GTA 41-01-005

RELIGIOUS FACTORS ANALYSIS

February 2015

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
GTA 41-01-005

Religious Factors Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

This document represents a collaborative effort by the Commandants of the Civil Affairs (CA), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Special Forces (SF) branches at the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School to equip CA, PSYOP, and SF Soldiers with a tool for better understanding religious considerations in mission planning and execution. Today’s population-centric warfare places Army special operations forces (ARSOF) and conventional CA and PSYOP Soldiers in high demand. Soldiers who have high levels of cultural competence and training in cultural analysis provide an effective mission planning tool for developing an understanding of the operational environment. Current (and likely future) operating environments require the unique cultural skills of CA, PSYOP, and SF Soldiers. Religion can be a significant behavioral driver for nonstate actors, faith-based transnational networks, insurgencies, and transcendent ideologies, which can influence terrorist activities or exacerbate national or regional conflicts.

Utilizing religious factors analysis prevents the exclusion of religion from planning and can increase a Soldier’s understanding of the operational environment. This process enables the examination of religious factors relevant to mission planning and the development of a synchronized process within the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). There is a need to integrate religious factors analysis into existing processes so that religious factors become actionable elements of the mission plan.
WHY RELIGION MATTERS

Given the complexity and potential power of religion, it can affect human aspects of the operational environment. Religion’s ability to shape the operational environment can include the following:

- Religion provides answers to some of life’s big questions, such as why there is death and war. Many societies’ understanding of what war is—its nature and character—and of the norms and ethics for engaging in war stem from that society’s religious traditions.
- Religious motivations in combat can impact the proportionality of violence and the discrimination between military and civilian targets.
- Religion can exacerbate the identity groups in conflicts and intensify differences based on nationality, ethnicity, politics, or language.
- Religion can motivate the masses effectively, and it is often outside the influence of the indigenous security forces.
- Religion offers an ideology—which sometimes can become a platform for political beliefs—that can resonate more strongly than other forms of influence.
- Religious leaders are often the last leaders left when states fail, and they offer a voice to the disempowered or oppressed.
- Religious authorities, especially at the local level, often wield political, economic, and kinship authority.
- Religious leaders are often the first to pursue harmony and reconciliation after a conflict.
Religious factors can assist with conflict resolution and conflict management. Religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide significant contributions to humanitarian efforts. Across the range of military operations, understanding religious factors is critical for anticipating human responses. One definition of religion is the human response to the perceived sacred. The response can be positive or negative. Understanding both positive and negative responses within the human aspects of the operational environment is critical. Attempting to influence the population of any host-country without understanding its religious beliefs and identities can result in adverse and unintended outcomes. Combating religiously motivated combatants without understanding religious factors can limit or impede mission effectiveness. Religion has shaped many past conflicts. There are indicators that its influence will only grow. Soldiers must comprehend the impact that religious factors have on their missions, and they must include religious factors to understand cultures in the operational environment. Soldiers should begin by examining their own beliefs to ensure objectivity in their analysis of the religious factors impacting the operational environment.

THE TWO FRONTS
Achieving mission success while conducting operations within foreign cultures occurs on two fronts—the cultural perception of the Soldier and those cultures in the operational environment. The first front is the Soldier’s personal perceptions of culture and religion. Biases about religion can prejudice objective analysis and impede cultural understanding. Secular tendencies within Western culture may limit a Soldier’s ability to grasp the importance of religion in other cultures. Conducting analysis of religious factors within the operational environment may require blurring the distinctions between secular and
religious components. The second front is the indigenous population’s perceptions derived from culture and religion. Understanding both of these fronts enables Soldiers to make a predictive analysis of civilian reactions to military operations. The Soldier must take two key steps when trying to understand how religion in an area of operations may affect the mission. First, the Soldier must compartmentalize personal beliefs to understand the religious practices of the population. Second, the Soldier must comprehend how and to what degree the theology and/or dogma of the practiced religion influences the indigenous population’s worldview. The Soldier needs to have a sense of self-awareness and sensitivity to the faith factors of the population. Educating and familiarizing the Soldier in a manner that applies the two-front theory allows the Soldier to have a better comprehension of, respect for, and sensitivity to the religious environment. Soldiers operating at this level of understanding can demonstrate leadership and provide examples to conflict-ridden societies of respect and tolerance for a pluralistic religious environment. The potential exists to overlook religion in mission planning because of the Soldiers’ views. However, if Soldiers demonstrate an ability to understand other views regardless of their own sacred beliefs, they can model tolerance in societies experiencing conflict.

For Soldiers to have the ability to analyze religion as part of the operational and mission variables, they must have an understanding of some key religious concepts. This understanding does not affix a value sentiment to indigenous religious beliefs nor does it require a Soldier to surrender personal convictions; it simply requires an objective and unbiased assessment of the population’s beliefs.

A key tenant of the modern Western view is the idea of the separation of church and state. This view often minimalizes religious factors. The Western worldview is shared by less than one sixth of the world’s population, and it is foreign to the indigenous populations of most of
the world. The Western worldview represents the influence of the Enlightenment and the development of secular thought that is not exclusively dependent upon religion. This worldview is further reinforced by the American military tradition that correctly eschews personal religious and domestic political preferences from official duties. While this approach is appropriate for our nation’s civil-military relations, it can cause planners to transfer a similar expectation to partners or adversaries and can preclude an accurate area analysis in military operations. To prevent errors from occurring and to increase the understanding of religious factors in mission planning, CA, PSYOP, and SF planners must develop a basic understanding of religious worldviews that links spiritual values with earthly actions. Soldiers must recognize a view of religion that synthesizes private religion and public action. A Soldier does not have to agree with or have empathy for this perspective to fully comprehend it. Failure to comprehend the sacred views of the population could affect the full analysis.

