global power. On the contrary, religion plays a limited, albeit symbolic role in Russia's Syrian policy. While the Russian Orthodox Church has expressed support for protecting Christian minorities in Syria, the Kremlin's main objectives are strategic rather than religious. Russia's policy drivers are predominantly geopolitical – maintaining a foothold in the Middle East, supporting an ally, and countering perceived Western encroachment (Trenin 2018, 135).

Turkey's involvement in the Syrian War is complex, driven by a mix of security concerns, regional ambitions, and domestic considerations. A primary concern for Ankara has been the threat posed by Kurdish groups along its border, particularly the PKK and its Syrian offshoot, the YPG, which Turkey views as terrorist organizations. Additionally, Turkey aims to limit the influence of Assad's regime and Iranian-backed forces, while also managing the refugee crisis resulting from the conflict. Religion, specifically Sunni Islam, plays a more pronounced role in Turkey's policy than in Russia's. Turkey has supported Sunni opposition groups against the Assad regime, which is aligned with Shiite Iran and Hezbollah. However, Turkey's policy is not solely driven by religious affiliations; strategic considerations, including border security and curbing Kurdish separatism, are paramount (Dalay 2017, 5).

The interaction between Turkey and Russia in Syria has been characterized by a pragmatic mix of cooperation and competition. Both countries have found common ground in seeking a political solution to the conflict and managing regional stability. However, their competing interests – Russia's support for Assad and Turkey's backing of opposition groups – have led to tensions and confrontations, including direct military clashes (Goularas and Ketenci 2020, 110).

## 4. CHAPTER: CONCLUSION

This MA thesis set out to explore the intersection of religion and foreign policy in Turkey and Russia, two pivotal states in the international system, whose geopolitical maneuvers are often observed through the lens of their religious identities. The central hypothesis posited that both nations demonstrate a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, frequently prioritizing political and economic interests over religious congruence, even within regions predominantly populated by Muslims. The comprehensive analysis of qualitative secondary data has revealed that Turkey and Russia employ religion in a versatile and strategic manner, aligning it with broader state interests when advantageous. Turkey's foreign policy, underpinned by its Islamic identity, has shown flexibility, as seen in its relations with various Muslim-majority countries. Religious affiliation has been utilized as a tool for strengthening economic ties and political alliances, but it has also been set aside in favor of national interests when necessary. For instance, Turkey's involvement in Syria and its relations with Israel exemplify a complex balancing act between religious considerations and strategic imperatives.

Similarly, Russia's foreign policy, while anchored in its Orthodox Christian heritage, has not been constrained by religious dogma. The Russian state has demonstrated a capacity to engage with Muslim-majority regions within its own borders, such as Chechnya, and abroad, exemplified by its actions in Syria and partnerships with Islamic countries. Russia has leveraged its religious identity to foster a multi-polar world order that advances its interests, often at the expense of religious solidarity.

The analysis of Turkish and Russian foreign policies supports the hypothesis that pragmatism prevails over religious uniformity. Both countries have shown that while religion can inform their foreign policy, it is ultimately the pursuit of national interests that guides their international engagements.

This pragmatic fusion of religious identity with political strategy has significant implications for understanding the multifaceted roles that religion plays in contemporary geopolitics.

The hypothesis that Turkey and Russia exhibit a pragmatic approach in balancing their religious affiliations with geopolitical strategies is substantiated through an examination of their foreign policies in Muslim-majority regions. The nuanced diplomatic engagements of both countries reveal a pattern of prioritizing political and economic interests, often at the expense of religious congruity. Turkey's foreign policy maneuvers in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq, provide clear examples of political and economic interests taking precedence over religious solidarity. Despite sharing a religious affinity with the Sunni majority in Syria, Turkey has demonstrated a multifaceted strategy that involves direct military intervention and political negotiations that align with its national security concerns, rather than religious imperatives. Turkey's operations in northern Syria, primarily aimed at curbing Kurdish influence, underscore its prioritization of territorial integrity over religious unity.

Economically, Turkey has sought to increase its influence in the Muslim world through investments and trade, as seen in its expanding relations with Qatar and other Gulf countries. The strategy here intertwines religious commonality with the pursuit of economic benefits, using religion as a soft power tool rather than a defining principle.

Russia's engagement in Muslim-majority regions, such as its intervention in Syria, highlights its pragmatic foreign policy approach. Despite the predominantly Sunni population in Syria, Russia has supported the Alawite-led government due to strategic interests, including maintaining its military presence in the Mediterranean and countering Western influence. This approach illustrates Russia's tendency to use religion as a diplomatic asset when convenient, but not as a determinant of its foreign policy decisions. Domestically, Russia's

management of its own Muslim populations, particularly in the North Caucasus, reveals a complex interplay between religious accommodation and authoritative governance. The Russian state has fostered a version of Islam that aligns with its national narrative, promoting an image of religious tolerance while ensuring that religious practices do not challenge state authority. Drawing parallels between Turkey and Russia's foreign policies, it is evident that both countries utilize religion as one of several tools in their geopolitical strategies. In regions with significant Muslim populations, they have both shown a capacity to align with or distance themselves from religious groups based on pragmatic calculations. This pragmatic approach has been particularly evident in their respective involvements in the Syrian conflict, where strategic alliances were formed based on political objectives rather than religious affiliations.

Additionally, both nations have harnessed religious connections to reinforce their international standing and influence. Turkey has cultivated its image as a leader of the Muslim world, while Russia has portrayed itself as a defender of Orthodox Christianity and a global power broker. Yet, in practice, their policies reflect a sophisticated blend of *realpolitik*, where economic interests, security concerns, and regional influence consistently overshadow religious ties.

