

HOLY SEE

Party Portrait

The Holy See is the diplomatic arm of the Pope as the head of the global Catholic Church and the leader of the Vatican city state.. In the Middle East, the Holy See considers itself to have moral responsibility to the mass exodus of Christians fleeing persecution and to address the escalation of violence and conflict. The Catholic Church has opened itself to interfaith dialogue and promoted nonviolent conflict resolution. The Holy See has a wide informant network due to the community of Christians, Catholic NGOs, educational institutions, priests and religious communities across the Middle East. They also use their global diplomatic ties with world powers such as the US, European Nations, and the United Nations to advance their priorities. The Holy See will generally refuse to take one side in a conflict.

Key Interests

- Protect Christians and maintain Christian presence in “the Holy Land”
- Protect Church legal rights and property
- Defend human rights, international law, and self-determination
- Promote regional peace and understanding through non-violent conflict resolution, dialogue, and diplomacy

Sources of Leverage

Convening Power - As it has no military or economic arm, it can effectively leverage its moral authority as a convening power.

Soft Power – Can communicate with governments all over the world via its ecclesiastical structure. Widespread local parochial networks give it strong local legitimacy. It sees no country as an enemy and is willing to maintain all possible channels of communication.

Political – Diplomatic relations with 177 countries including all Middle Eastern countries except Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Regional Strategy

The Holy See seeks to communicate with all parties to stop the violence in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Under Pope Francis, the Holy See has made assertive moves to avoid further stagnation of these conflicts. They have conducted the following moves: developed a theological (and closed-door political) relationship with the Ayatollahs in Iran; mended a relationship with the Maronite Church in Lebanon of which the new Lebanese president is a member; continued diplomatic relations with Syria’s Assad while simultaneously calling on him to honor humanitarian norms; established diplomatic ties with the State of Palestine; engaged in ongoing negotiations with Israel while recognizing its right to statehood and security. The Holy See intends to continue to use methods of dialogue, diplomacy, and non-violent conflict resolution to pursue its interests in the Middle East.

Powerful Individuals

Pope Francis (Sovereign of Vatican City State), Cardinal Pietro Parolin (Holy See Secretary of State), Bishop Paul Richard Gallagher (Holy See Secretary for Relations with States), Cardinal Mario Zenari (Holy See Ambassador to Syria), Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi (Leader of Maronite Catholic Church)

Potential Negotiation Moves

Use relationship with Iran to advocate for the continuity of diplomatic peace and nuclear disarmament talks between Iran and US Republican leadership under President Trump.

Work within the Iran/Russia/Lebanon Axis to put pressure on President Assad’s response to Syrian rebels.

Use ongoing negotiations and diplomatic relationships with Israel to promote the two-state solution with Palestine. Play a track II role between the Palestinians and the US Trump Administration.

Internal Conflicts

The Catholic Church in the Middle East has seven Arabic speaking rites. The Maronite rite is centered in Lebanon and has its own Patriarch. These relationships are sensitive to history and culture. During the Lebanese civil war, Maronite factions fought for Christian power against perceived Muslim exclusion of Christians. There are many other Christian denominations in the Middle East, and their common Christian roots do not guarantee homogeneity or agreement.

Memberships

IAEA, OSCE, UN (Non-Member Observer)

Partners

BAHRAIN, EGYPT Government, HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, IRAN, ISRAEL, JORDAN, KUWAIT, IRAQ State of Law Coalition, LEBANON Government, LEBANON Hezbollah, PALESTINE Fatah, PALESTINE Hamas, QATAR, RUSSIA, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Adversaries

ISIS

Proxy

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Allies

FRANCE, GERMANY, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES

Rivals

ALGERIA, OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA Government, YEMEN Government

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A