KEY CONCEPTS ON RELIGION

The study of religion is vast, and it influences many aspects of cultures and societies. Understanding the full relationship of religion on a particular culture and its bearing on military operations will likely require in-depth research and the utilization of experts with civilian education, such as theologians, anthropologists, or political scientists. Some key general concepts on religion are included in the following paragraphs.

Monotheism and Polytheism

Monotheism is the doctrine or belief that there is only one God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are examples of monotheistic faiths. In a purely monotheistic worldview, religion is not relegated to the private
realm. Polytheism is the belief in multiple deities. In some polytheistic traditions, the gods and/or goddesses are arranged in a pantheon with their own rituals. Shintoism is an example of a polytheist religion. It is important to understand what practitioners believe about their own faith, as well as what other groups believe about the religion. In many instances, religions can have monotheistic and polytheistic features. The Yazidi faith in Iraq is an example of a faith that incorporates both monotheism and polytheism. While Christians believe their faith is monotheistic, others view Christianity as polytheistic because of the concept of the trinity. While Christians would dispute this view, it is an example of the perceptions that external nonpractitioners of a religion can affix to the sacred concepts believed by a religious group.

### High and Low Religions

Another aspect of religious analysis focuses on practices and rituals. A faith classified as high religion is highly organized, structural, and usually hierarchical. Within Christianity, Catholicism and Anglicanism are examples of high faiths and are contrasted by some charismatic and Pentecostal faiths that worship in more open and less-structured formats. In between, a large number of Christian faiths blend both high and low features. Within Islam, the Twelver Shi’a is more high than low in its practice. The classification of high or low does not reflect the validity, sophistication, or spirituality of the faith; it simply describes organization and practices.

### Primary Versus Secondary Religions

Another classification to analyze a religion is whether it is a primary or secondary faith. These categories do not convey the value of the beliefs but do offer a method to understand relationships. Primary religions include Judaism and Hinduism. Primary religions generally tether to very specific groups of people and a somewhat limited geography.
People are usually born into primary religions. Secondary religions usually derive from or are adaptations of primary religions. Within the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism is a primary religion and Christianity and Islam are secondary faiths. Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism have a similar relationship to Hinduism. Secondary religions tend to focus on converting new adherents versus relying on individuals born into the faith. In addition, one can become a member of a secondary religion without tethering to a sacred space for living, worship, or both.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

For many societies, religion is the richest form of public motivation. It allows unrelated groups to coexist peacefully and gives people a higher motive for selfless service. United States (U.S.) presidents have understood religion’s power to reassure the nation in difficult times. Soldiers who have dealt with mass movements or riots started by a religious leader or a religious ritual understand the power of religion to influence populations.

Historically, the U.S. Soldier thought in terms of providing security through strength and firepower. Bringing religion into planning processes and methodologies requires a deeper understanding of the link between politics and religion. Osama bin Laden used his understanding of this link and exploited it. His fatwas, or religious edicts, against the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia and his classification of Americans as infidels played to a disempowered populace and provided them with the promise of security through a religious hope. He linked religious and political ideology with psychological finesse. The United States can understand the exploitation of religion for ideological and political manipulation by integrating religious factors analysis into mission planning and execution and by demonstrating that U.S. actions to build local capacity for stability do not conflict with religious identity.
Promoting a deeper understanding of religion and political security gives the Soldier a countermeasure to use against those who believe that he is spreading globalization—sometimes labeled as Americanization—to other parts of the world. Incorporating an understanding of all religions practiced in the area of operations into mission planning could help the Soldier find innovative approaches to developing positive, sustainable solutions and relationships while allowing indigenous people to retain their religious and cultural identities. Successful inclusion of religious factors analysis can also assist in the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures to counter a religiously motivated opponent’s ability to use ideology to promote insecurity and instability within the indigenous population.

An example of incorporating religious factors in mission planning and execution occurred in Afghanistan. As part of the International Security Assistance Force, ARSOF Soldiers applied available funds to refurbish several mosques in Konar Province. Refurbishing the mosques countered the messages of al-Qaeda and the Taliban that the Americans hated Islam. This psychological action resonated with the Afghani people. As members of the local population observed the U.S.-funded effort, they developed a trust for the ARSOF units throughout the area. This is an example of a simple, yet effective, countermeasure developed through a deeper understanding of religion and its relationship to local security conditions.

WHY UNDERSTANDING RELIGION IS VITAL

Author Thomas Friedman aptly observed that “While we were celebrating 11/9 [the fall of the Berlin Wall], the seeds of another memorable date—9/11—were being sown.” U.S. leaders, strategists, and planners generally failed to understand the impact that religion played throughout the 1990s in fermenting al-Qaeda and a myriad of other religiously motivated terrorists. The Army currently possesses a
broad understanding of religion’s impact on military operations, which was earned through sustained operations since 9/11 against a religiously motivated opponent. While a broader understanding is appropriate for U.S. forces applying the operational and mission variables, the nature of CA, military information support operations (MISO), and SF missions requires more precision and insight into religion’s impact on individuals and societies.

