

# ROLE OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY REALPOLITIK IR: A CRITIQUE OF SINO- PAKISTAN AND MALDIVES RELATIONSHIPS

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## Abstract

*Religion is today a prominent player in international affairs. Christian Zionists are passionate defenders of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and they have a powerful impact on US Congress and policy decisions. Arguing that religion solely determines international relations oversimplifies the complex reality, although reductionism can help understand certain aspects. This perspective could miss important context and reduce complex issues to simpler terms. This shows the need for a compromise. This methodology applies the reductionist and holistic approach to describe the operation of systems and the creation of new characteristics.<sup>1</sup> I am interested in the role of faith in the geopolitics of Pakistan, China and the Maldives. International Reductionism has, over its centuries of development, produced a wealth of ways of making sense of the world. They help people take complex systems and break them down into smaller and smaller pieces. This kind of thinking has greatly influenced various scientific areas. But the lack of significant contextual aspects and oversimplification, underlines the necessity for a balance between both perspectives. This approach integrates reductionist and holistic methods to provide a deeper understanding of how systems operate and how new features emerge.<sup>2</sup> I want to stress the importance of identity in the geopolitics of Pakistan, China and Maldives. There are several frameworks in International Relations to understand . Classical realism Neoclassical realism Populism driven by social media and its impact .*

**Keywords:** Religion, international relations, realism, neo-classical realism, geonomics, geo-cultural, doctrines, populism.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Alexander, "Reductionism: Understanding Its Concepts and Implications," *Clinical Neuropsychology* 7 (2024): 261.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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## Literature Review

Traditionally, the field of international relations has been dominated by a perspective based on political realism frequently called “power politics” or “Realpolitik”.<sup>3</sup> This is due of egoism or human self-interest and of anarchy, i.e., the absence of a worldwide ruling authority that drives the pursuit of power and security. Morgenthau, Waltz and Machiavelli are very important in the study of political philosophy and history. Classical realism deals with the nuances of human nature whereas structural and neo-realism deals with the structural patterns of the international domain. Neo-classical realism tried to link structural and state-level explanations. There is a weak and a powerful kind of reality.

Hans Morgenthau was one of the main proponents of scientific international relations, believing that all governments were driven by power or national interest. Rosenau's 'subjectivists' argue that the national interest is not only determined by political authorities, but also by human behavior and social processes. Critics say Morgenthau's focus on power and human nature led him to neglect compassion. Realists say that the basic interests of a country are security and well-being. Classical realists, like as Morgenthau, view this as a natural quest for power, whereas neo-realists, such as Waltz, view this as a reaction to shifts in relative power. In an anarchic system, governments will be security-oriented rather than national interest-oriented, and it will be impossible to identify and reconcile national interest. Economic globalization has reduced state sovereignty and increased dependence on non-state entities, hence increasing the dangers to national interests. Government choices are commonly made in favour of dominant groups according to Gilpin theory. The views of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (offensive and defensive realism), and of Kenneth Waltz (neo-realistic) are built upon Morgenthau and Carr. Realists interpret the current focus on power and security as a result of human egoism and the absence of a world government. From the realist perspective, the emphasis is on the dominance of the state, international security, the logical pursuit of power objectives and the consistency of state policy in a fragmented, anarchic environment. In Morgenthau's articulation of classical realism, political leaders are motivated by a mix of power and reason. Human nature determines political connections, he argued. This tactic poses problems of international ethics and law. Classical realists believe that the international order is inherently fragile, and that the pursuit of power is inherently self-interested. They go on about things like "power balance" and "self-reliance". The idea is to keep the peace by making sure no one state gets too much authority. The negative is it could stymie cooperation and lead to violence.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Donnelly, *Theories of International Relations*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Waltz's structural realism (or neo-realism) locates the restrictions on state behaviour not in human nature but in the architecture of the international system and the distribution of power. States are comparable, Waltz maintains, and the world system is chaotic because of their pursuit of self-sufficiency. He is unlike other realists. He believes bipolarity is the best organization of world relations. Neorealism suggests governments should increase their power to avoid coalitions. It differentiates between absolute and relative advantages. In international relations there are two kind of realists, defensive (e.g. Walt) who play down risks, and aggressive (e.g. Mearsheimer) who play up power. Neoclassical realists explain foreign policy choices by looking at systemic issues and country attributes. Internal politics govern power relations.

