

Vatican Diplomacy in an Age of Estrangement, Power Politics, and War



APRIL 13, 2026

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2026

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
234 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-1901
csce@mail.house.gov
<http://www.csce.gov>
@HelsinkiComm

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE].

The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 57 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is an independent U.S. Government commission created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held from 2:01 p.m. to 3:05 p.m., Room 1334 Longworth House Office Building, Alexander John Paul Lutz, Policy Fellow, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Mr. LUTZ: Alright. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you all for coming. My name is Alexander John Paul Lutz. I am a policy fellow at the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Thank you for coming to this briefing on Vatican Diplomacy in an Age of Estrangement, Power Politics, and War. I would like to give some brief introductory remarks, after which I will hand things over to our panelists.

In January of this year, Pope Leo XIV delivered his first address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, a speech traditionally understood as the Vatican's "state of the world." He told the assembled Ambassadors that "we are living at a time of profound readjustment of geopolitical balances and cultural paradigms." That "a diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force." That "war is back in vogue." Perhaps, most troublingly, that "peace is no longer sought as a gift and a desirable good in itself," and is instead sought "through weapons as a condition for asserting one's own dominion."

One does not have to look far to confirm Leo's observations. Russia continues its war of aggression in Ukraine. The United States, Israel, and Iran are engulfed in a conflict in the Middle East. Just last night, the president of the United States posted a lengthy public attack on the pope, calling him "terrible for foreign policy" and claiming that the Catholic Church has elected Leo, an American, to the papacy as a way of managing the Trump presidency. "If I were not in the White House," the president wrote, "Leo would not be in the Vatican." The president continued, "I do not want a pope who criticizes the president of the United States," calling on Leo to "focus on being a great Pope, not a politician."

To all of this, the force, the bellicosity, the transactionalism, the insistence that every actor on the world stage must really be angling for or toward something political, Pope Leo responded with a different vision. Drawing on Augustine, whose thought has shaped his life and pontificate, he told the assembled Ambassadors that the protection of the prin-

ciple of the inviolability of human dignity and the sanctity of life always counts for more than any mere national interest. These are the grounds on which the Holy See conducts its diplomacy. The Church teaches that human dignity is intrinsic to the person, rooted in the creation of every human being in the image of God. Because this dignity is given, not earned, it cannot be forfeited.

The practical consequence of this is that the Holy See cannot close the door on anyone. It will engage all parties, including those the rest of the international community has sought to isolate. It will never fully endorse any state's political platform and will subject every policy it encounters, including those of the United States, to an intellectual and moral rigor that is likely to improve it. It insists on speaking the truth for the record, even when doing so may lead to "misunderstanding and scorn." In Leo's own words, "the church does not belong to any political party. Rather, it helps form your conscience." Of its leadership, including himself, Leo said, "We are not politicians. We do not look at foreign policy from the same perspective that others may have."

Importantly, the church does not position itself above or apart from the world it addresses. The Second Vatican Council's "Gaudium et spes" opens with the declaration that the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are also the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ, the church. Indeed, the council fathers wrote, "nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts, for theirs is a community composed of men." The church's moral authority does not rest on distance from the human condition, but on the claim that it shares that condition fully. That it is, in the council's language, "truly linked with mankind in its history by the deepest of bonds."

Indeed, that identification with and care for the human condition is not abstract. Through some 5,000 hospitals, 10,000 orphanages, 200,000 schools, and a vast network of parishes, nunciatures, and charitable organizations, the church is present in nearly every country on the planet, including some places where few other states or institutions can or will go. Our own Department of State has acknowledged this, noting in a recent report that the church's global influence enables it to reach people in places where the U.S. Government has little or no access. In fragile states, it often represents the strongest and most organized part of civil society.

Whether this "soft power," a willingness to stand up and say that there is a better way, and the church's boundless hope, its belief in "a kingdom in which there is no sword, only dignity, understanding, and forgiveness," is enough to temper the extremes of the moment remains to be seen. What is clear is that no other State on Earth is even attempting to do what the Holy See is trying to do, to address the world as it is while insisting that it answers to something higher than power. Our three panelists will help us better understand this entity and its diplomacy.

With that, I would like to briefly introduce them. Their full bios can be found in the handout that you received as you entered.

On my left is Victor Gaetan, a senior international correspondent at the National Catholic Register, and the author of *God's Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican diplomacy, and America's Armageddon*. He also writes for *Foreign Affairs*, the *American Spectator*, and the *Washington Examiner*. He has written from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, experiences that provided a wealth of contacts with the notoriously tight-lipped papal diplomatic corps.