The United States has over a decade of experience factoring religious influences into military operations in the context of predominately Islamic societies. In future operations, it is vital for CA, PSYOP, and SF Soldiers to analyze religious factors and their impact on the human aspects of the operational environment, regardless of the religions in the operational area.

Successful analysis of religious factors is difficult for a number of reasons. The first reason is that religion is a complex subject. There are no definitive templates for religion. Oversimplification is another reason religious factors analysis is difficult. It can result in broad statements, such as “all religions are basically the same” or “all religions share universal beliefs.”

Although an analysis of religion does not fit well within most analytical methodologies, the complexity of religion does not make it incomprehensible. Author and professor Marc Gopin offers several recommendations to governmental and nongovernmental agencies to perform religious analysis. The following recommendations provide a good start for religious analysis in military planning:

- Study the fears and resentments of religious worldviews that oppose present civil societies and develop policies that do not increase those fears.
- Study causal chains that link religious violence to both internal and external religious traditions and understand how mass traumas affect groups.
Know religious traditions affected by military operations and anticipate their impact on religious life, religious institutions, and religious leaders.

Know when religion or religious figures have influenced social transformation in a positive sense and reinforce policies that continue positive transformation.

Know the most negative expression of a religion’s or culture’s interpersonal behavior patterns to anticipate causes and develop counteractive measures.

Study the perceived and remembered traumas of a society from its religious interpretations and involve the religious community in healing any trauma.

Bring all parties—no matter how violent or exclusive—into interactions. The inclusion of all parties short-circuits the martyr complex.

Isolate violent groups not by confrontation, which strengthens them, but by co-opting; address the grievances of the violent groups through cooperation with religious leaders and organizations.

The consideration of any one of these recommendations enables the Soldier to fuse religious factors into mission planning and execution.

A second reason for minimizing the impact of religion in mission planning is the planner’s failure to understand its relevance. Because cultural competence is vital to CA, MISO, and SF missions, it is essential not to overlook religious factors. Planners must ensure a thorough analysis of the religions in the operational area takes place to prevent this mistake. The belief that religion is a cover for other motivating factors leads to an underestimation of the connections between religious ideology and societal responses to military actions. This belief still misses the point that even if an insurgent is misusing religious ideology to gain a political end, his decisionmaking is shaped
through the prism of religion. Understanding religion is vital to comprehending the operational environment, defeating religiously motivated opponents, and achieving U.S. strategic aims. Bullets will not defeat spiritual warriors, and the more the Soldier thinks in purely secular terms, the more the religiously motivated insurgent becomes empowered. In addition, actions by U.S. forces can inflame religious opposition and counter long-term operational and strategic goals.

A third reason for minimizing the impact of religion in mission planning is a limited cultural understanding by Soldiers and staff members, which occurs for a myriad of reasons. Even with the level of cultural and linguistic preparation that occurs for CA, PSYOP, and SF Soldiers, operational requirements, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, may require the use of Soldiers and units trained for other geographical regions to sustain operational depth. In these instances, it is incumbent on those Soldiers and units to prepare for sustainable operations in the new area. It is inexcusable for ARSOF or conventional CA and PSYOP Soldiers to deploy to an operational area without conducting the prerequisite study to develop situational awareness of the operational environment.

Too often, cultural briefs on religion are based on one sect or perspective of a faith and may not address the diverse sects of a religion. This approach can lead to a narrow understanding of a faith. At the direction of the commander, the unit chaplain can provide a broader view of religion’s influence on the mission. Although the primary function of a chaplain is not necessarily to be a subject-matter expert in world religions, he is an internal resource that can aid the staff in exploring and bringing into focus factors that might affect mission planning. Chaplains provide staffs with religious perspectives that can assist in exploring religious impacts on mission planning, and they provide a theological voice throughout the mission planning process. Their role as religious and military leaders and their education in
religious schools uniquely position them to understand religion from an insider’s point of view. It is imperative that leaders and planners consider the mental flexibility and adaptability of chaplains—as well as other Soldiers—before including them in an examination of the religions in different cultures. Inflexible individual and theological prejudices or blind insistence on one particular worldview can preclude thorough religious and cultural consideration in mission planning. Still, it is better to have some understanding of religion than to have none, and the inclusion of chaplains in the planning process can enhance the understanding of religious factors.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS FACTORS ANALYSIS

An integrated approach to religious factors analysis incorporates critical religious factors into existing planning processes, including IPB. Religious factors analysis evaluates the implications of religion on mission considerations. The steps outlined in this publication, while not definitive for every situation, provide the necessary flexibility to start understanding the religious considerations unique to an area of operations.

Successful integration of religious factors analysis into existing planning frameworks requires two imperatives: intentionality and interpretation. Intentionality is the vital commitment to the continual consideration of religious factors in all stages of the IPB process. Interpretation of religious factors is difficult to define because of the subjectivity of the concepts involved and the breadth of religious viewpoints in the world.

A thorough understanding of religion requires triangulation through anthropological, theological, and other social science disciplines (history, political science, sociology, and so on). Translating religion
through only anthropological or another social science discipline of study leaves the process incomplete. Triangulating the interpretation of religious factors through the additional study of theology yields a more accurate picture of how religion informs the military mission and allows commanders to understand their enemies and potential allies on the ground. The inclusion of theologians in staff analysis can provide an insider’s point of view instead of a purely academic inspection.

