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The Evangelical Roots of US Africa Policy

Asteris Huliaras

About a quarter of US citizens claim to be evangelicals, or 'born-again' Christians.¹ While this broad term covers a number of different denominations and movements,² in general evangelicals are theologically conservative, viewing the Bible as the sole authority of faith and strongly promoting preaching and evangelism. While they were once considered America's staunchest isolationists (with the exception of their strong anti-communist views and their unconditional support for Israel),³ in recent years their political agenda has shifted away from a strict focus on domestic issues to encompass a greater interest in foreign affairs. They have come to play a significant role in the making of US foreign policy, especially with respect to developing countries.

Until the late 1970s, evangelicals tended not to take part in US politics. A large proportion of them did not even vote in presidential elections. However, through a process of gradual politicisation initiated mainly by their strong interest in contested domestic issues such as abortion and gay marriage, and strengthened by Republican officials looking for new constituencies,⁴ the evangelical presence in US political life increased spectacularly.⁵ By the late 1990s, evangelicals had become a recognised voting bloc, mobilised most effectively by George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election.⁶ More recently, the evangelical lobby has been a major driving force in placing African issues on the US government agenda.

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Saving the Third World

It is no coincidence that US evangelicals have become increasingly interested in the Third World. Evangelical Christianity has grown tremendously in the global South, to the point where Third World Christians greatly outnumber their counterparts in the North. In 1900 only 7% of the world's evangelicals lived in the Third World. By 1985 this share had shifted to 66%.⁷ In 2002 evangelicalism had nearly 800 million adherents worldwide, of whom some 500m resided in the global South.⁸ And it is in Africa where evangelicalism (especially its Pentecostal and charismatic variants) is growing most spectacularly.⁹

Still, demographic changes do not fully account for the relatively sudden interest of US evangelical Christians in the Third World. Also of importance are the missionary activities that have brought increasing numbers of evangelicals into direct contact with the people of Africa and other developing areas. Until the early 1950s, the majority of US Protestant missions in the Third World were drawn from mainline denominations.¹⁰ By the late 1980s, however, 90% were evangelical.¹¹ A combination of growing self-confidence and impressive economic resources (more than \$2 billion annually) explain this shift. Evangelical missions have become a particularly big industry in Africa. In the early 1990s there were at least 1,300 American protestant missionaries in Kenya alone.¹² In the second half of the 1990s, the number of US evangelicals fanning out across the globe on proselytising missions reached record levels. According to some estimates, nearly 350,000 Americans undertook such missions in 2001, eight times as many as in 1996.¹³ In 2002, the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the most important US evangelical denominations, spent \$290m abroad, mainly in Asia and Africa, establishing more than 8,000 churches and baptising more than 421,000 converts.¹⁴ In 2005, the BBC's *Focus on Africa* reported:

Africa is being colonised and Christianised all over again. The colonisers this time are Americans, not Europeans, and the brand of belief they are bringing to Africa is Evangelical Christianity.¹⁵

Evangelical missionaries returning to the United States were acutely aware of the poverty and oppression they had encountered in the less-developed

countries they had visited. Above all, they were concerned with the persecution of Christians in countries such as Myanmar and Sudan. They played a crucial role in persuading their organisations to mobilise in support of their persecuted co-believers. As a result of their interest in the 'suffering church' in Third World countries, evangelical groups attempted to re-direct American foreign policy in defence of Christian minorities worldwide. In 1996 the National Association of Evangelicals embarked upon a highly coordinated campaign that included public gatherings, strong media coverage and private meetings with officials in Washington aimed at changing US foreign policy towards countries that were seen as persecuting Christians.¹⁶ The association finally persuaded a reluctant Clinton administration to introduce the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998. Although government officials initially tried to underplay its importance, the act created three significant government bodies to monitor and respond to violations of religious freedom: the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom, the Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Special Advisor on International Religious Freedom within the National Security Council.¹⁷

