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A Strange Friend ?: The Role of Evangelical Christians in the Making of United States Foreign Policy Towards Africa

About a quarter of US citizens claim to be evangelicals, or “born-again” Christians.¹ However, the evangelical community in the United States is not homogeneous.² Though to a large extent Baptist or Methodist, the evangelical camp is very broad, containing a number of quite different denominations. Given this variety, some analysts have expressed doubts whether the concept “evangelical” is analytically useful.³ Nevertheless, most academic 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”. After all, the US evangelical denominations are largely represented by the *National Association of Evangelicals*, an umbrella-organisation founded in 1942 that claims to represent 30 million Christians. Member-organisations are theologically conservative viewing the Bible as the sole authority for faith and strongly promote preaching and evangelism.⁴ Evangelicals are the “Christians of certainty”. They believe that the biblical scripture is inerrant, they stress individual decision to choose God (including “new birth” or personal conversion experience), develop a strong personal relationship with Christ and emphasize fellowship with other co-believers in a community of “brothers and sisters”.

Although the proportion of mainline Protestants and Catholics in US Christianity is decreasing, that of evangelicals is increasing.⁵ There are many reasons that explain this development in religious demographics. One of them is the strong message, a “blessed assurance”, of a heavenly reward. But a crucial factor in explaining their success is their increasing sophistication and their well-organised networks.⁶ During the last three decades, U.S. evangelicals have developed strong and complex connections. Animated by distress over the secularism of American culture, they have created alternative schools and

¹ Andrew Kohut, John C. Green, Scott Keeter and Robert C. Toth, eds, *The Diminishing Divide. Religion's Changing Role in American Politics*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000, p. 18. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, their adherents are estimated to range from 40 to 75 million (see infra.).

² Harold Perkin, ‘American Fundamentalism and the Selling of God’, *The Political Quarterly*, 71, August 2000, pp. 79-89.

³ G. Marsden, ‘The Evangelical Denomination’, in G. Marsden, ed., *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, Grand Rapids: 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. 245-251.

⁴ Robert K. Johnston, ‘American evangelicalism: An extended family’, in *ibid.*, pp. 252-272.

⁵ Walter Russell Mead, ‘God’s Country?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (5), 2006, pp. 33-34.

⁶ Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

colleges; had alternative books published by such well-known houses as Warner Books and Bertelsmann that are keen to reach this market; and developed a whole range of alternative entertainment producing music, films and television programs.⁷ As Robert Putnam writes, “American evangelicals have built the largest, best-organized grassroots social networks of the last quarter century.”⁸

Until the late 1970s the evangelicals were not very much involved in US politics. A large proportion of them did not even bother to vote in presidential elections. However, there was a process of gradual politicisation initiated mainly by interest in domestic issues like abortion or gay marriage and strengthened by Republican party officials looking for new constituencies.⁹ Several Christian grassroots organizations with a political agenda appeared in the early 1980s. Probably the most important of them was the *Moral Majority* led by the evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell. However by the mid-1980s, partly reflecting a disappointment with Reagan’s little interest in banishing abortion and reinstating school prayer, the *Moral Majority* was replaced by a number of very active evangelical organizations like the *Christian Coalition* of the cable television mogul Pat Robertson and the *Focus on the Family* of the radio broadcaster James Dobson.

But the evangelical political clout increased spectacularly by the late 1990s. George W. Bush was more effective than any previous candidate for the US presidency in mobilising the tremendous voting potential of the US evangelical community. Evangelical voters played a significant role in the contested 2000 presidential election, especially in the states President Bush won in the electoral college: in total 78 percent of all evangelicals voted Republican bringing to the White House an evangelical president.¹⁰ The words of an analyst who observed in 1999 that “anyone who expects to make sense of American politics, domestic or foreign, over the short or long term, must accept that religious conservatives have become an enduring and important part of the social landscape” seemed to become prophetic.¹¹

Many observers viewed George W. Bush as an exceptionally religious president.¹² 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”¹³. His first major appointees included several born-again Christians, such as Condoleezza Rice, speech writer Michael Gerson

⁷ Melani McAlister, ‘An empire of their own’, *The Nation*, September 22, 2003; Martin Blake, ‘Stations of the Cross: How Evangelical Christians Are Creating an Alternative Universe of Faith-Based News’, *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 2005.

⁸ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001, p. 162.

⁹ Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, London: Pearson/Longman, 2007, pp. 243-244.

¹⁰ ‘The triumph of the religious right’, *The Economist*, November 11, 2004.

¹¹ William Martin, ‘The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Policy*, No 114, September 1999, pp. 68-80.

