

# “Things Which Are Abroad”

## Latter-day Saints and Foreign Affairs

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When the Lord instructed Joseph Smith in May 1833 to “obtain a knowledge of . . . countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man” (D&C 93:53), that counsel may have seemed incongruous to the young prophet. After all, the entirety of the revelation that preceded it dealt with lofty theological concepts of light, truth, progression, and grace, in addition to exhortations to make family and home life more in keeping with God’s will. The sudden commandment to learn about countries, kingdoms, and earthly law might have struck the twenty-seven-year-old Joseph as out of place, even though it built on a previous revelation that taught him to “be instructed more perfectly in . . . things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, . . . and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (D&C 88:78–79).

In both instances, the Lord’s instruction related directly to the accomplishment of his purposes—the “salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53) and preparation for effective missionary work (D&C 88:80)—and no doubt early readers of the revelations understood the counsel in this context. However, beginning in the twentieth century, the admonition to learn of “things which are abroad” has acquired a secondary implication to several generations of Latter-day Saints, an implication of conducting secular foreign affairs in a way consistent with their understanding of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Latter-day Saints and Historical Foreign Policy Questions**

To appreciate Latter-day Saints’ past approaches to international affairs questions, it is helpful to define the ideological spectrum along which

scholars of international affairs define policy positions; the opinions of Latter-day Saints, like those of others involved in formulating, implementing, and studying foreign policy, will generally fall somewhere along this range.

At one end of the international relations spectrum is the *utopian* school of thought, which is optimistic both about humanity's ability to shape the world for good and about the possibility of peace through democratic governance. According to international affairs scholar Ray Hillam, this model emphasizes "how men ought to behave in international relations rather than how they actually do behave."<sup>1</sup> Scriptural support for such an optimistic outlook ranges from the Psalmist's declaration that humans are "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5) to Isaiah's prophecy that nations will "beat their swords into plowshares" (Isa. 2:4) to King Mosiah's assertion that "it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right" (Mosiah 29:26).<sup>2</sup>

Opposed to utopianism is the *realist* position, which is pessimistic about human nature and emphasizes interests and power as driving forces in nations' behavior over ideologies and benevolent impulses. As Hans Morgenthau, the founding father of the realist school in the twentieth century, summarized, "Nations, like men, act like beasts of prey driven by the lust for power."<sup>3</sup> In the scriptures, evidence of the realist position includes the Prophet Joseph Smith's statement that "it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (D&C 121:39).<sup>4</sup>

In practice, Latter-day Saints' positions on international affairs, like those of their contemporaries, have spanned the spectrum between the realist and utopian extremes rather than representing one or the other in their pure, theoretical form. No one hews entirely to one or the other of these schools of thought, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, like others, vary in the extent to which they apply theoretical constructs (even ones with which they are not familiar) to real-world situations.

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1. Ray Cole Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought in International Relations: Some Scriptural Perspectives," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 100.

2. See Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 100–102.

3. Hans J. Morgenthau, quoted in Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 100.

4. See Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 102–3.

### *LDS Foreign Policy Positions in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

The earliest Church efforts to engage diplomatically with the outside world involved calling on world leaders to facilitate missionary work and defend the rights of the Saints in the United States against persecution.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the first efforts by a Church leader to officially make diplomatic overtures came during Orson Hyde’s mission to dedicate the Holy Land for the return of the Jews. During Hyde’s epic 1840–1842 journey (of which he spent a mere four days in Jerusalem), he traveled through modern Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, availing himself of opportunities to stop at American consulates along the way to seek letters of recommendation and support.<sup>6</sup> In general, Church members in the first half of the nineteenth century were preoccupied with spreading the gospel, ensuring the immediate survival of God’s kingdom on the earth, and countering constant threats to its establishment; they were therefore unable to devote more than scant rhetorical efforts to matters of U.S. national policy. Further, at this early period, religious prejudice and misunderstandings meant that, even had they been inclined to do so, Church members would have been unable to devote time and resources to foreign affairs (beyond missionary work and their efforts as part of the Mormon Battalion).

However, even in the Church’s earliest days, American Church members were conscious of the foreign policy questions affecting their country and expressed opinions on them that were largely consistent with those of their non-Latter-day Saint compatriots. Joseph Smith’s 1844 presidential platform demonstrated a concern for the major foreign affairs questions of the day by advocating for joining Oregon (then disputed with Britain), Texas (independent territory in 1844), Canada, and Mexico to the United States, contingent on those territories seeking such union. The platform also called on “all the world” to unite and abandon artificial divisions, becoming “one great family” enjoying

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5. Robert S. Wood, “International Diplomacy and the Church: Wise as Serpents and Harmless as Doves,” April 8, 2013, Brigham Young University Kennedy Center, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://kennedy.byu.edu/international-diplomacy-and-the-church/>.