Peter G. Martin, in the middle, is the special assistant to the President of Boston College. Prior to his current role, Mr. Martin was a U.S. diplomat for over two decades, including for seven years at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, the longest-serving U.S. diplomat accredited to the Holy See since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1984. He was posted at the Vatican during the historic transition from Pope John Paul II to Pope Benedict XVI, as well as during the early years of the pontificate of Pope Francis.

Jackie Aldrette, on the far end, is the executive director of AVSI-USA and deputy secretary general for U.S. Government relations of AVSI Foundation Worldwide. Her career with AVSI began in 2004 as a special adviser to AVSI's first large product funded by USAID. She works to help local, community-based partners around the world to grow and strengthen their own capacity to respond to needs directly where they are, with a strong base of funders and partners.

I have asked each panelist to keep their opening remarks to about five minutes, after which we will open for questions and discussion, in which you, the public, will have the opportunity to come up to our podium here and to inquire with our panel. With that, I will turn it over to Victor.

Thank you.

Mr. GAETAN: Good afternoon and thank you very much for putting together—thank you—good afternoon and thank you so much for putting together this panel, this event, especially in this conjunction of U.S. versus Vatican dialogue. For all its 2,000-year history, the Catholic Church has dealt with power, politics, and war. Its positions today are the fruit of wisdom and long experience. First, two clarifications. Holy See refers to the government of the Catholic Church, while Vatican City is the territory occupied by the Holy See. It is the Holy See that is the unique sovereign entity seated at the United Nations, and a dozen other international organizations, such as the Organization of the American States and the International Atomic Energy. Diplomats from around the world are accredited to the Holy See, not to the Vatican City microstate.

Also, it is important to observe that the pope is simultaneously a head of state and the leader of a world religion. For example, Leo XIV landed today, a few hours ago, in Algeria, where he was received by his counterpart chief of state, the president of Algeria, and the Algerian government. Tomorrow, Pope Francis [sic; Leo] will fly to Annaba, where he will address the poor, the nuns who are helping the poor and the needy in that area and will also have a mass at the ancient basilica there. There, he will be carrying his hat as the leader of the Catholic universal church.

Back to diplomacy. The Holy See maintains the world's oldest diplomatic school, where all of its professional diplomats, all Catholic priests, are educated at what is called the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, which was founded in 1701. The Vatican has bilateral relations with 184 nations and operates 124 nunciatures, or embassies, around the world. The pope's right-hand man is the Secretary of State, who is typically a diplomat—a priest diplomat. Because the diplomats are priests who take vows of silence regarding what they know, they often approach tasks as pastors, which helps explain why Vatican diplomats are notoriously discreet and why they are willing to meet even with dictators. No one is beyond salvation.

In my book *God's Diplomats*, I outline the four main functions of Vatican diplomacy: Representation, mediation, preservation, and evangelization. We could get back to giving

examples of these four different dimensions if you wish, as we go along. I will briefly mention two examples of mediation, when Vatican diplomats helped resolve secular conflicts. Argentina. In the Argentinian-Chilean conflict in 1978, where essentially old territorial disputes involving the Beagle Channel, a strategic waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans at the tip of South America. Argentina at that time had readied warships, while Chile had 45,000 troops on alert. At the last hour, Pope John Paul II announced he was sending a personal envoy based on the private agreement between the two countries.

Declassified cables confirmed that the U.S. Government shared intelligence with the Vatican, confirming the serious war footing. A papal envoy spent two weeks shuttling between the two countries. They were brought, the parties, together to sign an agreement renouncing force, pulling troops away from borders, and formally requesting Vatican mediation. Nearly six years later, Argentina and Chile signed a treaty of peace and friendship, awarding these contested islands to Chile, but limiting its rights to 30 miles, and conceding to Argentina navigation rights in Chilean waters. What the settlement included, and this is the most important element in Vatican diplomacy, handling of diplomacy, and that is the signature of the Holy See element. This agreement between the two countries almost going at each other's military throats, resulted in no winner and no loser, yet it allowed both countries to claim success.

One other example of mediation—papal mediation, it is an example that most of us remember or lived through. That is Pope Francis—when Pope Francis helped Havana and Washington overcome a distrust to conclude a prisoner swap and normalize the Cuban-U.S. diplomatic relations. In December 2009, the communist regime in Cuba arrested Alan Gross, a 60-year-old American USAID contractor, and sentenced in Cuba to 15 years. When secret negotiations between the United States and Cuba reached an impasse, the Obama administration and a handful of congressional allies turned to Pope Francis. He was able to serve as a bridge and a broker who could guarantee that both sides honored their part of the bargain.