¹² Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush*, New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2003, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹³ Interview with Steve Waldman, Beliefnet, 2000 (http://www.beliefnet.com/stoty/47/story_4703.html).

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* characterized his presidency as the “most resolutely ‘faith based’ in modern times”.¹⁴ 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. It is estimated that evangelicals now account for more than 40 percent of the Republican voter base.¹⁵

For decades, evangelical groups focused mainly on domestic issues, such as abortion and gay marriage. They were considered to be America’s staunchest isolationists, with the exception of their strong anti-communist views and their support for Israel.¹⁶ However, in recent years the evangelical political agenda has shifted more and more to foreign affairs. In the words of an analyst, the evangelicals became America’s “newest internationalists”.¹⁷ This development is mainly due to two factors.

First, their missionary activities. Until the early 1950s, the majority of US Protestant missions in the Third World was drawn from mainline denominations.¹⁸ However, by the late 1980s, “nine out of ten American protestant missionaries were evangelical”.¹⁹ A combination of growing self-confidence and impressive economic resources (more than two billion dollars annually) explain this shift.²⁰ Evangelical missions have become a big industry in Africa showing historically unprecedented growth rates. Only in Kenya in the early 1990s there were at least 1,300 American protestant missionaries.²¹ In the second half of the 1990s, the number of US evangelicals that fanned out across the globe on proselytizing missions reached record levels. According to some estimates, nearly 350,000 Americans undertook such missions in 2001, eight times as many as in 1996.²² In 2002, the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the most important US evangelical denominations, spent \$290 million abroad, mainly in Asia and Africa, establishing more than 8,000 churches and baptizing more than 421,000 converts.²³ In July-September 2005, the BBC’s *Focus on Africa* reported:

¹⁴ Howard Fineman, ‘Bush and God’, *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003, p. 25.

¹⁵ ‘The Triumph of the Religious Right – American Values’, *The Economist*, November 13, 2004.

¹⁶ Martin Durham, ‘Evangelical Protestantism and Foreign Policy in the United States after September 11’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 38 (2), 2004, pp. 147-154; Jeremy D. Mayer, ‘Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Toward the Middle East: Israel’s New Best Friends?’, *Social Sciences Quarterly*, Vol. 85 (3), September 2004, pp. 695-710.

¹⁷ Nicholas Kristof, ‘Following God Abroad’, *The New York Times*, 21 May 2002.

¹⁸ Julie Hearn, ‘The “Invisible NGO”: US Evangelical Missions in Kenya’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 32 (1), 2002, p. 39

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41

²² These figures do not include missionaries sponsored by individual churches, especially Pentecostal congregations. See Peter man, ‘Evangelicals give US foreign policy an activist tinge’, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2004.

²³ ‘Right on: Bob Geldof and Bono have some unlikely friends in America’, *The Economist*, June 30, 2005.

“Africa is being colonized and christianized all over again. The colonizers this time are Americans not Europeans and the brand of belief they are bringing to Africa is Evangelical Christianity”.

Evangelical missionaries returning to the United States were acutely aware of the poverty and oppression they had encountered in these less developed countries. Above all, they were interested in the persecution of Christians in countries like Burma/Myanmar and the Sudan. They played a crucial role in persuading their organisations to mobilise in support of the persecuted co-believers. As a result of their interest in the “suffering church” in third world countries, evangelical groups attempted to direct American foreign policy in defence of Christian minorities worldwide. The National Association of Evangelicals embarked in 1996 upon a highly coordinated campaign that included public gatherings, private meetings with officials in Washington DC and a strong media coverage aiming at changing US foreign policy towards countries that were persecuting Christians.²⁴ The Association finally persuaded a reluctant Clinton administration to introduce the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998. Although initially Clinton tried to underplay its significance, it soon became clear that the Act created three significant government bodies to monitor and respond to violations of religious freedom.²⁵

The second factor that played a crucial role in the evangelical interest in foreign affairs is September 11. In the three presidential elections prior to 2004, less than 2 per cent of evangelicals mentioned foreign policy as “the most important issue” that the US was facing. However, after 9/11 attitudes spectacularly changed: now about a third of evangelical Christians named foreign policy as the most important issue in the country’s agenda.²⁶ But September 11 did not only change the views of the evangelical community but those of the US president as well. America was now at war. And it was not only a war of revenge but also a war for ideals (exporting democracy). As an analyst has aptly observed, the terrorist attacks transformed Bush from a “self-help Methodist” to a “messianic Calvinist”.²⁷ Since September 11 George W. Bush set out to remake the world. His transformation from a lamb to a lion,²⁸ was a crucial factor in raising the interest of his supporters, the evangelical Christians, for foreign affairs. If the United States decided to become the “moral leader”, a “force of good” for the world, then evangelicals had clearly a role to play.