According to Dr. Scott Appleby,

_The unique dynamism of lived religion—its distinctive patterns of interaction not only with secular, nationalist, ethnic[,] and other elements of political or personal identity but also with its own sacred past—means, among other things, that religious behavior cannot be predicted merely on the basis of an individual’s or group’s affiliations with specific religious traditions._ . . . [Therefore] there is no substitute for continual on-site analysis, fieldwork of a highly specialized and particular sort that is best conducted by experts in the religious tradition(s) in questions.

When working with the sacred, the need to understand and interpret religious factors in military planning demands that planners approach the subject of religion in an analytical manner. Integrating religious analysis into the present IPB process—

- Provides the military planner with an approach for the inclusion of religious factors.
- Allows the reexamination of assumptions throughout the total process.
- Ensures the intentional inclusion of religious factors throughout the range of military operations.
THREE ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS ASSESSMENT

Effective assessment of religion requires understanding the intersections of religious identities within the operational environment and the impact of these identities on the operational and mission variables. Religion explains the sacred, often through supernatural or transcendent concepts. The impact of these religious concepts on actors within the operational environment determines the applicability to military operations. Three distinct aspects of analysis (Figure 1) can assist Soldiers in determining the interaction of religion on military operations.

**Figure 1. Religious factors analysis**
The first aspect of religious analysis is the physical terrain. The delineation of religious communities may include physical markers linked to key terrain features like mountains or rivers. In urban areas, religious communities or sects may occupy distinct neighborhoods, suburbs, or villages. Key markers of religious identity could include sacred sites, shrines, symbols, or icons to designate boundaries. It is vital to understand the importance of holy or sacred sites and the psychological and emotional value that faith communities place upon them. As discussed throughout this publication, religion can provide the impetus for or exacerbate conflicts. As demonstrated by the invasion of Iraq by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the terrorists destroyed Yazidi, Christian, and Shi’a holy sites to sever their connection to the geographical area. Religiously motivated violence can force minority groups to conceal traditional markers of their religions. In the physical terrain, the Soldier should—

- Identify the religious group’s sacred places.
- Identify the value of these sites and their hierarchy (if any) within the religion.
- Determine the uses of the sites by the group.
- Describe the past and present symbolism of the site.
- Predict reactions by the group to actions near the sites.

The second aspect of religious assessment is people. It focuses on the religious actors in the area of operations. Actors can include formal religious leaders, lay leaders, and adherents to the faith. These individuals can fill the ranks of the political leadership or religious groups. Understanding the role of religious leaders gives insight into their influence and can explain their potential impact on military operations. It is vital to determine the rank or status, resources, and lines of communication of religious leaders and the locations where they influence indigenous populations. Religious leaders can provide a voice of stability in disrupted societies. They can provide powerful
leadership. Acknowledging the importance of religious leaders within the population and, if possible, including them may help achieve unified action in the larger mission. In the human terrain, the Soldier should identify—

- The position, rank, and educational level of the religious leaders.
- The locations of the leadership.
- The roles of the religious leaders.
- The area of influence of the religious leaders.
- The resources of the religious leaders.
- The relationship of the religious leadership with outside groups, such as the regime, political leaders, and other religious group leaders.
- The potential reactions of the religious leadership.

The third aspect of assessment is the religious identity. Identifying religious identity includes gaining knowledge of the values, codes, practices, holy days, symbols, history, and heroes and villains of the faith groups in the operational environment. Sacred beliefs are the most difficult to assess in religious factors analysis, but they can yield a deeper understanding of the culture’s core elements. Understanding the way that religions shape individuals and the larger society can provide the commander with the ability to influence the population and attain mission objectives. Developing detailed operational knowledge on religious sects may require coordinating with local cultural or academic experts or requesting research and analysis capabilities through the institutional Army. In the ideological terrain—perhaps the hardest to assess—the Soldier should identify—

- The central beliefs and codes—written and unwritten—of the religious group.
- The central practices of religious expression.
• The prioritized holy days and calendar events.
• The symbols and meanings of the belief.
• The group’s historic narratives.
• The group’s heroes and villains.
• The group’s interconnectedness to society and other groups.
• The variances between orthodox beliefs and local beliefs.
• The openness of the group to outside groups or beliefs.
• The group’s potential responses to the mission objectives.

Understanding how each of the three aspects—physical terrain, people, and religious identity—intersect and interrelate can improve a Soldier’s ability to understand human aspects of the operational environment. Identifying religious sites is easier than understanding their meaning. A thorough assessment can increase the accuracy of predictions of the impact of religions on the mission.

In summary, the consideration of religious factors will not guarantee mission success. It has been said that all politics are local, and so it is with religion. Those who engage in religious analysis must understand that religion is too broad a subject to predict with certainty. However, the broadness of religion does not eliminate the need to study and interpret religion’s impact on the mission. A cursory glance at religion as part of cultural awareness is often the training solution, but this solution’s lack of depth often leads to errors in analysis.