6. David M. Whitchurch, “The Restored Church of Jesus Christ and the Holy Land: Beginnings,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2020), 18–33; Blair G. Van Dyke and LaMar C. Berrett, “In the Footsteps of Orson Hyde: Subsequent Dedications of the Holy Land,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 57–93.

“universal peace.”<sup>7</sup> Joseph was clearly familiar with the foreign policy matters affecting his country and was keen to apply his practical understanding to solving them.

Further, as historian Walter Nugent has argued, although the early Saints were rejected by American society and eventually driven out of U.S. territory, they remained thoroughly committed to the American project and what they and their contemporaries considered its natural implications. They took for granted then-current American ideals of westward expansion and America’s “manifest destiny” to spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts of North America. “There was never a wide separation between Mormons and general American ideas of empire,” Nugent writes, and Latter-day Saints were “strongly patriotic, expansionist, pro-imperial, [and] Manifest-Destinarian, from the start,” despite their ill treatment at the hands of other Americans on the country’s westward frontier and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Following the conclusion of America’s westward expansion, from the time of the Spanish-American War (1898) onward, Church leaders preached against war consistent with the scriptural mandate to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16), but they called upon members to support U.S. war efforts once war had begun. Consistent with the attitudes of many European and American contemporaries, many Latter-day Saints came to regard the First World War as a righteous effort to end war generally. And despite initial hesitation on the part of some Church leaders to publicly take sides in the early stages of the Second World War (see below), Latter-day Saints in the United States wholeheartedly committed to U.S. efforts following the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Even in the midst of the conflict, however, the First Presidency affirmed that “the Church is and must be against war. . . . It cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these could and should be settled—the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment.”<sup>9</sup>

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7. Joseph Smith Jr., “General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States, circa 26 January–7 February 1844,” 10, 12, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/general-smiths-views-of-the-powers-and-policy-of-the-government-of-the-united-states-circa-26-january-7-february-1844/10>.

8. Walter Nugent, “The Mormons and America’s Empires,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 26–27, <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=mormonhistory>.

9. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “Message of the First Presidency to the Members of the Church,” in *One Hundred Twelfth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day*

### *J. Reuben Clark and the Dawn of LDS Involvement in U.S. Foreign Policy*

J. Reuben Clark is probably best known among Church members today for his long tenure as a member of the First Presidency, but before being called to full-time Church service, he enjoyed a distinguished career in international law and diplomacy and was the first Church member to achieve prominence as a representative of the U.S. government involved in international affairs. After studying law at Columbia University, Clark served as assistant solicitor and then was appointed solicitor in the U.S. Department of State by President William Howard Taft in 1910. Clark's efforts in that position resulted in an international settlement in favor of the United States that was one of the largest ever awarded up to that time. During World War I, he served in the United States Army Judge Advocate General's Officer Reserve Corps; his efforts prior to and following the war included assignments representing the United States government at numerous peace conferences, arbitration panels, and disarmament events. During the interwar period (1918–1939), before his call to the First Presidency, Clark was appointed undersecretary of state and U.S. ambassador to Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Clark's service in these two positions in particular provided him with key opportunities to represent his country and promote his personal vision of good governance to international audiences. During his short tenure as undersecretary (August 1928–June 1929), he was the second-highest ranking official in the State Department and was acting U.S. secretary of state in the absence of the two secretaries under whom he served, Frank B. Kellogg and Henry L. Stimson.<sup>11</sup> As U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Clark demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of varying cultural norms, despite his relatively limited experience living outside the United States for extended periods, writing that “Mexican ethical, moral, and legal standards are different from those in the United

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*Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1942), 94, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/97ba1680-e238-460f-a305-61461b9e1b04/0/95>.

10. David H. Yarn Jr., “Biographical Sketch of J. Reuben Clark, Jr.,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 237–40.

11. Lee H. Burke, “J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Under Secretary of State,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 396–98. As assistant secretary of state, Clark would have functioned as acting secretary whenever the secretary of state was on vacation, ill, or away from the office for any extended period. In such a capacity, Clark would have made decisions and provided guidance on routine State Department business that could not wait for the secretary's return.

States, but not necessarily lower, and at any rate controlling here.”<sup>12</sup> Clark advocated for the personal responsibility of Americans in Mexico, rejecting the argument he sometimes encountered from his countrymen that they were not subject to Mexican laws while south of the U.S. border. Mexican officials highly regarded Clark and feted him upon his departure more than was customary for a U.S. ambassador.<sup>13</sup>

Clark’s philosophy of international relations, cultivated over a lifetime of participation in foreign affairs, is a prime example of a Latter-day Saint developing an approach to foreign policy and then applying it to real-world developments. Although Clark’s views were heavily influenced by his historical context, and many today would disagree with his positions, he was consistent in his advocacy of certain foreign policy stances, and he remained engaged in policy debates throughout his life.