Pope Francis' success rested on Vatican efforts stretching back over 50 years. The church in Cuba has carefully cultivated a *modus vivendi* with the regime that led to its emergence as the only independent institution on the island. What Francis helped the United States and Cuba accomplish was grounded in policy he inherited from his predecessors. The church cherishes the role of mediator, so it guards its right to remain politically impartial. For example, when offered the chance to become a full member of the United Nations in 2004, Pope John Paul II decided it was more appropriate to maintain permanent observer status to avoid the need to vote on politically charged issues.

Next, I would like to point to the priorities of Pope Leo XIV and the perspective on that. Pope Leo's diplomacy, as we now find out—but we should not be surprised—is squarely built on the priorities and pragmatism of his predecessors. Let us remember that he is an American-born and continues to be in possession of his American citizenship and an American passport. Like political officeholders potentially bringing different platforms to the task, each pope inherits the same mantle of teaching and tradition, regardless of his background. When he emerged on May 8, 2025, the American-born pope began, peace be with you. He mentioned peace ten times in his short address.

The priority he puts on peace is rooted in the Bible. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God, Matthew 5:9. When Leo convened a prayer vigil for peace in Rome last Saturday, only two days ago, he proclaimed: Enough of the idolatry

of self and money. Enough of the display of power. Enough of war. Leo was echoing Pope Paul VI, who spoke at the United Nations in 1965 and famously declared: Never more war. War, never again, during the Vietnam era. The pope's critique of war in Iran and bombing in Lebanon should not be understood as a political stand. Rather, it is a theological position grounded in what is called a just war. Developed by no other than Saint Augustine in the early fifth century and studied in all United States military academies. It says a just war must be defensive and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. If it is unprovoked, kills innocents, and destroys civilian homes, it can be classified as unjust and immoral.

Thank you very much for the opportunity of making this presentation.

Mr. LUTZ: Thank you, Victor.

Over to you, Peter.

Mr. MARTIN: Thank you, Alexander. Thanks to the Commission for your invitation to be here. Thanks also to Fleur Cowan, my old colleague from the diplomatic service. It is a great honor to be here on this panel, also. My students back at Boston College have read Victor's book and gotten a lot out of it. I worked with AVSI back in the day when I was at the Vatican. Thanks for assembling this group.

I am going to speak a little bit—I am going to speak a little bit about my perspective from being a diplomat at the Vatican and explore the topic in that way. An assignment for U.S. Foreign Service officers—an assignment to the embassy to the Holy See is a highly coveted posting. While few diplomats would complain about living in Rome, the attraction of the assignment is the exceptional diplomatic opportunity it presents. While most bilateral missions focus at least in part on the host country's internal politics, the U.S.-Holy See diplomatic relationship is almost entirely focused on third countries. Further, because the Holy See, like the United States, has an interest in every corner of the world, a U.S. diplomat at the Vatican may be engaged with counterparts on issues in Latin America one day, South Asia the next, maybe Eastern Europe after that. It is an exciting portfolio that mirrors the global network of the Holy See, including its strength in the dynamic Global South.

Working with the Holy See is also what a former Ambassador of mine called pure diplomacy. We are not trying to sell the Vatican anything. We do not spend time on visa issues. There are no military agreements to be had. Instead, it is high-level engagement on global, regional, and national issues related to war and peace, human dignity, and the future of our planet. Another attraction of Embassy Vatican for Foreign Service officers is the opportunity to work with the Holy See diplomatic corps that Victor spoke of a moment ago. As he mentioned, it is the oldest diplomatic corps in the world. I found them to be some of the most effective diplomats I ever worked with in my entire Foreign Service career.

Vatican City is a place where the world convenes. The network of diocese, religious orders, and other Catholic entities—I think Victor and Alexander both mentioned—is an extensive network. The flow of people and information to Rome is constant. At one point during my tenure at Embassy Vatican, for example, there was a violent crisis in Haiti. Most foreign diplomats in Port-au-Prince, including the Americans, were not able to get out into the field to report on what was happening and the most recent developments. My diplomatic counterpart at the Vatican, however, knew from Catholic sources in Haiti on the ground exactly what was happening. In Vatican City, while diplomats work with

various Holy See offices, our primary interlocutor is the Holy See's Ministry of Foreign Affairs equivalent—MFA equivalent.