RELIGIOUS LEADER ASSESSMENT

Perhaps the most powerful influence in religion is the leadership. Whether titled priest, reverend, monk, bishop, mullah, imam, or mufti,
the leader possesses great power to persuade. The following three indicators help determine a religious leader’s influence:

- What is the popularity of the regime in its local area?
- What is the agenda of the opposition?
- What are the resources of the leader and his organization?

Often, a higher-ranking religious leader is more likely to cooperate with the local government than a religious leader who serves a smaller group in the community. The lower-ranking leader may oppose the local government on a social issue and gain support among his congregation for opposing the larger dominions of society.

To assess religious leadership, Soldiers should use the matrix provided in Figure 2 to determine the religious leader’s cooperation or conflict with the mission.

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<td>Ties to Opposition</td>
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<td>Rank/Stature Within the Religion</td>
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<td>Local Influence</td>
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<td>National/Regional Influence</td>
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<td>International Influence</td>
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<td>Level of Resourcing/Financing</td>
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**Figure 2. Religious leader matrix**

In assessing religious leaders, it is important for Soldiers to understand that religious leaders frame problems in terms of their god and their people. Transnational and transcendent factors often influence religious
leaders, making them difficult to control. Their influence can extend beyond the operational environment. The Soldier must understand his religious convictions when dealing with religious leaders of a similar faith. If a Soldier gives more credence to a person of a similar faith than one of another faith, it can negatively affect the mission.

The joint doctrinal principle of unified action best describes the most common relationship U.S. Army forces will develop with indigenous religious leaders. Unified action is the synchronization, coordination, and integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.

RELIGIOUS SUPPORT IN CIVIL-MILITARY OPERATIONS

Throughout U.S. history, chaplains have supported commanders by advising them on the interface between religious support operations and civil-military operations (CMO). The necessary guidelines for chaplains to engage in this role as required by their commanders are outlined below.

ADVISING THE COMMAND

Chaplains can advise the commander in the following areas that may influence CMO:

- Indigenous religious, ethnic, and cultural influences.
- Beliefs, practices, and customs of religious groups in the area of operations (AO).
- Religious issues of displaced civilians.
- NGOs and international organizations.
- Relations with indigenous religious leaders (when directed by the commander).
ALIGNMENT WITH INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE BATTLEFIELD

During IPB, religious factors are important in determining the influence religious leaders and institutions exert over segments of the population. This assessment allows for a more thorough understanding of religiously based power relationships within a society and can assist in determining methods to achieve unified action with partners. Conversely, religious factors may aid in determining relationships between religious entities and the government and may potentially reveal exploitable discord.

Religious factors analysis improves the quality of advice CA, PSYOP, and SF personnel provide to commanders. The religious factors analysis is particularly useful in determining operational constraints, such as sacred places and shrines that should be off limits or handled with great care. For example, a relatively small percentage of the congregation may actually be involved in weapons storage at a religious site chosen for a raid. Avoiding the alienation of members who are uninvolved is crucial to preventing strong negative reactions within the congregation. U.S. and allied forces may also use the incident as a way to divide the members of the congregation from the hostile forces that misused their place of worship and endangered their lives. While determining constraints, religious factors analysis can equip planners with certain critical facts and assumptions that affect branches and sequels.

Identifying religious factors (Figure 3, pages 22 and 22) can increase the number of facts, decrease the number of assumptions, and enable more precision in mission planning.
1. Define the operational environment. Break down the area of interest and AO by—
   - Dominant religions.
   - Demographic layout of religious groups, tribes, sects, divisions, and overlaps.
   - External and internal influence.
   - Exploitable norms, values, beliefs, and traditions. This information could include religious groups, tribes, sects, divisions, and overlaps.
   - Government’s vulnerability to being influenced by religion. This information could include sacred times (key events and celebrations—daily, weekly, monthly, and annually), and religious biases and problems.

2. Describe environmental effects on operations. Determine how the battlefield environment affects both enemy and friendly operations and civilians. Determine—
   - How do the actions of U.S. forces affect religious factors in and around the operational environment?
   - What is the specific reaction that the enemy or the local population is likely to have based upon previous actions?
   - How will these reactions benefit or hinder military activities?
   - What is the sentiment of both external and internal religious leaders to the conflict center of gravity (positive, negative, neutral, or passive)?
   - How does the sentiment of the religious leadership affect the local populace?
   - Will certain actions cause religious no-go areas?

Figure 3. Religious factors in the intelligence preparation of the battlefield process
What is the impact of military operations on ethnic and cultural beliefs?

How will sects or denominations fracture or align based upon military actions, and is there a way to exploit the situation?

Are there targeting considerations that may restrict engagement?

Who are the specific clergy or leadership?

What are the religious structures or holy sites?

3. Evaluate the threat. What are the—

- Capabilities and methods? What religious capabilities and methods are used to influence the populace? (Examples of methods and means are rallies, propaganda, rhetoric, radio, and fliers.)

- Vulnerabilities? Is there corruption in the religious entities? If so, can it be exploited?

- Goals? Specifically, what goals are against U.S. or rival religious sects’ efforts?

- Motivations? Are the motivations ideological (such as the concept of jihad), monetary, or power-based?

- Limitations? Is there an insufficient support network or a lack of resources?

4. Determine threat courses of action. Determine how religious entities or groups will act based upon the activities conducted by U.S. forces. (This step might not be applicable for the determination of religious aspects because this factor was covered in previous paragraphs.)