Populism and “post-truth” have also played a role in national and international politics. It argues that the post-truth paradigm exploits contested facts for political gain and prioritizes subjective feelings and views over factual information, despite the fact that truth has been debated throughout history. In a “post-truth” culture, the reality of facts does not matter to what the public perceives, indicating that truth has been abandoned. For example, judgments made by previous U.S. President George W. Bush were assaulted. “Truthiness” is a word created by Stephen Colbert in 2005, meaning believing something because it feels true, not because it is real. In political science, populism is the emotive aspect of democracy founded on a common identity. Populism offers charismatic leaders the means to confront the elites and to speak to ‘the people’. Identity movements are often infused with populism, when populist leaders are seen as the real defenders of popular aspirations, sometimes attacking establishment politicians. The study is on South Asian geopolitics and contends that the processes of globalization have amplified the requirements of the region and that government initiatives should be adapted to altered geopolitical power equations. Governments need to be more flexible and more collaborative, they need to have a multi-centred approach not a Eurocentric approach. This is a very important example, the war of 1947 between India and Pakistan. Populism Politicians are typically distrustful of populism because it uses the anger of the people to advance radical ideals and split society. It is a refusal of diversity, of globalization. It's a call to the nation to unite in expressing dissatisfaction with the present administration and the need for change.<sup>4</sup>

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) provides a range of theoretical approaches that concentrate on bureaucratic procedures and examine engagements at several

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<sup>4</sup> S. B. Thapa, “Populism and Foreign Policy: Transforming Diplomatic Relations in South Asia” (2025), SSRN & L. McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

levels, rather than the idealized notion of diplomacy.<sup>5</sup> This paper explores global context and players responses to environment. It is the right to make their own foreign policy that makes independent countries seem as separate, sovereign entities on the world arena. It's about human actions and reactions, omissions, a country's standing in the world, its national objectives, and intellectual discussions about balancing short-term actions with greater ambitions. FPA covers public policy and the connections between international and domestic politics. It emphasizes the importance of improving our understanding of the international system. That line is growing more and more indistinct as time goes on. The problems are global environmental difficulties and domestic terrorism . Other scholars talk about stability, economic rewards and power, with Stephen Kresner claiming that the main goal of foreign policy is to defend national sovereignty. There is no one agreed upon theory of Foreign Policy Analysis as leaders have different aims and national interests are continually changing. So, the specialists analyze public remarks and official papers to try and figure out what various players are trying to do — what they have said they want to do, and what they have done. A clearly defined objective has purpose, direction, desired outcome and time-frame. But foreign policy aims are sometimes implicit and not actively pursued. A foreign policy doctrine is a system of concepts, rules and beliefs that guide professionals in understanding a nation's objectives and actions. Elsewhere it states what to do, what to reach for. Doctrines are misleading, for they are about what men say not about what men do. They are also change resistant, and hence more valuable for historical study.

Religion should be introduced as an external variable in the theory of international relations and that various protections should be taken in the process of operationalization. Considering the multidimensionality of religion, the researchers should customize the definition and application of religion to the specific objectives of their study and not use the established categories . The research says that the current IR frameworks should be an addition to this integration. Classical realism is the best approach for studying sub-state religion. Structural realism has its difficulties. Neorealism helps us understand interactions both within and across systems. Neoliberalism is the greatest way to evaluate religious groupings and transnational phenomena, especially phenomena that deal with legitimacy and transnational identity. The essay argues that IR theories should closely examine the role of religion in order to enhance the theoretical models. The essay illustrates how international religious institutions affect global politics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. F. Morin and J. Paquin, "What Is Foreign Policy Analysis?" in *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 1–15

<sup>6</sup> N. A. Sandal and P. James, "Religion and International Relations Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 1 (2011): 3–25.