Clark was an untiring advocate of the isolationism that had largely characterized U.S. foreign policy since the days of George Washington. “I am a confirmed isolationist,” he reported, “a political isolationist, first, I am sure, by political instinct, next, from experience, observation, patriotism, and lastly, because, while isolated, [the United States] built the most powerful nation in the world. . . . I stand for the possession of, and exercise by our nation of a full, complete, and unimpaired sovereignty.”<sup>14</sup>

Clark’s isolationism extended even to U.S. entry into the Second World War, which Americans of later generations would come to consider the archetypal righteous crusade against despotism and oppression. He had no sympathy for the ambitions of Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan, but he saw the conflicts stemming from their aggression as alien to American interests and ideals, and he considered the natural position of the United States to be that of a neutral arbiter rather than party to conflicts between foreign powers. Inasmuch as the U.S. took sides, Clark posited, it could have no credibility as an impartial referee in the court of international opinion. Even after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ entry into the war, Clark lamented what he saw as his country’s reliance on military might rather than principled example. In 1943, in a statement that would no doubt resonate with many Americans in

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12. Martin B. Hickman, “The Ambassadorial Years: Some Insights,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 410.

13. Hickman, “Ambassadorial Years,” 409–14.

14. Marion G. Romney, “The Political Thought of President Clark,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 252.

the post-Vietnam and post-Iraq invasion eras, he lamented that "as the situation stands today, we of America have lost our own moral force in world affairs, a force which was once very great; we speak now only as our brute force may sustain us."<sup>15</sup> For Clark, America's position as a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14) entailed remaining above the fray and leading by example, rather than actively engaging in the battles then engulfing the rest of humanity.

Throughout his professional life, Clark was concerned with the question of how states should ideally associate with one another without entangling themselves in alliances that would invariably lead to lost sovereignty and unnecessary conflict. Despite his idealism, he adamantly opposed the post-World War I League of Nations and portions of the Treaty of Versailles because he saw them as unnecessarily harsh toward defeated Germany. In contrast, his adherence to the utopian principles of international relations described above were on full display in his efforts to oversee the U.S. implementation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, a 1928 effort to formally outlaw war as an instrument of state policy, and in his advocacy for the creation of a "World Congress" and "World Supreme Court" to resolve international disputes.<sup>16</sup>

The question of great-power relationships with other states formed the basis for Clark's most enduring contribution to American foreign policy: the so-called "Clark Memorandum" on the Monroe Doctrine (the longstanding position that the U.S. would regard European interference in the Western Hemisphere as potentially hostile to the United States). Written during Clark's tenure as undersecretary of state, the document essentially repudiated the Doctrine's Roosevelt Corollary, which previous U.S. administrations had used to justify American intervention in Latin America. Clark argued, in contrast, that the Monroe Doctrine applied only to relations between the United States and European powers, not to relations between the states of the Americas. If Washington, D.C., sought to justify interventions elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, Clark famously argued, it would have to do so on the basis of national self-defense rather than appealing to the Monroe Doctrine, unless the disputes in question involved European powers.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Edwin Brown Firmage and Christopher L. Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 285.

16. Firmage and Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," 278-79, 282, 291-92.

17. Burke, "J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Under Secretary of State," 398-400.

### *LDS Thoughts on Cold War Dynamics*

For J. Reuben Clark's successors, both in the Church and in international affairs, Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated worldwide foreign policy debates, and Latter-day Saints, like others, were concerned by the implications of the global confrontation, especially in the age of nuclear weapons. The Cold War and the nuclear standoff meant that, for the first time in human history, international rivalries were capable of destroying life on earth, with major implications for the Church's ability to do the Lord's work.

Although American Church members as a whole probably supported U.S. Cold War policy, Church leaders and thinkers were often outspoken in their criticism of foreign policy positions they considered inconsistent with the teachings of Christ. The destructive potential of modern military weaponry seems to have had a particularly profound effect on their thoughts. Remarking on nuclear weapons development efforts in 1946, J. Reuben Clark described them as "unholy experimentations," remarking, "We in America are now deliberately searching out and developing the most savage, murderous means of exterminating peoples that Satan can plant in our minds. We do it not only shamelessly, but with a boast. God will not forgive us for this."<sup>18</sup>

Thirty years later, President Spencer W. Kimball was no more sanguine—and no less forthright—about what he considered to be the inconsistency between national foreign policies and the doctrine of the Lord. He lamented, "We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God."<sup>19</sup> For Kimball, foreign policy was clearly not a sacrosanct set of ideals, but a collection of manmade positions to be judged, like all things, against the doctrine of Christ.