The diplomatic environment in Rome is much broader than that. It is a function of that convening power of the Holy See. Diplomats working on an issue with Vatican counterparts would be wise to consult with colleagues from international diplomatic—from the international diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. As Victor mentions, the Vatican maintains relations with over 180 countries, and many of those have resident Ambassadors in Rome. Many times, we would go and speak to them about various issues we were working on.

Other important resources are the many religious orders that have established their international headquarters close to Vatican City. It is not just because I work at Boston College, but I would also—back in the day, we would consult a lot with the Jesuits and other religious orders on various issues that would come up. Finally, influential Catholic lay organizations, most notably the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio, are an important part of the diplomatic environment. In recent years, U.S. diplomats have been a part of talks hosted by Sant'Egidio in Rome to bring an end to conflicts in Senegal, South Sudan, and elsewhere.

A major storyline of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV is how he will balance his identity as an American with his duties as pontiff, especially given the current events that Alexander went over. It is worth noting, though, that Holy See diplomats have always had to negotiate these challenges, since its diplomats come from many countries around the world. Working in the Vatican, I could be sitting across the table from a French-born monsignor one day, an Argentine bishop the next, a Filipino after that.

When these diplomats join the service of the Holy See, they become representatives of the Vatican, first and foremost. Again, interchanging Holy See in the Vatican, although, as Victor notes, technically different terms we are talking about. This also goes for the American representatives of the Holy See as well. When I was stationed at the Vatican, I had a good friend who was an American Holy See diplomat. I had met him over there, and he would sometimes come over to our house to watch U.S. sports with us on Armed Forces TV. When we had diplomatic dealings back in his office in the Apostolic Palace, there was no doubt whose interests he was promoting.

Certainly, any diplomat, official, or pope is also a product of his or her background. Visvaldas Kulbokas, the courageous papal nuncio currently in Kyiv, for some years was the point person for Russia and Ukraine in the Holy See MFA equivalent. Hailing from Lithuania, he certainly had a different understanding of the Russian threat to Ukraine and the region than others might have had. I would say his background enriched his service rather than created any awkward entanglements. Returning to Pope Leo, the question is not whether his American background will create a conflict of interest, but rather how his innate understanding of American culture and its political system will influence his engagement on U.S. and world issues.

In the bigger picture, it is important to realize, as I think Victor and Alexander both got at, that while the Vatican is part of the geopolitical landscape and its diplomacy, its real focus is promoting the core principles of human dignity rather than a political agenda.

Thank you.

Mr. LUTZ: Thank you, Peter.

With that, we will go over to Jackie.

Ms. ALDRETTE: Good afternoon and thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic.

My name is Jackie Aldrette, and for the last 20 years, I have had the honor of working for AVSI Foundation. I currently serve as deputy secretary general for U.S. relations. AVSI Foundation is a nonprofit lay civil society organization that supports around 300 development and humanitarian aid projects in 41 countries around the globe, both directly and through partnerships with local organizations. Each year, these initiatives touch the lives of around four million people. Our vision is a world where the value and dignity of each and every person is recognized, respected, and supported, a world in which each person can be the protagonist of their own life, and that of their community. We respond to real needs, above all, education, economic opportunity, agricultural and rural development, and the environment.

Over the past 50-plus years, AVSI has worked directly with people in need and, in doing so, has experienced the influence of the Holy See on the ground as a steady presence alongside the people, a voice for the voiceless. AVSI is one of the many charitable organizations that relate to the church as a matter of personal conviction. Our history is interwoven with the church, and Catholic social teachings have guided our work over the years. Today, AVSI maintains an open dialogue with Vatican institutions, in particular the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

When it comes to our work in local communities, our deep relationships with representatives of the Vatican, the apostolic nuncios, and the leaders of the local church are among our most treasured resources. The steady, politically neutral presence of the nuncio in contexts of instability and turmoil provides humanitarian actors like AVSI with reassurance and support as we remain shoulder to shoulder with the local community and our dedicated staff. The Holy See is also a custodian of a rich set of teachings on social issues, referred to collectively as Catholic social teachings. The core principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor are pillars of the AVSI method. What is fascinating about this group of teachings is that they are constantly evolving, in dialogue, you could say, with the dynamic changes in our society, economy, and global order.

As we, as an organization, strive to live out these principles in the real world and in the face of challenging circumstances, we also contribute back and nourish the understanding of what these principles mean in practice and in today's world. To illustrate some of my points, let us consider Syria, a country that has experienced brutal dictatorship, civil war, and a population at the mercy of geopolitical striving from all sides. The presence of the Holy See through it all, largely in the person of Cardinal Mario Zenari, apostolic nuncio, is a testament to the themes already mentioned. In 2015, Syria was in the early phase of the latest civil war, and, moved by the unfolding health crisis that he saw around him, Cardinal Zenari reached out to AVSI and asked us to support the Catholic hospitals there.