Geopolitics is the fight between governments for territory and resources (for example the “Scramble for Africa” or the “War on Terrorism”) (Flint, 2021).<sup>7</sup> Feminists condemn it as masculine and western and promote “situated knowledge” that recognizes context-specific information. Geopolitics is the struggle of individuals and groups for control over territory. Critical geopolitics is a way of evaluating existing power structures and in doing so it challenges orthodoxy. The beginning of Geopolitics was toward the end of the 19th century. Mackinder’s Heartland and other ideas contributed to Cold War strategy and the formation of NATO. The Jammu & Kashmir dispute is a classic multi actor geopolitics. India considers it an internal issue. Pakistan considers it a fight for self-determination and terrorist organizations consider it a reaction to perceived grievances.

### Discussion

That is the cornerstone of the analysis I am talking about. The above variables influence the interactions between Pakistan, China and Maldives in the context of their historical and geopolitical situations. Pakistan recognized China in 1950 and established diplomatic ties with it in 1951. The cooperation of these two countries is represented in two major initiatives namely, Free Trade Agreement in 2007 and the opening of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015. Initially, the two countries began working together on governance and defense issues. In the 21st century there was much more cooperation on economic matters. The argument of “complex interdependence” is that the more economically and diplomatically linked a country is, the less it can afford to use military force.<sup>8</sup>

Regional cooperation for governance promoted diplomatic relations in the period 1950-1969. In 1963, China cast its veto in the UN in support of Pakistan in the 1971 war. In the 1970s-1990s China refused to support it in the UN and aided Pakistan during the 1971 war. Economy and Geopolitical Alignment China-Pakistan Economic Corridor 21st Century (2000-2018) Relations between China and Pakistan grew stronger in the 21st century with economic cooperation and geopolitical alignment. The trade agreement, completed in 1963, considerably improved the economy of the countries who participated. These partnerships were solidified by two things. These were the Karakoram Highway and China's economic support in the 1960s and 1970s. Trade flourished under the Early Harvest Program and later free trade agreements. “Pakistan is not a free trade nation yet.” The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project that would benefit Pakistan’s energy and infrastructure industries and provide China access to new markets.

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<sup>7</sup> C. Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> I. Hussain, I. Hussain, and I. H. Qambari, “History of Pakistan–China Relations: The Complex Interdependence Theory,” *The Chinese Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (2020): 146–164.

Pakistan, China and Maldives share many similarities in terms of history, economy, strategic interests and will try to work on strengthening their diplomatic connections in 2024. Pakistan has Islamic ties with Maldives, while China is secular and neutral. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) greatly enhances Pakistan's energy and infrastructure. It is also easier for China to get into markets.

Pakistan, China and the Maldives are deepening diplomatic ties in 2024, driven by common history, economic interests and geopolitical considerations. The Pakistan-Maldives relationship is fraught with religious linkages, the regional rivalry with India and China's attempts to limit Indian influence. Better linkages creating economic growth through China's infrastructure programs and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Maldives, a mostly Muslim country, has preserved a secular attitude with China over fears of Islamic militancy. Meanwhile, China and Pakistan continue to have a deep and long-standing connection throughout South Asia and the wider Islamic world. In September 2024 the countries' presidents inked a formal alliance promising to work together on commerce, investment, tourism and education. The study also looked at collaboration on climate change, which is a key concern for the Maldives. Pakistan, in February 2024, said it will help the Maldives with development initiatives. Islam, more specifically Islamic nationalism, is a key feature of the Maldives identity and foreign policy. Chinese secularism seems to be more focused on geopolitical and economic rather than theological matters.<sup>9</sup> President Muizzu said that he doesn't want to deal with other groups since he thinks independence is crucial for the Maldives. India and Sri Lanka were first reluctant, but now the United States is promoting tourism and opening an embassy to offset China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. The Maldives' foreign policy is greatly influenced by the seismic upheavals in infrastructure, economic growth and security cooperation between China and India. The geopolitical assessment suggests that the future developments will be based on: internal politics, economic strategies, China's engagement, India's attempts to establish cultural links and counterbalance China, the US's ambition to gain a strategic presence in the Indian Ocean. The 2023 elections in the Maldives were held against the backdrop of the "India Out" campaign in India over the presence of Indian troops. Muizzu wants to cut Maldives' dependence on India. Since 1970s, India has been involved in helping the Maldives in economic, security and military assistance which has a significant impact on the country's development and the 1988 coup attempt. The Yameen government was also striving to strengthen connections with China, which further fanned anti-India sentiment, frequently exacerbated by bogus social media stories on Indian