Figure 3. Religious factors in the intelligence preparation of the battlefield process (continued)
Although assumptions will always exist, religious-based assumptions fall into the realm of educated guesses derived from specific information. Consequently, religious factors analysis helps achieve a higher degree of accuracy. The review of key facts and assumptions in follow-on planning will be easier as long as the analysis is kept current. The religious factors analysis will have established the baseline data that defines the battlefield.

Identifying known facts and limiting assumptions increases the accuracy of a risk assessment. Knowledge of expected population reaction to combat operations weighs heavily in determining if the amount of force is adequate for the planned operation. Whether the attitude of the people is for, against, or indifferent to the operation greatly affects the operational scope and danger that friendly forces may encounter.

When conducting the mission analysis briefing, the Soldier’s use of facts gleaned from the religious factors analysis can improve the accuracy of planning of data for commanders and staffs. As a result, religious factors analysis provides facts that clarify the briefing and address outstanding issues. Religious factors analysis also enables commanders and staffs to understand the reaction of the civilian population to military operations and help develop measures to prevent negative impacts among the population.

Religious factors analysis–based assumptions are not unsupported suppositions—they are better described as educated guesses derived from specific current and historical data. Consequently, religious factors analysis helps achieve a higher degree of accuracy. The review of key facts and assumptions in follow-on planning will be easier as long as the analysis is kept current. Religious factors analysis will have established the baseline data that defines the battlefield.
Identifying known facts and limiting assumptions increases the accuracy of a risk assessment. Knowledge of expected population reaction to combat operations weighs heavily in determining if the amount of force is adequate for the planned operation. Whether the attitude of the people is for, against, or indifferent to the operation greatly affects the operational scope and danger that friendly forces may encounter.

When conducting the mission analysis briefing, the Soldier’s use of specific facts gleaned from the religious factors analysis will increase the likelihood that well-devised plans are approved. Religious factors analysis also aids contingency planning, because the population’s reaction will be thoroughly assessed. At that point, potential pitfalls will have been considered and countermeasures devised to offset potential undesired consequences. As a result, religious factors analysis provides facts that clarify the briefing and address outstanding issues. Overall, religious factors analysis will help PSYOP personnel achieve success, which means success for the supported force as well.

CA, PSYOP, AND SF CONSIDERATIONS

To overcome the deficiencies of current analysis systems, leaders of CA, PSYOP, SF, and the chaplaincy combined their individual assessments and tailored the religious factors analysis.

The religious factors analysis format provides the necessary depth and breadth of information needed to address the religious implications of military operations. Religious factors analysis provides specific information that goes further in predicting how a population may react to military operations involving religious figures and sites. Religious factors analysis serves as a model for predicting potential behavior to address in mission planning.
GTA 41-01-005

RELIGIOUS FACTORS ANALYSIS FORMAT

Figure 4, pages 26 through 32, provides a comprehensive religious factors analysis format. As with any assessment and analysis process, continuous information gathering upon entry into the AO is essential to validate the initial assessment and satisfy identified information gaps.

Crisis action planning often necessitates modification of the military decisionmaking process or joint operation planning process, either because of time constraints or the commander’s direction. Whatever the cause, expedient planning should never totally omit an initial—even if abbreviated—religious factors analysis of the targeted AO.

Data may come from either classified or open sources, may be dated, or may be unverifiable, forcing the development of planning assumptions prior to deployment. In a time-constrained planning environment, certain key religious factors analysis information will—

- Contribute to the overall civil considerations analysis and the IPB process.
- Enhance cultural awareness of the AO.
- Identify key leaders, communicators, and spheres of influence.
- Contribute to both the lethal and nonlethal targeting process.
- Assist in populace and resource control planning.
- Provide the basis for a more in-depth analysis.

Note: During crisis action planning, leaders should focus at a minimum on the bolded areas in the religious factors analysis format (Figure 4).
### Religious Group:  
### Country:  
### Regional Area:  
### Prepared By:  
### Date Prepared:  

1. **Local religious entities:**  
   a. What religions are indigenous?  
   b. Are religious entities organized or unorganized?  
   c. Are the religions national, regional, or local?  
   d. Are the religions predominately rural or urban?  
   e. Are the religious entities associated with specific families, clans, tribes, ethnic groups, or races?  

2. **History and background:**  
   a. What is the religious history of the area?  
   b. What ethnic groups came into the area and when?  
   c. Did the religion arrive by trade, conquest, or some other manner?  
   d. How were the religions affected by colonization?  
   e. What past conflicts involved religion?  
   f. What are the historical relationships of the entities with the government?  
   g. How were the relationships between the entities and the government affected by history, major shifts, social changes, and status in society (in the past 100 years)?  
   h. How did groups adjust to changes?  

*Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format*
3. Sacred days, rituals, and customs:
   a. What holy days or festivals may affect military operations?
   b. What are important religious “dos and don'ts” to observe?
   c. What are the sexual customs/mores (interrelationships and intermarriages)?
   d. What are the group’s dietary habits and restrictions?
   e. What are the group’s distinctive symbols and colors, and what is their significance?
   f. How does the group worship? What are the forms, nature, location, frequency, and traits of worship for the group?
   g. What are appropriate protocols for issues related to birth, marriage, and death?
   h. How do these protocols affect the local culture?
   i. How many forms of worship are there? What are the different sects or denominations?
   j. What are the membership requirements?
   k. Are distinct rites of passage observed for conversion, initiation, transitions from youth to elder and single to married, baptism, confirmation, warrior induction, and commissioning? If so, what observances and customs mark their passing?
   l. How are religious observances prioritized?
   m. What is the role of women within the religion?
   n. What are the group’s rituals for mediation, forgiveness (cleansing of guilt), reconciliation, and retribution?