Another factor that played a crucial role in increasing evangelical interest in foreign affairs was the violence of 11 September 2001. In the three presidential elections prior to 2004, fewer than 2% of evangelicals mentioned foreign policy as 'the most important issue' that the United States was facing. However, after 11 September attitudes changed markedly: by 2004 about a third of evangelical Christians named foreign policy as the most important issue on the country's agenda.¹⁸ But the events of 11 September not only changed the views of the evangelical community, they changed those of the US administration. America was now at war. And it was not just a war of revenge but a war of ideals, including the spread of democracy worldwide. As liberal evangelical Jim Wallis observed, the terrorist attacks transformed Bush from a 'self-help Methodist' to a 'messianic Calvinist'.¹⁹ If the United States had decided to become the world's 'moral leader', a 'force of good' in global politics aiming to 'export democracy and freedom' in an unruly world, then evangelicals clearly had a role to play.

Other, more structural changes also affected evangelical interest in international affairs. With the growth of interdependence among nations and increasingly porous borders, a new concern for distant and different peoples appeared among evangelicals as among other Americans.²⁰ Technological advances also played a crucial role. The development of transnational television networks and the capacity for 'real-time' coverage of international crises unleashed an 'electronic internationalism'.²¹ Barriers of citizenship, religion, race and geography that once divided the international moral space broke down, creating an emergent 'global conscience'.²² The rapid expansion of the Internet provided not only an important means for acquiring information but also a critical networking and organising tool. US domestic factors were also important: a new emphasis on norms and values in the conduct of US foreign policy helped reanimate the notion of the 'persecuted church' that had energised anti-communist Christian networks in the Cold War period.²³

Growing US evangelical interest in foreign affairs has led to attempts, particularly within the last ten years, to launch initiatives aimed at fighting global poverty and injustice, especially in Africa. In the words of the *Economist*:

If the European campaign for aid for Africa is dominated by bleeding-heart liberals, poring over the *Guardian* and *l'Humanité*, the American campaign is dominated by Bible-believing Christians.²⁴

For example, in October 2004, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a document entitled 'For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility' that called upon evangelicals to seek justice for the poor, protect human rights and seek global peace:

We believe that care for the vulnerable should extend beyond our national borders. American foreign policy and trade policies often have an impact on the poor. We should try to persuade our leaders to change the patterns of trade that harm the poor and to make the reduction of global poverty a central concern of American foreign policy.²⁵

In Washington, Richard Cizik, the vice-president for governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals, has supported the large evangelical aid organisations World Relief and World Vision in lobbying for a major increase in US foreign aid.²⁶ In California, Rick Warren, an influential pastor (he was given top billing in *Time* magazine's list of the 25 most important evangelicals²⁷), sent thousands of volunteers to combat poverty in Africa.²⁸ 'I've never been involved in partisan politics ... and don't intend to do so now', Warren said. 'But global poverty is an issue that rises far above mere politics. It is a moral issue ... a compassion issue, and because Jesus commanded us to help the poor, it is an obedience issue.'²⁹

(In August 2008, Warren did host an important political event – the Saddleback Civil Forum on Leadership and Compassion – where he questioned presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama on faith and values issues.) In 2005, leading evangelicals and faith-based organisations joined humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Hollywood celebrities to form the ONE campaign to 'make poverty history'. The diversity of ONE supporters impressed many observers:

in a public-service announcement, Rev. Pat Robertson appeared alongside actors Brad Pitt and Tom Hanks.³⁰ Among other initiatives, the ONE campaign called on the US government to raise by 1% of the federal budget the amount of aid it provides to Africa.

Several observers have argued that Bush's decision to greatly increase US aid to Africa was partly a response to evangelical demands.³¹ In autumn 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that President Bush 'should be known for increasing – doubling development assistance and tripling it to Africa after a period in which [it] was essentially flat for decades'.³² He should also be known, she said, 'for the largest single investment in AIDS and malaria, the biggest health investment of any government program ever'.³³ It is true that the presidential initiative reflected in part priorities related to the growing strategic importance of Africa.³⁴ But there is evidence that the influence of the evangelical community also played an important role.