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<sup>9</sup> P. Ferrara, "Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding: A Diplomatic Perspective," in *Religion and Peacebuilding in Contemporary Global Crises*, ed. Fabio Petito and Michael Daniel Driessen (Milan: Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2023).

military strategies. Realism in international relations provides a pragmatic alternative to romanticism by focusing on critical concerns and the moral implications of world affairs. The soured relations between Maldives and India also helped the “India Out” effort to remove Indian troops, a change from earlier collaborations. Still, the two countries hold frequent military drills and have a robust defense relationship. This is an example of China-Pakistan cooperation on initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It’s a multi-billion dollar project and it’s part of China’s Belt and Road initiative. It is designed to encourage the flow of people from China to Pakistan through the Gwadar port. Pakistan is also trying to curb India’s influence in the area, working with China. China supplies large quantities of military aid to Pakistan during wars, such as the expected India-Pakistan war in 2025.

Countries such as China, Pakistan and the Maldives are not formal allies but are growing closer. That is very important for the region. In July 2025 China, Pakistan and Bangladesh attended a summit that was symptomatic of Beijing’s aim to increase its power in South Asia and to oppose India’s rise. China’s strategic footprint in the Maldives is part of a broader effort to create a network of naval bases across the Indian Ocean to extend its regional reach.

India, which views the Indian Ocean as a vital strategic arena, is following these events intently. Muizzu’s first years in office have seen bad relations and damaged diplomatic ties with angry statements against India. However, things turned for the better in mid-2024 with the election of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Muizzu’s travel to India in October 2024. It helped cement ties and gave a boost to India’s “Neighbourhood First” program. India and the Maldives have worked together on several projects, including road building and digital technology. It has also been watching international trends that may affect its economy and security.

We need to know the complete picture of how people connect worldwide. International interaction is a struggle of self-interested states and is dubious about the possibility of resolving crises and the nature of conflict. Experts are calling for a shift from the confrontational mindset, to a more nuanced and multi-dimensional inquiry. Theoretical frameworks are important for understanding phenomena and generating new hypotheses. They discuss notions such as realism, liberalism and constructivism without evaluating whether they are true or not.<sup>10</sup>

There are very few elements that always reinforce the strategic relationship between Pakistan and the Maldives. These include attempts to foster

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<sup>10</sup> M. Behraves, “Realism and Neorealism: An Investigative Overview,” *e-International Relations* (2010), <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/12/19/realism-and-neorealism-an-investigative-overview/>.

cooperation between military, economic and educative sectors. One reason for this is that the Maldives is very important to the Indian Ocean. This makes it strategically important for regional players like China and Pakistan. Maldives and Pakistan are working together to support China's effort to diminish Indian influence in the region. High level visits and cooperative operations emphasize the historic linkages between the two militaries and the importance of security alliances in the face of the growing threat that terrorist organisations in Pakistan pose to the stability of the Maldives. Recent trends suggest that high level engagement is important notably in terms of debate and cooperation on international matters in groups such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Both countries can also use the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and other multilateral groupings to build ties with others in the region. The defense pacts aim to increase military cooperation via training programs and joint exercises. Trade is still somewhat slow but efforts are being made to expand business contacts by creating Joint Working Groups and by solving logistic problems, such as the creation of direct sea routes. There is a need of collaboration in the sector of education with Pakistan providing scholarships to the students of Maldives and humanitarian help in the time of disasters.<sup>11</sup>