President Gordon B. Hinckley was equally adamant about the divide between military might and divine assistance as a means of ensuring peace. He remarked in 1983, "We live in a world of pomp and muscle, of strutting that glorifies jet thrust and far-flying warheads. It is the same kind of strutting that produced the misery of the days of Caesar,

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18. Firmage and Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," 322.

19. Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign* 6, no. 6 (June 1976): 6.



Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler.”<sup>20</sup> Notably, President Hinckley did not tie this “strutting” and glorification of armaments to one nation or bloc of nations in particular, apparently condemning equally all those who trusted in military might rather than in the God of Israel as the primary means of national salvation.

### *The Post-9/11 World*

Like responses to Cold War confrontations, Latter-day Saint responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror and Second Gulf War varied widely. Some LDS commentators argued, in conformity with a utopian approach to international affairs, that military responses to the attacks were equivalent to fighting fire with fire and that the only morally palatable option was a “non-violent, spiritually transformative approach to combating terrorism.”<sup>21</sup> On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, others argued that war was an unavoidable reality in a fallen world and that only just military action could deter aggression in a world dominated by the “carnal, sensual, and devilish.”<sup>22</sup>

In April 2003, a middle-of-the-road, common-sense approach to the national response to terrorism and aggression came from then-Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley, who during the 1980s had decried the “pomp,” “muscle,” and “strutting” of a militaristic approach to foreign affairs, now acknowledged that changing times required flexibility in national policy, especially where direct attacks were concerned: “There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, and against tyranny, threat, and oppression.”<sup>23</sup> Far from glorifying war or violence, President Hinckley simply acknowledged that extreme circumstances sometimes required nations to act in self-defense.

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20. Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Shall I Do Then with Jesus Which Is Called Christ?” *Ensign* 13, no. 12 (December 1983): 3.

21. Robert A. Rees, “America’s War on Terrorism: One Latter-day Saint’s Perspective,” *Dialogue* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 29.

22. Alma 42:10. For an example of this argument, see Robert M. Hogge, “War is Eternal: The Case for Military Preparedness,” *Dialogue* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 166.

23. Gordon B. Hinckley, “War and Peace,” *Ensign* 33, no. 5 (May 2003): 80; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Times in Which We Live,” *Ensign* 31, no. 11 (November 2001): 72–74.

## Current Latter-day Saint Involvement in the Foreign-Policy World

### *General Considerations*

The remainder of this paper will focus on the experience of contemporary Latter-day Saints involved in the world of foreign policy. It relies on the ideas of numerous professionals with decades, if not centuries, of combined experience in foreign affairs. It is important to note from the outset that, unlike President Clark, many Latter-day Saints involved in foreign affairs today are involved in implementing rather than making policy. As a political appointee, Clark was charged with formulating a U.S. approach to international affairs consistent with the views of the presidents under whom he served; in contrast, many of today's LDS foreign affairs professionals are civil servants who are (ideally) apolitical and committed to advancing any policy promulgated by the administration in power.

Several important considerations should be kept in mind in any discussion of modern LDS involvement in the practice of foreign affairs. First, and most obviously, foreign policy is the exclusive preserve of the state. Whatever the involvement of Church members in professions related to international relations, the Church as an organization has no responsibility for the formulation or implementation of the foreign policy of the United States or any other country.<sup>24</sup> Even in a hypothetical state in which all citizens were Church members, state institutions rather than ecclesiastical authority would be responsible for international affairs; until Christ's return, the kingdom of God on earth will be an institution that exercises moral, rather than political, suasion among its members, and the conduct of interstate relations will remain the duty of presidents and prime ministers rather than prophets and seers.

Second, Church members involved in foreign policy must reconcile their dual identities as Latter-day Saints and as representatives of the governments they serve.<sup>25</sup> These identities can complement one another but also present unique challenges. For example, as previously noted, Latter-day Saints are under scriptural injunction to "renounce war and proclaim peace" (D&C 98:16), and there can be no doubt about the superiority of peace over war from a scriptural perspective.<sup>26</sup> And yet

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24. Wood, "International Diplomacy and the Church."