4. Sacred sites and shrines.
   a. What and where are the group’s places of worship, pilgrimages, and memorial sites? Why?
   b. Where are cemeteries and sacred areas located? What is their makeup?

Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format (continued)
c. Is there a distinctive architecture unique to the group’s gathering place? What do these distinctions represent to the group?
d. What sacred sites are off-limits? When? Why?
e. How do the locations, architecture, or uses of holy spaces support or detract from the mission objectives?
f. What is the location and composition of religious records (property, marriage, birth, and death)?
g. What is the location and makeup of ecclesiastic archives or relics?

5. Primary values.
   a. What are the major tenets and beliefs of the religion?
   b. How are beliefs initially formed (family, tribe, or religious center)?
   c. What are religious members willing to die for?
   d. What subjects incite emotional responses from the religion’s members?
   e. What behaviors does the group reward? What behaviors are punished? What are accepted rewards or punishments?
   f. What value is placed on women, children, ancestors, animals, or objects?
   g. How are values transferred (oral, written, symbolic, or other means)?
   h. How do outside influences threaten (real or perceived) these values?
   i. Is the religion or group more focused on the individual or the community?
   j. What are the religion’s beliefs on corruption?

Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format (continued)
   a. Who are the official and unofficial religious leaders, and what is their affiliation?
   b. How many leaders exist? Where are they located?
   c. What is the political role of religious leaders?
   d. What is the relationship of religious leaders to government officials?
   e. What is the scope of the host-nation government’s influence on religious leaders (and vice versa)?
   f. What are the motivations of the religious leaders? Are they theological, ideological, or politically driven?
   g. How are religious leaders organized (administration, clergy, ranks, titles, roles)?
   h. What does their jurisdiction cover? How are they connected to a higher organization?
   i. What are the religious leaders’ scopes of influence on the populace and areas?
   j. Do the religious leaders have an impact on the armed forces?
   k. What is the level of religious integration in the military?
   l. What do religious leaders wear to symbolize their position?
   m. How are leaders selected and trained?
   n. What methods of religious education, legitimization, ordination, and discipline are in place?
   o. Are religious leaders monitored? What missionary efforts are present?
   p. What is base of support of the religious leaders?
   q. What is the religious leaders’ area of influence?
   r. What is the relationship among religious leaders, other religions, and NGOs?
   s. What role do religious leaders play in the cultural society?

Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format (continued)
7. Tolerance and religious intensity.
   a. What is the degree of religious commitment or conviction in each group (nominal, mild, strong, inclusive, exclusive, pluralistic, radical, or fanatical)?
   b. How accepting are the group’s leaders of conversion of their members to other groups?
   c. How are competing groups viewed and received?
   d. How easily can others join and quit the group? Are there repercussions?
   e. How tolerant are adherents if other members convert to different groups or religions?
   f. How do members react to bad behavior within their own ranks?
   g. How do they perceive modernization, globalization, and secularization?
   h. How do they view the United States and Western society?
   i. What factors are present that affect fundamentalism?

8. Relationship to society.
   a. How does the society relate to the religious group? Does the society desire—
      (1) Group eradication.
      (2) Group containment.
      (3) Group assimilation.
      (4) Group power sharing.
      (5) Group pluralism.
   b. How is this group viewed? Is it viewed as a—
      (1) Religious group?
      (2) Secret society?
      (3) Protest movement?

Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format (continued)
c. Is the group affiliated with a political party?
d. Does the group have a distinct subculture or communal life?
e. How does the group seek to influence society?
f. How does the group use media resources to relate to or influence society?
g. **What is the relationship of religious or spiritual leaders to government officials?**
h. **What political influence do religious or spiritual leaders have?**
i. **What is the socioeconomic influence of the religion on the society?**
j. What is the relationship of a secular education to a religious education? How are they legally distinct from each other?

9. **Organization.**
   a. What is the official hierarchy within the religious institutions? If in name only, what is the de facto power structure?
b. What subgroups (sects) are present within the religion?
c. **What are the locations of religious learning centers?**
d. **What is the size, attendance, and influence of each center?**

10. **Doctrine and myths.**
   a. **What are the sources of doctrinal authority?**
   b. What are the sources of ethics?
   c. What is the group’s concept of justice?
   d. Who are the historical heroes, villains, friends, foes, and rivals (past, present, future) of the group?
   e. What are the group’s concepts of the afterlife and salvation?
f. **What is the spiritual focus or center of gravity for the religion’s belief system?**
g. What are the central truths of the group's most famous myths?

h. What are the local interpretations of their myths?

i. How can these truths and interpretations affect operations?

j. How much variance is there between official and folk doctrine and teachings?

1. References/sources.

Figure 4. Religious factors analysis format (continued)

RELIGIOUS FACTORS IMPLICATIONS

Religious awareness will not always enable Soldiers to predict what the enemy and noncombatants will do, but it will help Soldiers better understand the motivations behind the actions. A well-conducted religious factors analysis will assist with mission preparation across the range of military operations.