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The content of the US programme on AIDS, for example, was heavily influenced by the president's evangelical backers. It has been reported that when Bush spoke to his evangelical speech-writer Michael Gerson about the feasibility of a plan to spend \$15bn fighting AIDS, Gerson told him, 'if this is possible, and we don't do it, we will never be forgiven'.³⁵ In 2003, under pressure from evangelical lobby groups like Focus on the Family, the US administration decided to introduce a three-pronged strategy to fight AIDS, based on promoting abstinence, monogamy and, under certain limited circumstances, the use of condoms.³⁶ The programme has faced heavy criticism from many activists and health experts: the UN secretary-general's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa has argued that its emphasis on abstinence has contributed to a shortage of condoms in some African countries.³⁷ 'To impose a dogma-driven policy that is fundamentally flawed is doing damage to Africa', said the UN official.

The influence of evangelicals was also evident in US development-assistance programmes that did not focus on AIDS. For decades, US policy avoided intermingling aid programmes and religious proselytising. However, in December 2001 Bush created a new Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).³⁸ Gradually, the percentage of US aid going to faith-based organisations doubled and, according to many observers, the separation between religious services and donor activities became increasingly blurred.³⁹ Some restrictions imposed at the request of Congress in order to separate USAID-funded programmes from religious activities seemed to lose their effectiveness as many religious organisations could easily argue that they were using private and not public money for proselytising. In 2006, the US Government Accountability Office examined 13 federally financed faith-based organisations and concluded that four of them 'did not appear to understand the requirements to separate these activities in time or location from their program services'.⁴⁰ 'By the early years of the new millennium', concluded development scholar Gerard Clarke, 'an effective nexus between the Bush administration and the US Christian right had become an important feature of US policy in international development.'⁴¹

Some analysts argued that the evangelicals' broadening of their agenda to include Third World poverty was more a tactical move, a reaction to a growing resentment among the American public of conservative Christians' support for the Republican Party and their perceived political influence over Bush's decisions.⁴² In March 2005 a poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press showed that 34% of Americans held an 'unfavourable' view of Christian conservatives, compared with 29% in 2002.⁴³ Several leading evangelicals have since tried to distance themselves from the Bush administration. David Neff, the editor of *Christianity Today*, the magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals, argued in a July 2005 editorial that:

George Bush is not Lord. The Declaration of Independence is not an infallible guide to Christian faith and practice ... The American flag is not the Cross. The Pledge of Allegiance is not the Creed. 'God bless America' is not the Doxology. Sometimes one needs to state the obvious – especially at times when it's less and less obvious.⁴⁴

Other observers have argued that the evangelical emphasis on poverty was also intended to deflect attention from a number of scandals that 'have blown away the careers of several of the religious right's darlings', including Ted Haggard, Tom Delay, Jack Abramoff and Ralph Reed.⁴⁵ Although there is some truth in this claim, it tends to underestimate the depth of the discussion within the evangelical community that shows a clear *structural* shift in priorities.

Not all evangelicals agree with their movement's focus on poverty or endorse with the same enthusiasm the broadening trend in their foreign-policy agenda. It has been reported, for example, that Joel Hunter, the president-elect of the Christian Coalition of America, stepped down in December 2006 because of 'his frustration at the group's refusal to adopt a broader social agenda'.⁴⁶ And the Rev. Richard Cizik has identified Focus on the Family head James Dobson as a leader of 'isolationist' evangelicals who refuse to 'extend support of the community to addressing poverty'; Cizik has characterised this refusal as the 'Empire strikes back'.⁴⁷ It also seems

that grassroots evangelicals do not always share the zeal of their leaders: according to a recent poll, only 8% of white evangelicals and 20% of African-American evangelicals said that helping to improve the standard of living in less-developed countries is ‘extremely important’.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, these controversies and disagreements show that the evangelical anti-poverty call is not just a response to a growing negative image but has real substance, reflecting a clear new focus that may have a long-term impact on the US foreign-policy agenda.