Of course, apart of the above factors, some structural changes affected the influence of the evangelicals for international affairs. Among these factors of

²⁴ Elizabeth A. Casteli, ‘Praying for the Persecuted Church: US Christian Activism in the Global Arena’, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 4, 2005, pp. 321-351.

²⁵ Julie Mertus, ‘Raising expectations ? Civil society’s influence on human rights and US foreign policy’, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 3 (1), March 2004, p. 32.

²⁶ John C. Green, ‘The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004’, Ray C. Bliss Institute, University of Akron, 2005.

²⁷ Jim Wallis, ‘Dangerous religion: George W. Bush’s theology of empire’, *Sojourners*, September-October 2003, pp. 20-26.

²⁸ Jason Berggren and Nicol C. Rae, ‘Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36 (4), December 2006, p. 620.

particular importance were the development of the Web that provided not only an important means for information but also a critical networking and organising tool and the new emphasis on norms and values in the conduct of foreign policy.²⁹ Here, there was clearly a connection with the notion of the ‘persecuted church’ that had animated anti-Communist Christian networks in the Cold War period.

However, attempts to influence do not necessarily mean real influence. As Jeffrey Haynes argues, “the ability of a religious actor to translate *potential* ability into *actual* influence depends on several factors”.³⁰ Evangelicals exerted an “unprecedented” level of influence in Bush administration,³¹ but neither their interest in foreign policy nor the Bush administration’s receptiveness to their demands alone can explain their success. The evangelicals’ political leverage became more effective, partly because they began collaborating with non-evangelical groups, particularly Jewish organizations. Michael Horowitz, a former Reagan administration official and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute,³² was important in bringing about this alliance. On July 5, 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.³³ “Christians are the Jews of the 21st century” and the “victims of choice for thug regimes,” claimed Horowitz. Topping his list was “the imprisonment, beating, torture and selling into slavery of thousands of Christians in Sudan by the Islamic radical regime.” The article marked the beginning of a campaign for Horowitz, who 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 magazine *Christianity Today* called him the “Jew who is saving Christians”³⁴. Jewish organizations like the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Anti-Defamation League joined the evangelicals in the campaign for religious freedom in Africa and elsewhere.³⁵ In April 2001 Horowitz was arrested (along with radio talk-show host Joe Maddison and former Washington, D.C. delegate Walter E. Fauntroy) after they chained themselves to the fence in front of the embassy of the Sudan protesting slavery and anti-Christian genocide.³⁶

Steady campaigning by evangelicals concerned about the Khartoum’s government efforts to impose its will on the predominantly Christian and animist southern part of the country, played a prominent role in a US government intervention to end Sudan’s civil war, a war that had claimed more than 2 million lives. The next section examines the evangelical influence on US foreign policy towards Africa’s largest country.

²⁹ Jeffrey Haynes, An Introduction to..., *op. cit.*, p. 253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

³¹ Esther Kaplan, *With God on their Side: George W. Bush and the Christian Right*, New York: New Press, 2004.

³² David Aikman, ‘Avoiding a Holocaust’, *Charisma*, July 1, 1996.

³³ Joshua Green, ‘God’s Foreign Policy’, *The Washington Monthly*, November 2001, p. 28.

³⁴ Michael Cromantie, ‘The Jew who is saving Christians’, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 43 (3), March 1999, pp. 50-55.

³⁵ Allen D. Hertzke and Daniel Philpott, ‘Defending the Faiths’, *The National Interest*, Vol. 61, Fall 2000, p. 75.

³⁶ Al Kamen, ‘Protest Makes Odd Bedfellows’, *The Washington Post*, April 30, 2001.

The Sudan³⁷

Many evangelicals were involved in an anti-slavery movement that emerged in the early 1990s, originally led by the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group.³⁸ For evangelical groups like Christian Solidarity International, slavery in Sudan became a central issue. A systematic effort for the “redemption” of “Christian” southern Sudanese slaves 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,³⁹ 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 U.S. foreign policy the Sudan.