We responded by launching the Open Hospitals Project. Our shared goal was to ensure free access to medical care for the Syrians most in need. Three Catholic hospitals managed by various religious congregations were kept open throughout the war, receiving all patients regardless of religion and the ability to pay. The project continues today with strong hospitals and now expanded outreach clinics and pharmacies, bringing health serv-

ices closer to the people in need. This partnership highlights several dimensions of the Holy See's role in the world, from our perspective.

First, the church is present even in the most remote villages of the world, giving voice to the voiceless and close to the lives of everyday people. Second, the Holy See is consistently advocating for an integral vision of a person who needs not only a food—not only food and a roof over his head, but also work and, importantly, peace, rights, and freedom. Third, the Holy See holds steady and will not forget crisis situations, even when they no longer dominate the headlines.

Now, on a more personal note, as an American I am proud that—I am proud that I could work for the past 20 years, for AVSI, inspired by Catholic social teachings, to create concrete opportunities for disadvantaged families, enabling them to educate their children, find dignified work, manage disease, and face all of the challenges of life, doing so in partnership with my government, the U.S. Government. AVSI's work at this nexus, where the spirit of the Holy See and the commitment of the United States to upholding human dignity have converged, has delivered important results. We look forward to a return to such collaboration.

Like the Holy See, AVSI will never give up this mission to defend and support human dignity wherever it is threatened by extreme poverty, lack of opportunity and basic services, lack of protection and safety, and inhumane treatment, standing by our conviction that every human life has the same inherent value, regardless of his or her circumstances.

Thank you.

Mr. LUTZ: All right. Thank you, Jackie.

I will go ahead and ask our first question here, just to kick things off, and then we will open the podium up to you guys. I think the way that we will go about doing this is just that you can raise your hands, and I will recognize you. You can walk up there and ask your question to any or all of the panelists.

To ask my question—in *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre offered what he called “a disquieting suggestion” about modernity. That we possess “simulacra of morality.” That we continue to use the key expressions—dignity, rights, justice, truth—but have lost the context from which their significance is derived. We have the words but no longer know what they mean. If MacIntyre is right, even partly, I would ask, what does that imply for the Holy See, which still enters the room insisting that these words refer to something real, that truth exists, that dignity is given, that they make demands on us, whether we recognize them or not? Is the church speaking to a world that disagrees with it, or one that has lost the capacity to understand what it is saying? I will pitch that out to anybody who wants to take it, or we can leave it on the floor and maybe return later.

Mr. GAETAN: I will probably say, very straightforwardly, that the doctrine of the church is rooted in the natural law. The natural law is an expression of Aristotle's understanding and philosophy, which precedes Christianity by some 2,500 years. The practice of the quest to reach the values which are expressed through the doctrine of the Catholic Church—social justice, respect for the dignity, secure conditions, decent conditions of living, expressed throughout so many encyclicals of the different popes, all go back to the natural law.

Thank you.

Mr. LUTZ: Thank you.

All right. Would anyone like to come up and ask a question?

Mr. MARTIN: Excuse me, Alexander, I could add on to that, if you—

Mr. LUTZ: Oh, yes. Of course.

Mr. MARTIN: Just to note, working at the embassy to the Holy See, it was an interesting example of engaging on those issues, the political, and then the way the Holy See looks at the world through this lens of human dignity. I think that in the past—I have not read the current National Security Strategy—but in the past, our U.S. national security strategy has included the idea that the U.S. wants to promote human dignity around the world. There were many times, I felt, that we were very closely aligned with the Holy See when we were engaged with Holy See officials on various issues. It was not always the case, but it was often the case.

One very satisfying thing, as diplomat working there, was that even if the policies were not aligned, when a U.S. diplomat is writing his cable back to the State Department describing a conversation that might have been had in the Apostolic Palace, it is great to be able to explain the Holy See's viewpoint, which centers on these issues, to try to get some traction in the State Department, even if there might not always be that traction.

Ms. ALDRETTE: I think your question highlights, again, the value of the Catholic organizations out there on the ground. Because questions of human dignity are very, very concrete when you are in, you know, the slums of Haiti, for example. It is not just an abstract thing that we talk about. Organizations like ours and the many others are able to speak about whether children are going to school, whether there is sufficient water, clean water to go around, you know, what the impact of the gang control is on the young women in that context. All of those very real, very human issues are what we are encountering every day. I think the interesting point is how organizations like ours, which are linked to the church in more formal or informal ways, are able to share that information back up the channels so that these concepts are embedded in real life and not just abstract thought.