Sudan

Of course, just because evangelicals became interested in US foreign policy did not necessarily mean they would be able to exert real influence over it. Evangelicals exerted an unprecedented level of influence in the Bush administration,⁴⁹ but neither their interest in foreign policy nor the Bush administration’s receptiveness to their demands can fully explain their success. A further reason why evangelicals were able to exert political leverage was because they began collaborating with non-evangelical groups, particularly Jewish organisations. Michael Horowitz, a former Reagan administration official and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, was important in bringing about this alliance.⁵⁰ On 5 July 1995, Horowitz published an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, ‘New Intolerance between the Crescent and the Cross’, calling for an intervention to stop the persecution of Christians in Africa and the Middle East.⁵¹ ‘Christians are the Jews of the 21st century’, he claimed, going on to call them the ‘victims of choice for thug regimes’. Horowitz asked for a new foreign policy that would make ending the persecution of Christians a high priority.

Horowitz initiated a mass campaign that crucially secured the involvement of the National Association of Evangelicals. In 1996, the association issued a ‘Statement of Conscience’ that called on its members ‘to work tirelessly to bring about action by our government to curb worldwide religious persecution’.⁵² The campaign introduced a very successful idea: an ‘International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church’. The first such day was estimated to include 60,000 congregations.⁵³ Despite his being Jewish, Horowitz was named one of the ten most influential Christians of the year

(together with Mother Teresa and Billy Graham) by *Southern Baptist Magazine* in 1997. The influential *Christianity Today* called him the 'Jew who is saving Christians'.⁵⁴ Jewish organisations such as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Anti-Defamation League joined the evangelicals in the campaign for religious freedom in Africa and elsewhere.⁵⁵

Topping Horowitz's list of global outrages was 'the imprisonment, beating, torture and selling into slavery of thousands of Christians in Sudan by the Islamic radical regime'.⁵⁶ Sudan quickly became the focus of the evangelical campaign for religious freedom. In April 2001 Horowitz was arrested (along with radio talk-show host Joe Maddison and former Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy) after he chained himself to the fence in front of the Sudanese Embassy in Washington to protest slavery and 'anti-Christian genocide'.⁵⁷ Steady campaigning by evangelicals concerned about the Sudanese government's efforts to impose its will on the predominantly Christian and animist southern part of the country played a prominent role in a US government diplomacy to end Sudan's civil war, a war that had claimed more than 2m lives.

Many evangelicals also became involved in an anti-slavery movement that emerged in the early 1990s, originally led by the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group.⁵⁸ For evangelical groups such as Christian Solidarity International, slavery in Sudan became a central issue. A systematic effort to 'redeem' southern Sudanese slaves believed to be Christians from 'Arab Muslim' raiders/masters gained momentum in the mid 1990s. Steady campaigning on the slavery issue at the Christian grassroots level and fundraising through appeals to 'buy back' slaves by evangelical congregations helped to upgrade interest in Sudan's civil war,⁵⁹ which was portrayed in simplistic terms as a 'biblical conflict' between Arab Muslims of the North and African Christians of the South. Gradually, evangelical groups started to show a strong interest in US foreign policy towards Sudan.

Growing US evangelical interest in Sudan coincided with the increasing anger of humanitarian and development NGOs at the continued interference of the Sudanese government in the workings of Operation Lifeline

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movement*

Sudan (a consortium providing humanitarian assistance to the southern part of the country). Although NGOs often held very different views on what the US response to the Sudanese civil war should be, all of them were outraged by the aerial bombings of civilians by the Khartoum regime in southern Sudan.⁶⁰ The Rev. Franklin Graham, founder of the faith-based Samaritan's Purse organisation, which runs a hospital in southern Sudan that was bombed by Sudanese government aircraft seven times in 2000, stated that he was persuaded that Khartoum's government was genocidal and that Islam itself was 'evil and wicked'.⁶¹ Graham tried to publicise the plight of Sudan by flying Republican Senator Bill Frist to Sudan's most desolate outposts. A few days before becoming president, George W. Bush took a break from the campaign in Florida to meet Graham (whose father, Billy, had persuaded Bush to 'recommit' his life to Christ). The two prayed together, and Graham made one request: 'Governor, if you become president, I hope you put Sudan on your radar'.⁶²

Shortly after Bush took office, a group of activists came to see presidential adviser Karl Rove, who had masterminded Bush's electoral strategy. The group included born-again Christians and liberal Jewish activists, and its objective was to ask the new administration to intercede in the Sudanese civil war. Rove, according to participants in the meeting, was 'unusually receptive'.⁶³ The need to retain evangelical voter support was an important factor in persuading the new administration to show a strong interest in Sudan's civil war. While the evangelicals' demands were a headache for many career State Department officials, Rove saw an opportunity to encourage cooperation between evangelicals and African-American lobbyists.