Recently India, China, Pakistan and Maldives have joined hands to prevent China from acquiring further dominance in the region. They did it for economic and political reasons. This hints at complex and at times hostile relations of these countries with India. China is also seeking to mend relations with Pakistan and the Maldives to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean. When President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in 2018, he rapidly changed the country's foreign policy from closeness to India to distancing from India. March 2024: Military signs contract to support military, expanding military and business ties to China. This has a huge impact on the region. In July 2025, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh formed an alliance. China wanted to expand its influence in South Asia and contain India's expansion. The Chinese strategic footprint in the Maldives is part of a wider plan to construct a network of maritime outposts throughout the Indian Ocean to increase its influence in the area.

New Delhi closely watches these developments as India's rising interest in the Indian Ocean as a key strategic region. Muizzu's relations with India soured during his first tenure when he made critical remarks against the country. But relations improved once Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in mid-2024 and Muizzu visited India in October 2024. It also strengthened ties between the two countries and furthered India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.

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<sup>11</sup> "Why Bangladesh's Mohammad Yunus Wants SAARC Back but India Isn't Keen," *Firstpost*, September 24, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/why-bangladeshs-mohammad-yunus-wants-saarc-back-but-india-isnt-keen-13936555.html>

India and the Maldives have worked closely on topics ranging from road building to digital technologies. It has been monitoring foreign events that could pose a danger to its economy and safety.

We need to think more broadly about how individuals engage globally. Global interaction is a competition between self-interested states and is concerned with how conflict will be resolved and what the fundamental characteristic of war is. "Good research," experts claim, "should move from a one-size-fits-all, adversarial approach to a more nuanced and multi-dimensional view." Theoretical frameworks do not evaluate the validity of ideas such as realism, liberalism and constructivism. Studying them helps to understand occurrences and inspires diversity of hypotheses.<sup>12</sup>

There are a lot of aspects that are consistently strengthening the strategic link between Pakistan and Maldives. Projects include further cooperation among the military, economy and schools. This is principally because of the importance of Maldives in the Indian Ocean. That makes countries like China and Pakistan in the region more relevant. Maldives, Pakistan cooperate to help China curtail India's influence in area. The historical links between the military forces, as demonstrated by high-level visits and joint actions, emphasize the necessity of security partnerships in the face of increased worries about extremist groups in Pakistan that threaten the stability of the Maldives. Recent events have shown the importance of high level engagement notably on discussion and working together on world concerns in platforms such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and other multi-lateral bodies have called for both governments to strengthen partnerships with others in the region. Formal defence agreements are intended to promote military collaboration, such as training programmes and joint exercises. Trade remains restricted but is being expanded by means of Joint Working Groups and by tackling logistical challenges such as the need for direct shipping routes. Pakistan has also provided scholarships and humanitarian support to Maldivian students during times of crisis, highlighting the need of cooperation in the field of education.<sup>13</sup>

Recently, India, China, Pakistan and Maldives have joined hands to fight the growing influence of China in the area. They are doing it for political and economic reasons. It is a symbol of the complicated and often turbulent

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<sup>12</sup> M. Behraves, "Realism and Neorealism: An Investigative Overview," *e-International Relations* (2010), <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/12/19/realism-and-neorealism-an-investigative-overview/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Why Bangladesh's Mohammad Yunus Wants SAARC Back but India Isn't Keen," *Firstpost*, September 24, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/why-bangladeshs-mohammad-yunus-wants-saarc-back-but-india-isnt-keen-13936555.html>.