Thanks.

Mr. LUTZ: Thank you.

All right, back there. If you would not mind going to the podium, just so that people who are catching this on the livestream can hear. If you would just state your name and affiliation before your question, please.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Natasha Quinn. I am an intern at the Congressional Black Caucus.

I had two different questions. One for Mr. Martin. I was wondering, how does one become a diplomat? Especially in a state as special as the Vatican City? For everyone else, I was wondering, how have you seen the hand of God in your work? If you have any examples of that. I was just curious, as a Christian myself.

Thank you.

I'm sorry?

Mr. GAETAN: What is your second part? The second part of your question?

QUESTION: Oh, it was just how have you seen—like, are there any examples of you seeing, like, the hand of God in your work, like, being a part of, like, a Catholic organization? If so, like, do you have, like, a specific example?

Mr. MARTIN: Thank you for the question. Well, it is a great career. You take—you take the first step by taking the Foreign Service exam. If you pass the Foreign Service exam, if you pass the written exam, then there is an oral exam. Then, if you get a security clearance, you can join the State Department and become a Foreign Service officer. It is not assured that you can get an assignment at the Vatican, because sometimes it just depends on what jobs are available when you are looking for an assignment. My colleague, Fleur, and I, who served—is still Foreign Service officers on loan here to the Helsinki Commission, and it is a long process. We call bidding on different jobs. I would be happy to talk to you for a few minutes if you have any other questions. Fleur is still in the trenches, so she could tell you a bit more.

Mr. GAETAN: You might also wonder, how does a Vatican diplomat become a Vatican diplomat? First, it must be a priest—already an ordained priest. Then there is no real examination, as it would be in a case of the U.S. Foreign Service. It would be the local bishop who would mentor, without necessarily telling different young priests, I am looking at you as possibly recommending you to go to the diplomatic school, the academia in Rome, in order to become a Vatican diplomat. There is this tradition throughout the centuries that it would be the local bishop or archbishop who would eye a talented young priest and would then suggest to the president of the academia the diplomatic school in Rome. There, they will be other officers will be looking at that suggested candidate. That young priest would then be invited to attend the courses of the Vatican diplomacy academia, which go on for two, three, or four years.

At the same time, that young diplomat would be going through the school of diplomacy of the Vatican, he would most likely get another degree in canonical law or some other field. Then there is the kind of examination that will be—that the young diplomat will be going through will be observed in the field. He will be assigned somewhere at a nunciature, or whatever, provided that he already speaks the language, has familiarized himself with the geography, with the political context, and the regional context in that area, and with the workings of the church and the interreligious dialogue in that country and in that region. It is a very interesting, complex process. Most appealing, I would say.

Mr. LUTZ: Yes.

Ms. ALDRETTE: I am happy to answer your second question, because that is an easy one for us. They would say that we see the hand of God in a lot of what we do. I will just tell you one little story that illustrates that the best, most recently for me. I was in Uganda meeting with some participants in a project of ours. I met a young woman who was a refugee from Congo. She had gone through a lot of trauma, leaving Congo and coming into Uganda, where she was not sure whether she wanted to keep on living. She was 20 years old or so, lost her parents, was taking care of younger siblings, and just felt very forgotten.

When she encountered our program, and she began working with the AVSI colleagues there, they were coaching her and mentoring her through, and helped her start a business, and all of the different programs—you know, activities within a program. What she communicated—so her life started to change, and she decided to get married, and she had a child, and all of this. What she communicated to me when I sat down with her on her patio was that she experienced love. She experienced being seen and being loved, and that changed everything.

Mr. LUTZ: Any questions? Yes, if you would be willing to go up to the podium.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Yes. I just wanted to ask about the—I do not know if this is even part of what you are discussing—but the relationship between the Vatican now and this Muslim uprising that we had in New York? I do not know if you have seen it. I have noticed it myself, even here in Washington, where I live. I was wondering. It to me—at least from my experience, because I have known a lot of Muslims—I think communism—I do not know. I do not know myself how you—how the Catholic Church would interrelate with Muslims, at least the ones that I live with. They are not all of the same type of Muslim as how—as how I have seen it. That might not be right.