The US evangelicals interest in Sudan coincided with the interest of humanitarian and development NGOs that were very embarrassed by the continued interference of the Sudanese government in the workings of Operation Lifeline Sudan, a consortium providing humanitarian assistance to the southern regions 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.⁴⁰ The Rev. Franklin Graham, founder of the faith-based *Samaritan Purse*, which run 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.”⁴¹ Graham tried to publicize the plight of Sudan by flying Senator Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) 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.”⁴²

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

³⁷ This section draws heavily from the article by Asteris Huliaras, ‘Evangelists, Oil Companies and Terrorists: The Bush Administration’s Policy towards Sudan’, *Orbis*, Fall 2006, pp. 709-724

³⁸ Walid Phares, ‘The Sudanese Battle for American Opinion’, *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1998, p. 8.

³⁹ For a critical background see Human Rights Watch, ‘Slavery and Slave Redemption in Sudan’, March 2002 (<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/sudanupdate.htm>) and Richard Minter, ‘The False Promise of Slave Redemption’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1999 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jul/9907sudanslaves.htm>).

⁴⁰ Matthias Muindi, ‘Sudan: Christian Right Might Inflamm War, Observers Fear’, *Africanews*, May 2001; ‘NGOs fighting over US Policy towards Sudan’, *Executive Intelligence Review*, May 28, 1999.

⁴¹ Raymond L. Brown, *American Foreign Policy Toward the Sudan: From Isolation to Engagement*, National War College, National Defense University, April 2003, p. 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*; Farah Stockman, ‘Christian Lobbying Finds Success: Evangelicals Help to Steer Bush Efforts’, *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 14, 2004.

to ask the new administration to intercede in the civil war in Sudan. Rove, according to the participants in the meeting, was “unusually receptive.”⁴³ 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 the evangelicals and African-American lobbyists.

For African-American activists, building alliances with other lobbies was highly desirable, considering that their influence on U.S. foreign policy was in decline.⁴⁴ The removal by illness of Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan, who was a defender of the Islamic government of Sudan, helped the rapprochement between African-Americans and the evangelicals.⁴⁵ African-American groups like the National Black Leadership Committee and the NAACP banded with evangelical groups, and the anti-Khartoum coalition became a significant political force.

In March 2001, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent government entity created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, 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. The 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.” One week after these comments, Powell commissioned a review of US policy toward Sudan.

Early after coming to power, George W. Bush had announced that he would abandon the Clinton practice of assigning special envoys. But under the pressure of evangelicals and their allies, the administration changed its position. In May 2001, Bush appointed USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, a man with strong connections with the evangelical community, as the U.S. Special Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan. And in August 2001, the President appointed John Danforth, a moderate Episcopalian priest and former senator, as US special envoy for Sudan’s peace process. The ceremony took place in the White House Rose Garden on September 6 and was attended by Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and many leading evangelicals.

Two months before, in June 2001, Congress had passed the Sudan Peace Act, a bill that made available to President Bush up to \$10 million per year in non-lethal aid to rebel-controlled areas. It also threatened further sanctions against Khartoum if its president could not certify every six months that the regime was negotiating in good will. The Act was praised as an expression of unity among a diverse group of lobbyists. Congressman Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) joked that in all his thirty years in Congress he had never before been on the same platform with Dick Arney (R-Tex.). The bill was a victory for activists who had

⁴³ Elisabeth Bumiller, ‘Religious Lobby Finds a Good Friend in Bush’, *International Herald Tribune*, Oct. 27, 2003.

⁴⁴ Adekeyo Adebajo, ‘Africa, African Americans, and the Avuncular Sam’, *Africa Today*, Vol. 50 (3), September 2004, p. 99.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Sudan, Oil and Human Rights* (London, 2003), p. 486.

been campaigning against oil companies' doing business in Sudan since the mid-1990s. This divestment campaign had especially targeted *Talisman Energy*, a Canadian oil company with a significant presence in Sudanese oilfields. By April 2001, under the pressure of the anti-Sudan evangelical activists, several American states, including New Jersey, and many US pension funds had divested from *Talisman*.⁴⁶ In early 2002, Danforth reported to the president and advocated continued U.S. engagement in Sudan. In July 2002, under the strong pressure of Washington, Khartoum and the rebels finally signed an agreement in Machakos, Kenya. The Machakos Protocol that acknowledged the right of southern Sudanese to self-determination was a power-sharing agreement under which Sudan became a federal state with two governments that shared the newly-found oil resources. It was a great success of US diplomacy and a unique victory for evangelical activists.