relationship that these countries have with India. Strategically, China is anxious to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean by partnering with Pakistan and the Maldives. Since President Mohamed Muizzu entered office in 2018, the country's foreign policy has rapidly swung away from tight ties with India. In March 2024, a military agreement was reached to improve military cooperation. This strengthened military and commercial relations with China. Pakistan's political and military backing provides China with tremendous leverage in the region. Supported projects in the Maldives and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are among the highlights of bilateral partnership. But when these debts balloon, these projects may force countries to cede enormous parts of their resources to China. This is often referred to as "debt-trap diplomacy." They have also stepped up their military cooperation, particularly in the Indian Ocean. In anarchic systems when governments are fighting for power they choose to ally to protect their interests. Military arrangement between the Maldives and China on facilitating Chinese access to ports in the region.<sup>14</sup> This is the idea of political realism. Realists think that threats are key weapons of security and that coalitions are usually transient. The conclusion provides new insights into monetary interests, common ideals and institutional factors that further explain global dynamics. But realism tends to see coalitions in terms of national interest. It also talks on how views about alliances have changed these days. "They are more symbols of shared values than objects for people to simply look at. That's how difficult it may be to create alliances. They can be useful for strategy but they can be detrimental as well."<sup>15</sup> The Westphalian Treaty has established secular grounds that have shifted the importance of faith in world politics from secondary to primary. The 9/11 events showed the importance of religion that is usually neglected in state-centric systems, especially in the systems of realism. A few issues have led to the loss of prominence of religion in international relations:

1. The secular underpinning of IR theory has prohibited any serious consideration of religion.
2. The state as the principal actor, the national interest and rivalry of power are Realism. It tends to disregard religion. They have also stepped up military cooperation, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sajla Abdul Razack, "Maldives beyond the Myopic Lens: Why Major Powers Seek Leverage," EIAS, (July 31, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> G. Elefteriu, "Why Alliances Matter," *Geostrategy* (2023), <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/why-alliances-matter>.

<sup>16</sup> S. Modongal, "The Resurgence of Religion in International Relations," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023).

Maldives and China established a military deal allowing China access to the ports in the region.<sup>17</sup> In political realism alliances are widespread in anarchic systems. Power relations determine how states operate, and how they align with others to achieve national interests. Realists see partnerships as important in keeping people safe and these are typically short term and hazard-focused. Finally, the conclusion suggests that complex dynamics in international relations can be better characterized by other theoretical frameworks considering material interests, common values and institutional components. Coalitions, conversely, are often seen by realism as being pushed by national interests. The world is changing the way it looks at relationships today. They are now more likely to be seen as symbols of shared ideas than as pragmatic tools. This shows the complexity of collaboration, its strategic benefits and challenges.<sup>18</sup> Religion has moved from a peripheral player in world politics to a major impact in the world.<sup>19</sup> And this is on the Treaty of Westphalia which laid the secular underpinnings. The events of 11 September 2001 have demonstrated the centrality of religion, which is often overlooked by state-centric views, especially those with a realism tinge. The role of religion on international affairs has been limited by several factors:

1. The secular nature of IR theory has precluded, or at least limited, serious consideration of religious elements.
2. State-centric realism is about national interests and power politics, often at the expense of religion. There are additional methodological problems that have made the evaluation of the interaction between religion and politics challenging. But there has been more attention given to religious influences in the changing norms and identities. Beliefs enable people to see the world and themselves in a certain way and hence to relate to others and society in a certain way. Religion causes conflict. Or people desire power. Shared ideals can unite people. Faith is why so many people believe in the purpose and power of politics. Religion plays a big role in things like terrorism and human rights. It can be a source of conflict or cooperation. In the 21st century, religion has played a more significant role in foreign conflicts, especially in Somalia and Afghanistan. Faith communities increasingly engage in peacebuilding activity that is an expression of their spiritual goals. New research shows that religion is a complicated and important factor in identity,

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<sup>17</sup> Sajla Abdul Razack, "Maldives beyond the Myopic Lens: Why Major Powers Seek Leverage," EIAS, July 31, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> G. Elefteriu, "Why Alliances Matter," *Geostrategy* (2023), <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/why-alliances-matter>.

<sup>19</sup> S. Modongal, "The Resurgence of Religion in International Relations," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023).