For African-American activists, building alliances with other lobby groups was highly desirable, considering that their influence on US foreign policy was in decline.⁶⁴ The retreat from public life owing to illness of Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan, who was a defender of the Islamic government of Sudan, helped encourage rapprochement between African Americans and evangelicals.⁶⁵ African-American groups such as the National Black Leadership Committee and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) banded with evangelical groups, and the anti-Khartoum coalition became a significant political force.

In March 2001, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent government entity created by the International Religious Freedom Act, issued a report calling Sudan ‘the world’s most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion and belief’ and summoned the administration to intervene.⁶⁶ That same month, then Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Congress that ‘there is perhaps no greater tragedy on the face of the earth today than the tragedy that is unfolding in the Sudan’. He added: ‘The only way to deal with that tragedy is to end the conflict’.⁶⁷ One week after these comments, Powell commissioned a review of US policy toward Sudan.

Shortly after coming to power, Bush had announced that he would abandon Clinton’s practice of assigning special envoys, but under pressure from evangelicals and their allies, the administration changed its position. In August 2001, Bush appointed John Danforth, a moderate Episcopalian priest and former senator, as US special envoy for Sudan’s peace process. The appointment ceremony took place in the White House Rose Garden on 6 September and was attended by then Secretary of State Colin Powell, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and many leading evangelicals.

Two months earlier, in June 2001, Congress had passed the Sudan Peace Act, a bill that made available to Bush up to \$10m per year in non-lethal aid to rebel-controlled areas. The act also threatened further sanctions against Sudan if the country’s president could not certify every six months that the regime was negotiating in good faith. The act was praised as an expression of unity among a diverse group of lobbyists. Democratic Congressman Charles Rangel joked that in all his 30 years in Congress he had never before been on the same platform with his Republican colleague Dick Armey. ‘I will not forget Sudan’, Bush promised when he signed the Sudan Peace Act into law. ‘And if I do’, he added, ‘I know that you will prod me.’ It was, concludes a commentator, a clear acknowledgement of the power of the faith-based movement.⁶⁸

In early 2002, Danforth reported to the president and advocated continued US engagement in Sudan. In July, under strong pressure from Washington, Khartoum and the rebels finally reached an agreement in

Machakos, Kenya, that acknowledged the right of the southern Sudanese to self-determination. Five other protocols were signed in the next two years, under which Sudan became a federal state with two regional governments that shared the country's newly found oil resources. Finally, in 2005, the two sides signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that paved the way for the arrival of UN forces to monitor the transition process. Of course, not all the factors that contributed to the agreement can be attributed to US diplomacy. But according to many analysts, the peace deal would never have been sealed if the United States had not brought such leverage to the process.⁶⁹ The agreement was a diplomatic achievement and a great victory for evangelical activists.

However, US efforts to bring peace to southern Sudan were complicated by developments in the western parts of the country. In February 2003 the Sudanese government, facing another insurgency in the western region

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of Darfur, launched a ground and aerial assault that killed many civilians. Despite considerable progress in North–South negotiations, the Darfur crisis gradually escalated, killing hundreds of thousands and leaving more than 2m refugees. In April 2004, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum issued its first-ever ‘genocide alert’, citing conditions in Darfur.⁷⁰ The American Jewish World Service and 100 evangelical and human-rights groups joined forces to form the Save Darfur Coalition.