25. See discussion below under the heading "Latter-day Saints and the Practice of Foreign Policy."

26. See Ray C. Hillam and David M. Andrews, "Mormons and Foreign Policy," *BYU Studies* 25, no. 1 (1985): 57-58.

all Latter-day Saints in the modern world live under the jurisdiction of a state, constraining their ability to insist on peace when those who are legitimately granted political power over them opt for military action.<sup>27</sup> Because Church members believe in “being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates” (A of F 1:12), they are duty bound to either support the state in its policies or, where possible and on an individual rather than a corporate basis, obtain a legal status (such as that of conscientious objector) that would preclude them from doing so.

### *Size of LDS Contingent among Foreign-Policy Professionals Generally*

In the early twenty-first century, many Latter-day Saints participate in the practice of foreign affairs. LDS diplomats frequently encounter fellow Church members even in far-flung postings. That being said, involvement in foreign policy among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is almost exclusive to the U.S. context. To be sure, there are small numbers of LDS diplomats from other countries throughout the world, but their experiences differ greatly from those of their American counterparts. Foreign policy workers from other countries are frequently the sole Church member from their home country in their profession, making their experience a much lonelier one, at least as far as their religious lives are concerned, whereas American Latter-day Saints serving in the foreign policy sector are likely to cross paths frequently with fellow American Church members.

If the participation of relatively high numbers of Latter-day Saints is a largely American phenomenon, it is also a recent one. LDS officers in the U.S. foreign service were very rare in the 1950s and were still limited to probably less than twenty total in the 1980s, despite much larger numbers of Church members in the U.S. military. As recently as the early 1990s, the number of Latter-day Saints serving in the U.S. State Department remained small. Beginning around 2005, larger numbers of Church members began embarking on careers in the U.S. foreign service, and their presence has remained steady ever since.

Today, in the U.S. State Department alone, Latter-day Saints serve in positions ranging from undergraduate summer interns to ambassadors confirmed by the U.S. Senate. At one point in the recent past, there were simultaneously three Latter-day Saints serving as chief of mission (the highest-ranking official in an embassy) in three of the most challenging

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27. Hillam and Andrews, “Mormons and Foreign Policy,” 58.

diplomatic posts for Americans. No one (including the United States government) knows precisely how many Church members serve in the foreign policy world, given that U.S. government employees are not asked about their religious affiliation, but one general indicator is the eight hundred or so members of the closed “LDS Foreign Service Families” group on Facebook.

Latter-day Saints are well represented in the U.S. foreign-policy apparatuses, then, but their numbers are not overwhelming. Among foreign-policy practitioners, the perception of large numbers of LDS colleagues probably arises primarily from the fact that few other groups in American society define themselves primarily by their religious affiliation. (The discovery that a diplomat is a Church member almost invariably leads to the question, “Do you know such-and-such? She’s a Latter-day Saint too.” This almost certainly does not happen among Presbyterians or Methodists or Episcopalians.)

If Latter-day Saints are slightly overrepresented, though, in proportion to their overall share of the U.S. population, it is almost certainly a result of the practice of sending their young people throughout the world as missionaries. The Church is one of the few sectors of American society that consistently dispatches large numbers of young people abroad, and although missionaries’ purposes are religious and spiritual in nature, they frequently gain valuable secondary experience with peoples, languages, and cultures. If other groups of Americans sent their eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds abroad in similar numbers, Latter-day Saints would almost certainly be less prominent as a subculture within the world of foreign affairs.

The number of Church members involved in foreign affairs in the United States is potentially a two-edged sword, however. Latter-day Saints find camaraderie and companionship in the presence of fellow Church members in their chosen profession, and they also provide exposure for the Church in the various parts of the world in which they serve. However, if they are unnecessarily vocal about the allegedly large LDS contingent in the U.S. foreign affairs apparatus, they can also give the mistaken impression that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an international organization with more members outside the United States than in it, is an American church or even an extension of the U.S. government. Such a perception could obviously do great damage to the Church’s evangelizing mission, especially were foreign governments to come to view LDS missionaries as representatives of

U.S. national power rather than of the Church. Thankfully, such a situation does not seem to prevail at present, but the possibility is worth bearing in mind.

### *Latter-day Saints and the Practice of Foreign Policy*

Whatever their numbers, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints whose professional endeavors involve representing their respective countries note that their faith presents important benefits and challenges in their day-to-day efforts. LDS foreign affairs professionals consistently acknowledge the importance of having a community of Saints to join upon arrival at a new foreign posting. This is the case for Latter-day Saints worldwide, but foreign affairs professionals are perhaps more keenly attuned to this benefit because of the frequency with which they relocate (typically every two to three years) and the dramatic nature of their moves (oftentimes to new countries and cultures with a new language). Colleagues of other faiths or of no faith sometimes comment on the advantage that Church members have in arriving in a wholly foreign environment and instantly finding a group of loving fellow Saints.