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conflict, diplomacy and world government. But certain attitudes to the nature of religion in international politics have evolved, but this is still the case.

## Conclusion

India-Maldives relations underwent a sea change and new difficulties sprang up between 2008-2013.<sup>20</sup> Maldives is presently developing its ties with China and Pakistan despite strong bilateral collaboration in a number of areas which is a big cause of concern. During this period, the Maldives has improved its diplomatic and trade relations with both countries. China's rising foothold in the Indian Ocean and investments in Maldivian infrastructure have only intensified India's strategic concerns. India also had worries over the Maldives' developing links with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the island nation deepened its engagement with Pakistan in trade, defence and education. This has raised concerns in India that the balance of power in the Indian Ocean may be upset. Realism is the answer to utopianism in international relations. Realism's realistic and careful approach reveals the core difficulties and moral dilemmas of world affairs.

The Maldives' recent shift from its old friend India to China and Pakistan is a hint of severe geopolitical shifts in the Indian Ocean region. Many regard this budding cooperation as a counterweight to Indian influence, as exemplified by the counterweight course of the Maldives under President Mohamed Muizzu, who takes power in late 2023. Relations between Maldives and India soured and a "India Out" campaign was begun to minimize Indian military presence and show they were breaking with past friends.

The new trilateral alignment is built upon the tight cooperation between China and Pakistan, termed as a "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership," and involves a substantial amount of military and commercial cooperation. Pakistan has become China's number one arms buyer and is largely reliant on Chinese weapons. Both countries held joint drills and created huge military-industrial cooperation. This collaboration has given rise to projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multibillion-dollar project under China's Belt and Road Initiative which seeks to enhance connectivity between China and Pakistan through the Gwadar port. Both countries also attempt to maintain a watchful watch on India's regional power. In times of crisis, such as the alleged 2025 Indo-Pakistani conflict, China gives Pakistan with substantial military aid.

It is not a formal military alliance but a collaboration of significant relevance in the regional dynamics between Maldives-China-Pakistan. The China-Pakistan-Bangladesh trilateral conference in July 2025 underscored China's

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<sup>20</sup> R. S. Gaware, "India-Maldives Relations in the Last 25 Years: A Geostrategic Analysis," *Journal of East-West Thought* 15, no. 1 (2025): 751-761.

interest in expanding its sway in South Asia and thwarting India's ascent. China's strategic outreach to the Maldives is partly its "String of Pearls" strategy to build a string of military bases throughout the Indian Ocean that will increase China's regional presence.

India, which considers the Indian Ocean as its strategic backyard, is wary of the advances. Muizzu, at the start of his tenure, was strained over harsh comments on India and diplomatic issues. But once Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came into office in mid-2024, ties began to thaw, and Muizzu's October 2024 visit helped build reconciliation and promote India's "Neighborhood First" initiative. Since then, India has been cooperating with the Maldives on infrastructure and digital technology initiatives, and has also been monitoring regional and global changes that potentially affect its security and economy.

International relations is a multifaceted approach. It is suspicious of violence and conflict resolution and sees international politics as a contest of self-interested states. Scientists need to make the leap from a singular, unfriendly perspective to a pluralist vision, say experts in realistic research. Theoretical frameworks are useful for understanding events and the range of beliefs since they incorporate notions such as realism, liberalism and constructivism as opposed to labeling them as correct or wrong.<sup>21</sup>

There exists a very strong and growing strategic partnership between Pakistan and Maldives on a number of aspects. The efforts are mainly directed at cooperation in military, economic and educational spheres, given the strategic location of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. This further underscores the relevance for regional players such as Pakistan and China. Maldives' links with Pakistan are a part of China's "String of Pearls" plan to contain India's influence in the region. It has well-established military links, with security cooperation including visits by senior military personnel and joint projects, amid fears about radicalism by Pakistan-based groups capitalising on the weaknesses of the Maldives. Recent developments include active high level engagement in the form of discussion and cooperation especially on global concerns in organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Both countries aspire to boost their regional ties through regional multilateral institutions like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Deals have been reached to step up military cooperation in the defence field such as training programmes and joint exercises. Trade is quite modest but the present focus is on strengthening economic ties through the establishment of Joint Working Groups and the overcoming of logistical problems including the establishment of direct

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<sup>21</sup> M. Behraves, "Realism and Neorealism: An Investigative Overview," *e-International Relations* (2010), <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/12/19/realism-and-neorealism-an-investigative-overview/>.

shipping lines. Educational collaborations matter. Pakistan also offers scholarships to students of Maldives and provides humanitarian assistance during calamities.