The coalition's campaign seemed capable of exerting some influence on foreign policy, especially with the US election approaching. In July 2004, the US Congress adopted a resolution branding the attacks by militias allied with the Sudanese government as ‘genocide’. Powell also described the Darfur tragedy as genocide, the first time Congress or such a senior official had labelled a crisis with the term.⁷¹ In August 2004, 35 evangelical leaders signed a letter urging the president to provide massive humanitarian aid and consider sending US troops to stop the killing.⁷²

This time, no Christian victims were involved: it was a Muslim-against-Muslim affair. In January 2005 the UN published the results of its own investigation into the Darfur atrocities, concluding that the violent attacks

on civilians stemmed from counter-insurgency tactics and that, despite the claims of evangelical activists and the US administration, genocide was not committed. Nevertheless, the evangelical activists continued with their campaign. On 26 April 2006, five members of Congress were arrested after protesting outside the Sudanese Embassy in Washington over atrocities in Darfur. That same day the president met with Darfur advocates in the White House and lent his support to rallies planned in more than a dozen cities around the United States: 'The genocide in Sudan is unacceptable', Bush told them.⁷³ In autumn 2006, a group called Evangelicals for Darfur, created and backed by Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Association of Evangelicals, asked Bush to take the lead in sending a peacekeeping force to western Sudan.⁷⁴

In short, the evangelical community played a crucial role not only in placing Sudan on the US government agenda but also in affecting its actual policy toward this African country. And it continued to do so even after the signing of the North–South peace accord. As Danforth put it, Sudan became 'a very, very high priority ... something that was of personal interest' to Bush.⁷⁵ This does not mean, however, that evangelical influence over US Africa policy will decline once Bush leaves the White House. On the contrary, there is reason to expect that evangelicals will continue to shape US policies even after Barack Obama is sworn in as US president on 20 January 2009.

The future

Several observers seriously question the practice of treating evangelicals as a single group. It is a great mistake, some argue, to lump all evangelicals 'together into one mass and then confound the lumping by quoting the wackiest people you can find'.⁷⁶ In a recent article, one leading evangelical noted that by putting all evangelicals 'into one indistinguishable mass we cede to the religious Right more weight and power than it deserves'.⁷⁷

However, in the case of evangelical interest in US policy towards Africa, this argument partly loses its analytical power. Here, the evangelical community is less divided than on any other domestic or foreign-policy issue.⁷⁸ And relative unity means greater potential for influence. Evangelical cam-

paigns to address African poverty and the conflict in Sudan show clearly that the movement's influence over US Africa policy is not only real but is probably much deeper, more consistent and more able to survive a change of US administration than the evangelical impact on any other area of US external relations.

Some commentators argue that the evangelical interest in US foreign policy is and will continue to be circumstantial and inconsistent. Mark Galli, editor of the leading evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, recently claimed that US evangelicals are only interested in 'specific problems that affect specific people in specific ways'. 'We will continue to have flashes of international genius', he added, 'but in all, our unique contribution to the world lies elsewhere.'⁷⁹ However, the African and global-poverty agendas have the potential to become exceptions. It is in relation to these agendas that the evangelical 'flashes of international genius' are more likely to appear in the near future. Moreover, these flashes have probably more potential to influence *real* foreign-policy decisions than US evangelical interest in any other region or country (including Israel). There are three reasons for this.

Firstly, in their interest in these issues evangelicals are not alone. The themes of Africa and global poverty offer ample opportunities for cooperation not only with other religious groups (such as Roman Catholics) but with other segments of civil society, including left-wing activists, humanitarian NGOs and ethnic (such as the African-American) lobbies. Common cause can also be made with African governments: several African leaders, such as Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, have already used their evangelical credentials to build support in Washington.⁸⁰

Secondly, in relation to Africa and its development, any US administration is susceptible to the demands of public opinion. As Africa was – and still is – more marginal in US foreign policy than probably any other world region, any president, regardless of political affiliation, can satisfy evangelical demands for policy change relatively easily, avoiding the need for compromise with other domestic interests or foreign-policy objectives. This is often not the case with other regions or countries. The *Economist* reported, for example, that Bush 'brushed aside evangelical worries about government persecutions of Christians' in China.⁸¹ Here, strategic objectives, realist

calculations and business interests superseded evangelical worries.