In addition, the group of local disciples with whom Latter-day Saint diplomats interact often provides the most legitimate window into a country that they or their colleagues receive. On a professional level, foreign affairs practitioners interact almost exclusively with a country’s elites. These scions of a society’s political, economic, media, and business sectors provide valuable insights into the functioning of their country, but they are often not representative of the “ordinary” people who make up the majority of any given population. These “ordinary” people are often just the individuals with whom Latter-day Saint diplomats interact in their wards and branches. Their meetings with government elites during the week allow for increased understanding of certain societal issues, but their gatherings on Sunday with fellow Church members allow them to see how a country’s “real” population lives, works, and thinks. Sometimes, Latter-day Saints are the only foreign affairs professionals in an embassy who have friends from the regular fabric of the societies in which they serve.

Like Church members involved in any professional endeavor, LDS diplomats also face a variety of challenges related to the intersection of their religion and their work. Issues related to the Word of Wisdom come to mind quickly, given the frequency with which evening professional

gatherings (“representational” events) involve alcohol; senior diplomats are expected to serve alcohol at functions for which they host foreign dignitaries. Frequent involvement in events at which alcohol plays a prominent role, however, also provides faithful Latter-day Saints with opportunities to quickly establish their religious identity among both colleagues and foreign interlocutors, and both groups are generally accepting of Church members’ choices.

Other challenges are equally practical in nature. Frequent attendance at representational events can take a heavy toll on family life, particularly when there are small children in the picture, and families must decide how to balance professional and personal demands. Family religious observance can also be made more difficult when families with youth are posted to areas without strong youth programs; such young people benefit from friendships with young men and women from other faiths but miss out on opportunities to develop strong relationships with peers who share their unique religious values. This is not, of course, a problem unique to the children of LDS diplomats, but it can be a vexing issue for such families. Awkwardness can also result from the often-stark socio-economic differences between expatriate Western diplomats and the local Church members with whom they worship, requiring careful judgment but also providing critical opportunities to serve.

On a more philosophical level, Latter-day Saints involved in the conduct of foreign affairs are at some point in their careers likely to be asked to implement policies with which they personally disagree. Diplomats are civil servants, after all, and they spend the majority of their careers implementing policies that have been developed by national processes in which they have no part. (And the level of commitment involved in climbing the corporate ladder high enough to participate in the formulation, rather than just the implementation, of policy often involves such extensive and consistent sacrifices of family time that it becomes unattractive as a career path for many.) Church members in the foreign affairs world, like those involved in other professional pursuits, must ultimately decide for themselves how they will react to the requirement to promote externally imposed mandates that they personally find distasteful at best or morally untenable at worst. Those who find that they cannot in good conscience advance such positions must be prepared to travel a lonely road, recognizing that their organizations, their colleagues, and their fellow Church members are unlikely to have the same redlines or support them in their dissents and that, in extreme scenarios, they may even be required to seek alternative employment.

### *Gospel Principles and the Practice of Foreign Affairs*

Despite the practical or moral conundrums that LDS diplomats sometimes encounter, the vast majority find that their faith provides key perspectives as they fulfill their professional duties, and that gospel principles affect their work in important ways. These principles do not, of course, directly determine LDS foreign policy practitioners’ approaches to policy positions, which are determined by national processes rather than personal preferences, but they do determine how individuals fulfill their responsibilities in their day-to-day activities. The same is true, of course, for Latter-day Saints involved in any other profession.

The doctrine that all men and women are spiritual children of God—and therefore brothers and sisters despite national, cultural, and linguistic divides—is key to Latter-day Saint understandings of foreign affairs. Because work in and with foreign countries brings differences to the fore, it can easily tempt those involved in foreign policy to be dismissive of people with different outlooks and backgrounds. The teaching that all are children of God, which aligns with the Judeo-Christian Western insistence on the value of the individual, ideally serves as an added inducement to Church members to treat all with respect, to appreciate cultural differences rather than disparaging them, and to avoid “us versus them” mentalities that are dangerous in all walks of life and especially in international relations.

An understanding that all are children of God can also create tensions for LDS foreign affairs professionals. At times, foreign affairs work requires diplomats and others to “play hardball,” encouraging others to change their positions to align with the stances of the country they represent; such a requirement can be complicated by the knowledge that an adversary is a spiritual sibling and can become even more challenging in the case of national security issues where lives are potentially at stake. Acknowledgement of the spiritual ties binding all people can also cause heartache when national policy conflicts with the religious imperative to love and serve everyone; the 2021 hasty U.S. departure from Afghanistan and the abandoning of Afghans who had served the United States in that country for years provides one poignant example.