I would feel—I would feel, that is my feeling, that communism is using the Muslim religion presently in these humongous uprisings that I read about. Now that is just—I am just—I just do my own reading. I was a teacher at one point. That is how I look at it, which kind of bothers me very much because I think it is a very serious problem. I do not know what—I have when I speak—when I go to mass, I do speak with the priests about it. I do not know how political the Catholic Church wants to get, or the people who work within the Catholic Church want to be political. You know, that is a whole different thing sometimes. How do—sorry.

Mr. LUTZ: All right. Does anyone want to respond to that?

Mr. MARTIN: Well, I am not familiar with all the things you were talking about. I could say that at the U.S. Embassy, we worked quite often with the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Vatican, which is very active in dialogue with various world religions. I think some very good, committed people are trying to find common ground with different religions and their—and their authorities. I think you have seen—I do not know if Pope Leo has had any yet—but Pope Francis certainly signed some statements with other religious leaders that affirmed some things that different faiths have in common about human dignity, the environment, for example, so these are ongoing issues for sure.

The Community of Sant'Egidio, which I mentioned, is also an organization that every year puts on an annual prayer for peace, in which religious and political leaders come together to try to find common ground. I think it is something that the Holy See continues to work on, and worth watching, I think, because I think it is important for our future as a planet, too.

Mr. GAETAN: Yes. I will add to what Peter just explained, that this is—the work that is done from Rome through a number of dicasteries, in particular the Dicastery for Inter-religion—interreligion meaning meeting with Catholics, meeting with Muslim, meeting with Buddhist, meeting with Hindu, and so on. It is done at the local level, wherever that is, in Muslim countries and so on.

In particular, I would remind us that Pope Francis in 2019 signed a[n] extraordinary declaration in Abu Dhabi that reflects and endorses, together with the most important leaders of the Sunni religion—the Sunni being the majority within the Muslim faith. Then a number of trips that Pope Francis took throughout his pontificate in Muslim-majority countries like Egypt, Morocco, and others—Central Africa, where there was enormous terrorism going on. That has been, I would say, very successfully conducted to date.

The problem, as you have pointed to, is a local problem, which is generated, as we remember, as a result of the United States invading Iraq. The spin of that invasion was, on one hand, false. The reasoning of the invasion, mass destruction—or weapons of mass destruction, proved to be false. Then, the most devastating argument that was carried was

that the United States Army is engaged in a crusade and went out to the Middle East to evangelize the Muslim population and liberate the Muslim woman.

As a result of those statements made by our then-President Bush, that led to violence. It led to violence throughout the Middle East. It led to violence in Europe. It led to violence in the United States. Today, we have somehow, a copy-paste of the statements that were made in the 2000's by the then-president. We should not be surprised that we are faced with some kind of violence locally.

Mr. LUTZ: Yes.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Carly Breland. I am the communications fellow with the Helsinki Commission.

I would like to ask, I guess, any of you. Yesterday, President Trump said that Leo was chosen as pope at least in part because of Trump's second presidency. Is there any truth to this claim? Then, in connection, how does Leo, being an American—the first American pope—uniquely position him, as far as his—the Vatican's—or the Holy See's foreign policy toward the United States?

Thank you.

Mr. MARTIN: Well, I do not think I would venture a guess as to the reason for Pope Leo's election. I think that he brings a lot to the table besides being an American. He had such a rich history as a missionary and bishop in Peru. He was a Vatican official. He understood the Vatican. As Alexander mentioned, he has a rich theological character, informed by St. Augustine. I think that he was—there was a great article written by—I think, by John Allen shortly after his election, saying that he checked all the boxes for the cardinals. As I think most people know, it is a secret vote. Even though there are some leaks afterwards, you do not typically know really what happened inside the conclave.

I think if you look at his resume, also as provincial of his order, the Augustinians. Someone said to me once, it is very unusual for—I am sorry—he was the superior of the whole order in addition to being provincial. It is very unusual for someone to be reelected to that position because, typically, in a religious order, they want someone else to come in. He was reelected. That was, I think, a statement as to his leadership and ability. I would—I do not have any inside information from the conclave, but I would doubt that his being—he was selected because he was American. I would also say that—it is not a new thought—but that if he had been an American who had not spent significant time in another country, I do not think he would have been elected.

Mr. GAETAN: Yes. I would remind us that the election of the American pope was received and perceived in the United States as a fascinating event. It was the hope—the view at a time, unanimously, overwhelmingly, throughout the media, you name—through the whole spectrum, looked as the advent of an American Pope as a timely, most important moment, which will allow two Americans—the leader of the most powerful country, many people call it an empire, the president of the United States, and the American pope, who is the leader of that other empire, the empire of morals—1,400,000,000 people.