PROVIDING INFORMATION FOR TARGET ANALYSIS

The first steps of an effective assessment include an analysis of the religions in the operational environment and the manner in which the religions impact the operational variables (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time—known as PMESII-PT) and the mission variables (mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations—known as METT-TC). Staffs provide commanders and subordinates with relevant information to the operational environment based upon the operational and mission variables.
The religious factors assessment supports (not supplants) these methodologies and can provide more clarity in human aspects of the operational environment.

The population—their locations and loyalties—is as important as the physical terrain in shaping the operational environment. Military planners need detailed information and intelligence on the human aspects of the operational environment to conduct effective operations. In accurately defining the religious considerations of the operational environment, there is an apparent need to develop a keen understanding of the religious intricacies that drive the population.

In some past conflicts, enemy forces commonly had leaders playing the dual role of religious and military leader, which often involves a complex chain of command. Identifying linkages will help mission planners determine not only the relationships but also the weight of those relationships. Leader analysis includes—

- Identifying religious leaders who support legitimate government efforts (foreign internal defense or counterinsurgency missions).
- Identifying religious leaders who support resistance movements (during unconventional warfare missions) and the reasons for resistance to government.
- Reducing the resistance to U.S. operations.

**Targeting Friendly Networks**

U.S. forces must assess who supports what efforts. They need to know which leaders support the resistance movement, insurgency (potential government), or current government. This information is valuable in targeting for lethal and nonlethal means and in synergizing, aligning, and leveraging friendly or neutral forces to support the mission.
Targeting Hostile Networks

Targeting does not always equate to destroying. Analysis of the operational and mission variables enables COAs that will have a desired effect. To achieve this effect, COAs may be lethal, such as calling a direct action strike, or they may be nonlethal, such as having tea with a local sheikh.

CA-UNIQUE CONSIDERATIONS

CA Soldiers analyze the civil component of the operational environment to identify threats to civil societies and to develop measures to mitigate or reduce their effects. Religious factors analysis is vital to this effort. For CA Soldiers, analysis begins with the initial civil reconnaissance conducted in the area study of the operational area. Subsequent civil reconnaissance updates the running estimate to develop the civil component of the supported commander’s common operational picture. The analysis of the civil component is done using areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events (ASCOPE), which is the civil considerations portion of METT-TC.

The CA functional areas, supported by the expertise of functional specialists, correspond to lines of effort to support governance, economic stability, infrastructure, rule of law, public health and welfare, and public education and information. In-depth religious factors analysis is necessary at the strategic, operational, and tactical echelons to identify and clarify the impact of indigenous religious beliefs on each of these areas. Conducting a detailed religious factors analysis has the potential to further clarify the overall cultural environment of the AO and provide the information necessary to—

- Identify the formal and informal linkages between influential religious leaders and tribal, clan, and local government leaders.
Identify which religious leaders to empower. Determine which leaders support legitimate government efforts to provide a secure environment and a better quality of life for the populace.

Identify those religious leaders to isolate from the populace in support of counterinsurgency operations as part of an overall populace and resource control plan.

Define the linkages between religious influence and the economic condition of the AO.

Provide a more detailed perspective of the civil components of the supported commander’s common operational picture.

Define the areas controlled by influential religious leaders and their organizational structure.

Provide additional data to the targeting process through the identification of local sacred sites and shrines for inclusion in the list of restricted fire locations.

Increase cultural awareness information for dissemination to Soldiers.

Increase the supported unit’s situational understanding of the impact of religion on the local populace.

Continually monitor the religious factors analysis process to update the running estimate and disseminate new information as it becomes available.

**PSYOP-UNIQUE CONSIDERATIONS**

Contemporary perspectives of current conflicts are heavily influenced by a worldview that does not recognize separation between religion and politics, economics, or other facets of human society. Such a belief system significantly influences target audience (TA) thought, beliefs, attitudes, and, ultimately, behavior. To reach those audiences, PSYOP personnel must thoroughly understand the influences affecting TA
behavior; otherwise, attempts at behavioral modification will be unsuccessful. Religious factors analysis, as a supplement to target audience analysis, can increase the ability of MISO to specifically address behavior. Identifying religious barriers is critical to achieving specific changes in behavior and provides essential information that aids in developing effective psychological acts and products.

Religious factors analysis provides information for intelligence on where and how to reach the TA through key communicators that influence the operational environment. Using MISO capabilities, U.S. forces can be more attuned to psychologically resonant images, symbols, and language that elicit compliance—if not cooperation—from the population.

Analysis may reveal important information about what actions, symbols, and language the Soldier should avoid because of possible negative behavioral effects. In essence, religious factors analysis allows MISO to better define and understand the specific TAs, and it enables commanders to be more cognizant of the psychological consequences of their actions. This knowledge directly affects mission analysis and subsequent planning. Comprehensive and well-conducted planning determines success, and religious factors analysis aids in both analysis and planning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>area of operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSOF</td>
<td>Army special operations forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCOPE</td>
<td>areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Civil Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>civil-military operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COA</td>
<td>course of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPB</td>
<td>intelligence preparation of the battlefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METT-TC</td>
<td>mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available—time available, and civil considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISO</td>
<td>military information support operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMESII-PT</td>
<td>political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYOP</td>
<td>Psychological Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Special Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>target audience</td>
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