On a broader level, Latter-day Saint foreign affairs professionals may question whether a dichotomy exists between the nation-state system that shapes the world’s political framework and the gospel requirement that all be considered children of God and potential brothers and sisters in Christ. As public servants, foreign affairs professionals necessarily privilege the interests and citizens of their respective countries above those of all others.

Latter-day Saints accept that “governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man” (D&C 134:1), but they may still question, on a theoretical level, whether a system of national interests and priorities is ultimately compatible with God’s plan for his children.

Setting aside such esoteric questions regarding the justification of the modern concept of the state, however, Latter-day Saints continue to serve in large numbers in foreign affairs professions, and the ethic of service for which Church members are widely known tends to characterize their efforts. Many LDS foreign affairs professionals originally entered the field because of a desire to be of service and to be able to respond affirmatively to the query, “Have I done any good in the world today?”<sup>28</sup> Practicing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are, of course, accustomed to serving wherever and whenever asked, regardless of the assigned field of labor, because their Church responsibilities come as “callings” issued by ecclesiastical superiors and not as a result of personal preferences. In fact, one senior U.S. State Department official, not a member of the Church, jokingly remarked that she could convince her LDS subordinates to accept challenging assignments by telling them she was “extending them a calling.”<sup>29</sup>

The LDS ethic of service does not go unnoticed at the highest levels of foreign policy. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted that the U.S. foreign service “requires the highest regard for the United States and what it can be. It requires the highest commitment. . . . It requires a kind of selflessness that I associate with BYU and the community that BYU represents, the Latter-day Saints.” Rice further remarked that Church members were characterized by a “sense of how you go out into the world to serve—that what you learn and your intellectual pursuits are not just to be hoarded internally but are really to go out into the world. That’s how I would characterize people I’ve known from BYU.”<sup>30</sup> Rice’s high regard for the Church’s members and its flagship university are clearly founded in her perception that they, in the words of the BYU motto, “go forth to serve.”

Service, whether in a professional foreign affairs setting or in a Church context, necessarily implies Christian humility, an attribute that

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28 Will L. Thompson, “Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 223.

29. Author’s personal correspondence with an LDS foreign affairs professional.

30. Brittany Karford Rogers, “A Diplomatic Life,” *BYU Magazine*, Winter 2012, <https://magazine.byu.edu/article/a-diplomatic-life/>.



can provide an important anchor for Latter-day Saints in their relationships with others, whether with colleagues in their countries’ embassies or foreign interlocutors across the negotiating table. The gospel mandate to approach human interactions in a spirit of humility can be particularly important for those serving abroad in high-profile positions; the temptation to adopt an inflated sense of self-importance can be great when foreign affairs professionals (largely middle-class civil servants who would not be recognized walking down the main streets of their home towns) are constantly in the spotlight or the glare of the TV cameras. In such instances, gospel warnings about the perils of pride can serve as important sources of balance. In the same vein, cross-cultural communication is inevitably enhanced when those conducting it demonstrate humility rather than arrogance. The effective diplomat will constantly keep in mind the principle suggested by J. Reuben Clark: “In human affairs no nation can say that all it practices and believes is right, and that all others have done that differs from what it has is wrong. Men inflict an unholy tragedy when they proceed on that basis. No man, no society, no nation is wholly right in human affairs, and none is wholly wrong.”<sup>31</sup>

A gospel-centered belief in the inherent value of human freedom and the righteousness of democratic governance also influences the activity of LDS foreign affairs practitioners. American Latter-day Saints involved in the foreign policy world may see particular value in defending and advancing policies inspired by the U.S. Constitution, of which the Lord described himself as the creator in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith. God’s declaration that he “established the Constitution of” the United States “by the hands of wise men whom [he] raised up unto this very purpose” provides divine sanction for the principles of government contained in that document (D&C 101:80). In April 2021, First Presidency member and legal scholar Dallin H. Oaks distilled these principles into the following key considerations: the people are the source of government power; the power they delegate is best exercised in a federal system; the separation of powers among government entities allows for critical checks and balances; individual rights limit government authority; and government is by law and not the whim of individuals.<sup>32</sup> Given

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31. James B. Allen, “J. Reuben Clark, Jr., on American Sovereignty and International Organization,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (1973): 356.

32. Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 106–7, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2021/04/51oaks?lang=eng>.

the Lord's statement that "that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs *to all mankind*" (D&C 98:5, emphasis added), Latter-day Saints may see value in promoting these principles of democratic governance and human freedom throughout the world. And because similar principles are now enshrined in the written or traditional constitutions of nearly all the world's liberal democracies, LDS diplomats worldwide can be equally confident that their efforts to promote freedom and good governance align with scriptural admonitions in this regard.