The expectation was euphoric. To bring it to date, it is—there is no expression to the disappointment that sees the two most important leaders, American leaders, being exchanged. One in particular, being so aggressive that—I read just as I came in the threat that was addressed by President Trump to Pope Leo XIV, the American pope. His answer,

Pope Leo XIV's answer, "I am not afraid of the Trump administration." That is an enormous statement that is broadcast throughout the world.

How did we get here? I keep thinking, how do—is there any moment in history with such a contentious, and such an expression of power—ultimate power—that a lay leader could aim to foster? It led me to the Potsdam Conference in 1945, where the then-partners, allies who won the Second World War, Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, Prime Minister of Great Britain Winston Churchill, and the new president of the United States, just was sworn in as president, President Truman, met, to establish the borders of the divided—of the split Europe among themselves.

At some point, there is a famous quote that dominated throughout history. When Prime Minister Churchill pleaded with Joseph Stalin—I want to be correct, so—and asked him to consider the opinion of the Vatican with regard to the Polish Catholic Church. Stalin famously asked, how many military divisions does the Vatican have? Like in some leaders—today's leaders' opinion, in Stalin's view, political power stemmed from military might, not from moral authority. Today, the Vatican army happens to be 1,400,000,000.

That would beg for the next question. Is that why the nuncio, the Vatican ambassador to Washington, was summoned to the War Department, instead of being summoned at the Department of State or the White House? That is the question that comes to mind, so the War Department handles diplomacy today.

Thank you.

Mr. LUTZ: All right. I think we have got time for maybe one more question, if anyone's got one. All right over there.

QUESTION: Hi. Oskar Gorzynski, Polish Press Agency.

I also wanted to ask about the president's statements about the pope. Most of all, how do you think that will—that will influence or challenge—would challenge American diplomacy? Because coming from Poland, I have already seen some Polish politicians, even the conservative ones, even the ones who were supportive of the president—of President Trump, criticizing him and his comments. Also, I wonder what this means for the Catholics here and the Catholics that serve in the administration. We have some prominent ones, Marco Rubio and others, so that is my question.

Mr. LUTZ: All right. Anyone want to take that?

Mr. MARTIN: [SPEAKS IN POLISH.]

[CONTINUES IN ENGLISH.] I think it is very difficult to predict how this will affect so many things because it is—this level of exchange of comments, I think, is unprecedented, at least in modern times. I think what I would like to ask folks to keep in mind is that there is a whole diplomatic apparatus that Victor has described, which is a part of the equation. Victor mentioned this meeting between the nuncio, the papal nuncio, Archbishop Pierre, and the—and a Pentagon official. That created a stir in the media recently. I do not know how many people have read about that. Shortly afterwards, Archbishop Pierre, in various sources, tamped down a little bit the controversy, and that is his job. That is the job of diplomats, is to find those areas of cooperation and to help that diplomatic relationship move forward, even when there are other distractions.

Archbishop Pierre has done a great job. The new nuncio who is going to come in is Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, who—I will give another plug for Boston College—he spoke at Boston College in the fall. He is a former nuncio in Lebanon. He was at the U.N. He is a great diplomat. He is going to be, again, someone who is going to keep this relation-

ship on a good course, I think. I do not know our Ambassador to the Holy See, Brian Burch, personally, but I have heard very good things about him. That is his job also, to keep this relationship moving forward. You have experienced diplomats, like Cardinal Parolin, Victor mentioned, who is the number-two at the Vatican, and Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who is the minister of foreign affairs equivalent. All these people are working to help this relationship thrive, and I think that is an important context to keep in mind.

Mr. GAETAN: In one word, it is the whole dialogue. It is educational. It is sending us to look up sources, history, and even 14th-century French history. I met with the Nuncio Christophe Pierre yesterday. He is already retired, as a few weeks ago. He is going to leave town in a few days. In our conversation at some point, I asked him, Your Eminence, do you perceive this blown-up, shall we call it, scandal as an incredible PR for the work, the beneficial work that has been done, is done by the Vatican? The devastating blow to the policies, the military policies, as led today by Washington? That is the lesson that comes from this conflict.

Thank you.

Mr. LUTZ: I think we are, unfortunately, out of time. I would invite you all to stick around and ask a couple of further questions to our panelists after we adjourn here, if they are willing and able to do so. Thank you all for coming in. I think it has been a great discussion. I hope it has been informative for you. All right.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 3:05 p.m., the briefing ended.]





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