Again, the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia in Muslim-majority regions confirm the central hypothesis of this thesis. Both countries demonstrate a pattern of pragmatism, where religious affiliations are balanced against, and often subordinated to, geopolitical strategies. This pragmatic fusion underscores a broader trend in international relations where states are increasingly likely to use religion as a versatile tool to advance diverse and often secular, strategic interests.

The intricate fabric of international relations is often colored by the use of religion as a strategic element in statecraft. Both Turkey and Russia have employed religious rhetoric and symbols to project their influence and assert hegemonic interests, integrating these elements into their foreign policy with varying degrees of success and implications. These practices can be examined through three distinct modes: Interrogation, Accommodation, and Engagement.

Turkey, for instance, has leveraged its role as the custodian of Ottoman heritage and Islamic civilization to assert its influence in the Muslim world, particularly in regions like the Balkans and the Middle East. The instrumentalization of the Ottoman past and Islamic symbolism serves to project power and foster a sense of leadership among Muslim-majority nations. This approach, however, raises questions about its effectiveness, as it can sometimes lead to accusations of neo-Ottomanism or exacerbate regional tensions.

Russia's invocation of the Orthodox Church and religious heritage has been a cornerstone in its quest for a “Russkiy Mir” (Russian World), particularly in areas of Eastern Europe and the Balkans where Orthodoxy is prevalent. The symbolic use of religion to support Russian-speaking communities abroad has been integral to its foreign policy, particularly in asserting its influence in the post-Soviet space. However, this approach has had mixed results, with some successes in strengthening ties with like-minded regimes and Orthodox communities, while also inviting criticism and resistance from those wary of Russian expansionism.

Both countries have also shown an ability to integrate religious considerations into their foreign policy frameworks. Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) plays a significant role in shaping the country's religious diplomacy. The Diyanet's activities, such as sending imams abroad and providing religious services to the Turkish diaspora, are examples of how Turkey integrates religious soft power into its foreign policy.

The success of this integration is evident in Turkey's ability to maintain strong ties with Muslim communities internationally, though it has also been critiqued for attempting to exert influence over these communities.

Russia, in turn, has accommodated religious considerations by fostering close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, which serves as a soft power tool in its foreign policy. The Church's support for Russian interventions in regions like Syria has been portrayed domestically as a moral crusade against terrorism and protection of Christian minorities. This integration has bolstered nationalistic sentiments within Russia and provided a veneer of legitimacy to its foreign interventions. However, the strategy has also been problematic, as it has alienated non-Orthodox populations and sometimes contradicted Russia's secular foreign policy principles.

Furthermore, engagement with religious traditions has been a prominent feature of both Turkish and Russian foreign policies. Turkey's engagement with Sunni Islam has allowed it to project influence in the Arab world, evident in its support for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups across the region. This engagement has at times strengthened its foreign policy agenda, providing leverage in international negotiations and creating alliances based on shared religious identities.

Russia's engagement with the Orthodox Church has enabled it to reach out to Orthodox Christians globally, positioning itself as a defender of traditional values against a perceived encroachment of Western liberalism. This has been particularly pronounced in its support for Orthodox minorities in the Middle East and its opposition to Western interventions in the region.

The impact of such religious engagements on international relations and domestic politics has been profound. While these strategies have provided Turkey and Russia with additional tools to assert their interests on the international stage, they have also complicated diplomatic relationships and internal social dynamics.

The use of religion in foreign policy has to be carefully managed to avoid alienating other religious and secular actors, both internationally and domestically. Moreover, the blending of religious rhetoric with nationalistic agendas has the potential to polarize societies and international communities, making it a double-edged sword in foreign policy.

Last but not least, the foreign policy behaviors of Turkey and Russia reflect a pragmatic synthesis of religious traditions with political objectives. Both states have demonstrated a capacity to utilize religion as a means to enhance their strategic goals, albeit with varying levels of integration and engagement. This pragmatic use of religion serves to confirm the central hypothesis of this thesis, underscoring the adaptability of religious elements within the complex arena of global politics. The nuanced application of these strategies speaks to a sophisticated understanding of the utility of religion in advancing state interests, a recognition that religion can be both a potent unifier and a divisive factor in foreign affairs.

As this MA draws to a close, the intersection of religion and foreign policy as demonstrated by Turkey and Russia opens numerous avenues for future research. Scholars might extend this inquiry to analyze how emerging powers, such as China and India, incorporate their religious and philosophical traditions into their international strategies. Comparative studies could be enriched by including nations with diverse religious landscapes, such as Indonesia and Nigeria, to explore how pluralistic religious beliefs within a country influence its foreign policy.

Another promising area of research could involve a deeper investigation into the internal mechanisms through which religious institutions influence foreign policy decisions. This could include case studies on the relationship between religious leaders and state officials, and how these dynamic shapes policy outcomes.



Additionally, the role of transnational religious networks and their impact on bilateral and multilateral relations warrants further exploration, particularly in the context of globalized communication and international advocacy.

Reflecting on the significance of this study, it becomes clear that the intricate dance between religion and statecraft is as old as civilization itself, yet it remains underexamined in contemporary scholarship. This thesis contributes to the field of International Relations by highlighting the pragmatic use of religious identity and rhetoric as tools in the complex game of foreign policy. It underscores the importance of considering religious factors as part of the multi-dimensional forces driving international affairs. The findings of this research not only enhance our understanding of Turkish and Russian foreign policies but also prompt a broader reevaluation of the role of religion in global politics. It is a call to scholars and policymakers alike to recognize the power of religion not as a peripheral or antiquated force, but as a living, evolving influence that pervades and shapes the strategies of nations in the modern world.

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