A gospel outlook also provides Latter-day Saints involved in foreign affairs with an important understanding, sometimes difficult for their secular colleagues to fully appreciate, of the importance to billions of people worldwide of religion and faith. Latter-day Saints share such an appreciation, of course, with their colleagues who are believers of any stripe. As the West grows increasingly secular and consciously rejects the Judeo-Christian heritage that provides its cultural underpinnings, a legitimate appreciation for the role religion continues to play among the world's population, especially in the Islamic world, Latin America, and Africa, can be critical. Alongside other Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other believers, Latter-day Saints are better positioned to see how genuinely held faith contributes to the lived experience, including the foreign policy choices, of others. In this sense, Latter-day Saints and other religious adherents can help temper dismissive attitudes toward religion—especially minority Western religions—held by some of their colleagues and contribute to broader understanding of the importance of such issues as the right of conscience and religious freedom.

This appreciation for the realities of religion can be particularly important in the Muslim world, which stretches from Morocco in the west to Indonesia (the world's most populous Muslim country) in the east. The secular, highly educated Westerners who generally populate Western foreign services often consider religion a quaint, outmoded relic of an unenlightened past, so it can be challenging for them to appreciate how religion continues to inform every aspect of life for the adherents of Islam. Although Latter-day Saints do not view religion as appropriately influencing politics to the same extent as Muslims often do, Latter-day Saint participation in a belief system that makes heavy demands on their time and their worldview makes it possible for them to engage their Muslim brethren as helpful interlocutors rather than *de facto* critics.

Finally, Church members involved in foreign policy ideally benefit from appreciating the need for a charitable approach to differences of

opinion. They recognize that, just as citizens of the same country can disagree on policy matters while maintaining a patriotic dedication to their homeland, Latter-day Saints can hold different opinions on foreign policy without sacrificing their Christlike love for each other and for policy opponents outside the faith. President David O. McKay, for example, considered the Korean War justified as a means of containing communism, while his counselor, J. Reuben Clark, considered the conflict unconstitutional.<sup>33</sup> Despite these strongly held differences of opinion on a foreign policy question, though, Presidents McKay and Clark had no trouble working harmoniously in doing the work of the Lord.

At the same time, Latter-day Saint foreign affairs practitioners recognize that their personal preferences, including their agreements or disagreements with national policy, are not the positions of the Church, however doctrinally justifiable they may consider them. Although J. Reuben Clark believed his isolationist views were justified by Church teachings, he consistently took personal responsibility for his opinions and did not conflate his positions with Church doctrine.<sup>34</sup> Church members' and leaders' varying reactions to every major U.S. foreign policy issue in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries provide ample evidence of the need for charity in matters of international policy, as in all other aspects of life.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Even if they have not participated directly in diplomacy, Latter-day Saints have opined on foreign affairs since the dawn of the Restoration. They have recognized the implications of international developments, both for their own sake and for their potential impact on the work of the Lord. In the early twentieth century, very small numbers of Church members began participating directly in the foreign policy apparatus of the United States; J. Reuben Clark, with his distinguished career in international affairs prior to his call to the First Presidency, was the outstanding example of this early involvement by Latter-day Saints. Toward the end of the twentieth century and in the first decades of the twenty-first, LDS involvement in foreign policy expanded dramatically. That being said, a definitive history of Latter-day Saint involvement in diplomacy and foreign affairs has not yet been written, and there is much work that

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33. Hillam and Andrews, “Mormons and Foreign Policy,” 63.

34. Allen, “Clark on American Sovereignty,” 348.

remains to be done. Future scholarly efforts could examine the careers of specific LDS pioneers in the foreign affairs realm as well as how extensive LDS participation in domestic politics, particularly in the United States, has influenced foreign policy questions.

Further, it bears keeping in mind that there can be no “Latter-day Saint” foreign policy as such, even if LDS diplomats are influenced in their personal views by gospel principles. Foreign policy will remain the prerogative of the state, not of the Church, and until Christ’s millennial reign, the two will remain separate (although fruitful collaboration between the two power centers can and should continue). The nature of the interplay between Church members and national foreign policies, though, will remain another area on which future studies could profitably focus.

Finally, future widespread participation by *non-American* Latter-day Saints in their respective countries’ diplomatic corps will be key to understanding how the LDS experience influences the foreign policy world. Because the vast majority of Church members involved with foreign policy represent the United States, their experience provides a relatively limited window into the intersection of discipleship and diplomacy. It is to be hoped that, as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes increasingly international and as countries around the world see the emergence of multigenerational Latter-day Saint families, Church members across the globe will embrace the opportunity to advance their countries’ interests abroad. Such a possibility will provide endless material for future studies in this area.

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