Recently, China, Pakistan, India and the Maldives have come together to form an alliance based on geopolitical concerns, economic interests and common views on China, India, Pakistan and the Maldives due to the increasing regional dominance of China. What they have in common is their complicated and frequently antagonistic relationship with India. China's 'string of pearls' desire to extend its reach in the Indian Ocean by building ties with Pakistan and the Maldives. When Mohamed Muizzu took over the administration in 2018, they altered their foreign policy from 'India First' to 'India Out'. In March 2024 a military aid pact was signed, enhancing military and commercial relations with China. China's diplomatic and military assistance of Pakistan enhances its geopolitical hegemony in the area. Another major economic aspect of this trilateral cooperation is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI includes Chinese-funded projects in the Maldives and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This, together with rising debt burdens, has caused governments to cede vital assets to China after investing in them — a tactic referred to as "debt-trap diplomacy." Military cooperation between these countries has also been growing, especially in the Indian Ocean region. There is a military pact between the Maldives and China and this is reinforced by China's access to ports in the region.<sup>22</sup>

In anarchical systems, political realism says, governments' behavior is governed by the allocation of power in pursuit of national goals. Coalitions are formed to achieve national goals. Alliances are seen by realists as essentially short term tactics to deal with challenges and they are the effective method of security. Finally, although other theories explain complexity in international relations as the outcome of the interaction between material interests, shared values and institutional features, realism's approach is predominantly based on national interests in defining coalitions. The study also briefly refers to the changing perspective of alliances in the globalized world, where they are more and more perceived as a reflection of similar ideas, not only an instrument. This illustrates the complicated nature of coalitions, which may bring both strategic benefits and possible disadvantages.<sup>23</sup>

The status of religion within international relations (IR) has shifted from the periphery, as a result of the secular basis of the discipline after the Treaty of Westphalia, to a position of global dominance. The values of the state, notably

<sup>22</sup> Sajla Abdul Razack, "Maldives beyond the Myopic Lens: Why Major Powers Seek Leverage," EIAS, July 31, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> G. Elefteriu, "Why Alliances Matter," *Geostrategy* (2023), <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/why-alliances-matter>.

realism, neglected the significance of religion, highlighted by the events of 9/11.<sup>24</sup>

There are many reasons for the low-profile of religion in international affairs.

1. Secularization of International Relations Theory The fundamental issue has been to separate religious issues from the secular foundation of the study.
2. State-Centric Realism: Realists concern themselves more with state interests and power dynamics than religion.
3. Methodological challenges: Scholars have struggled to explore the complex impact of religion on political behaviour due to methodological challenges.

But the religious components have been revived in recent years, as is evident from the changing rituals and identities. Religion shapes world views and identities and affects relations between nations and between states and individuals. Conflict and Legitimacy: Religious differences may cause friction, yet common values may cause collaboration. Religion can also serve to legitimate leaders and political goals.

Religion also has worldwide implications in areas like terrorism and human rights that generate collaboration and conflict. Back to relevance Religious issues are gaining importance in international fights, particularly in Afghanistan and Somalia, in the twenty-first century. Faith-Based Diplomacy: Religious organizations increasingly involved in peace-building in accordance with their principles It took a while to realize that religion was a factor in world affairs. Later advancements have broadened this paradigm, seeing religion as a complex and powerful role in defining identity, war, diplomacy and global government.

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<sup>24</sup> S. Modongal, "The Resurgence of Religion in International Relations," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023).

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