Thirdly, in a period which has seen the international image of the United States decline, evangelicals in Africa are one of the strongest pro-American groups in the less-developed world. Although African evangelicals can be stubbornly independent and often align themselves with the African left,⁸² they generally hold a very positive view of the United States. In the words of liberal evangelical and Oklahoma State Senator Andrew Rice,

Grateful for years of patronage by their American brethren, bound by a sense of fellowship to the nation where the contemporary evangelical movement was formed, and respectful of born-again President Bush, these Africans represent a growing constituency of friends.⁸³

The US evangelical community's international connections are important for any American government. They wield a kind of soft power that neither a Republican nor a Democratic president could ignore. Although Americans will see many changes in US policy when President Obama takes office in January 2009, a change in the country's Africa policy is unlikely to be among them. In short, evangelical influence on US foreign policy towards Africa is here to stay.

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Notes

¹ A. Kohut, J.C. Green, S. Keeter and R.C. Toth (eds), *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 18; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The American Religious Landscape and Politics*, 2005, [http://](http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/green.pdf)

pewforum.org/publications/surveys/green.pdf.

² Given this variety, some analysts have expressed doubts whether the concept 'evangelical' is analytically useful (see George Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

- 1984); Donald W. Dayton, 'Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category "Evangelical"', in Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (eds), *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 245–51). Nevertheless, most observers continue to use the term, claiming that there is 'unity in diversity' and that evangelical Christianity in the United States can be regarded as an 'extended family' (see, among others: D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)). After all, US evangelical denominations are largely represented by the National Association of Evangelicals, an umbrella organisation founded in 1942 that claims to speak for 30 million Christians.
- ³ Martin Durham, 'Evangelical Protestantism and Foreign Policy in the United States after September 11', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 147–54; Jeremy D. Mayer, 'Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Toward the Middle East: Israel's New Best Friends?', *Social Sciences Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 3, September 2004, pp. 695–710.
- ⁴ Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (London: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp. 243–4.
- ⁵ Several Christian grassroots organisations with a political agenda appeared in the early 1980s. Probably the most important was Moral Majority, an organisation led by the evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell, whose rallying cry of 'get 'em saved, get 'em baptised, get 'em registered' marked the beginning of the contemporary era of politicisation. By the mid 1980s, partly reflecting a disappointment with President Ronald Reagan's lack of interest in banning abortion and reinstating school prayer, Moral Majority was replaced by a number of politically more active evangelical organisations such as the Christian Coalition of the cable-television mogul Pat Robertson and Focus on the Family, led by radio broadcaster James Dobson. See William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1997); William Martin, 'The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy*, vol. 114, Spring 1999, pp. 66–80.
- ⁶ 'The Triumph of the Religious Right – American Values', *Economist*, 11 November 2004, http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=3375543. Evangelical voters played a significant role in the 2000 presidential election, especially in the states President Bush won in the electoral college. In total, 78% of all evangelicals voted Republican, bringing to the White House an evangelical president (see 'The Triumph of the Religious Right – American Values'). Many observers viewed George W. Bush as an exceptionally religious president (Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush* (New York: Tarcher, 2003), pp. xvii–xviii). There was ample evidence for this: the new president prayed often, read the Bible every day and argued that his faith formed his general 'frame of mind, and attitude

and outlook' (Interview with Steve Waldman, *Beliefnet*, October 2000, http://www.beliefnet.com/story/47/story_4703_3.html). His first major appointees included several born-again Christians such as Condoleezza Rice, speechwriter Michael Gerson and Attorney General John Ashcroft. Moreover, the new president established an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in the White House. In March 2003, *Newsweek* characterised his presidency as the 'most resolutely "faith based" in modern times' (Howard Fineman, 'Bush and God', *Newsweek*, 10 March 2004, p. 25). Not unexpectedly, evangelical voters became Bush's most ardent supporters, securing him a second term in 2004, when about one-third of the extra votes he received were cast by the evangelical community. 'The Republican Party does not have the head count ... to elect a president without the support of the religious right', Jerry Falwell said confidently in 2004 (Quoted in Frances FitzGerald, 'The Evangelical Surprise', *New York Review of Books*, vol. 54, no. 7, 26 April 2007, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/20131>). This seems to be a correct statement: it is estimated that evangelicals now account for more than 40% of the Republican voter base (see 'The Triumph of the Religious Right – American Values').

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