However, Danforth's efforts at pushing for a peace agreement between the North and the South were complicated by developments in western Sudan. In February 2003 the Sudanese government launched a ground and aerial assault on Darfur. Trying to sustain momentum in the North-South negotiations, the United States and other international players initially acquiesced to Khartoum's aggression. However, when the government and the rebels "failed to conclude a 'final deal' in time for Bush's state-of-the-union address in late January 2004, . . . Washington publicly protested Khartoum's show of force in Darfur."⁴⁷

Despite considerable progress in the negotiations, the Darfur crisis gradually escalated, killing hundreds of thousands and leaving more than 2 million refugees. In April 2004, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum issued for Darfur its first-ever "genocide alert." The American Jewish World Service and a hundred 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 making, especially with the US election day approaching. In July 2004, Congress adopted a resolution branding the attacks by militias allied with the Sudanese government as "genocide." Secretary of State Colin Powell also described the Darfur tragedy as "genocide." "Never before," wrote an analyst, "had Congress or such senior US officials labeled an ongoing crisis 'genocide.'"⁴⁸ In August 2004, thirty-five evangelical leaders signed a letter urging the president to provide massive humanitarian aid and consider sending US troops to stop the "genocide".⁴⁹

Many observers were also puzzled with the evangelical emphasis on Darfur, since no Christian victims were involved: it was a Muslim-against-Muslim affair. But as an analyst aptly noted, the Darfur tragedy reverberated

⁴⁶ Hishaam D. Aidi, 'Slavery, Genocide and the Politics of Outrage: Understanding the New "Racial Olympics"', *Middle East Report*, Spring 2005, p. 12; Ted Dagne, 'Sudan: Humanitarian Crisis, Peace Talks, Terrorism, and U.S. Policy', CRS Issue Brief for Congress, Sept. 27, 2004, p. 12; Michael T. Klare and Daniel Volman, 'Africa's Oil and American National Security', *Current History*, May 2004, p. 229.

⁴⁷ IISS, *Strategic Survey 2003-4*, London: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 324.

⁴⁸ Scott Straus, 'Darfur and the Genocide Debate', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005, p. 129

⁴⁹ Alan Cooperman, 'Evangelicals Urge Bush To Do More for Sudan', *The Washington Post*, August 3, 2004.

deeply in the United States because it was misrepresented as a racial conflict between “Arabs” and “indigenous Africans” that corresponded well with the deep-seated view of an “Arab-Islamic threat.”²⁰ In January 2005 the UN published the results of its own investigation of the Darfur atrocities, concluding that the violent attacks on civilians stemmed from counterinsurgency tactics and that, despite the claims of evangelical activists and the US administration, genocide was not committed.

The evangelical activists continued their campaign. On April 26, 2006, five members of Congress were arrested after protesting outside the Sudanese embassy in Washington over atrocities in Darfur. The 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.⁵⁰

In short, the evangelical community played a critical role not only in placing Sudan on the US government agenda but also affecting its policies toward the 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” for US foreign policy. “It was very much in the news, it was a matter, it was of great interest to Christian conservatives in the United States, a good part of President Bush’s base, and it was something that was of personal interest to him”.⁵¹

But Sudan was not the only case where evangelical activists influenced US foreign policy towards Africa.

Poverty and Disease

Within the last decade, US evangelical interest in foreign affairs has focused on combating poverty – 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”.⁵²

A good example is Rick Warren, a very influential pastor in California, whose book *The Purpose-Driven Life* has sold 25 million copies (more than any other hardback edition in US history).⁵³ Within the last years, one of his main objectives became the fight against poverty and disease in the developing world and his Saddleback Church decided to send thousands of volunteers to combat poverty in Africa, starting from Rwanda. In 2005, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his Church, Mr Warren brought to a stadium filled with tens of thousands of his supporters the President of Rwanda who took the microphone to thank Warren for helping “rebuild his country”. And Mr Warren’s interest in Africa is not an isolated initiative in the american evangelical community that

⁵⁰ Andrew Miga, ‘5 Lawmakers Arrested At Darfur Protest’, *The Washington Post*, April 28, 2006.

⁵¹ John Danforth interview, *BBC*, 3 July 2005, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

⁵² ‘Right on: Bob Geldof and Bono have some unlikely friends in America’, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Malcolm Gladwell, ‘The Cellular Church: How Rick Warren Built his Ministry’, *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2005.

journalists like to promote. The fight against poverty and disease in the Black continent has become one of the main interests of US evangelicals – influencing even policy decisions.

Several observers have argued that Bush's decision to increase spectacularly US aid to Africa (including much spending on the fight against HIV/AIDS) was partly a response to evangelical demands.⁵⁴ 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". "He should also known" added Rice, "for the largest single investment in AIDS and malaria, the biggest health investment of any government program ever".⁵⁵ Although these presidential initiatives reflected more cynical priorities related to the growing strategic importance of Africa with regard to terrorism and resources (particularly oil), it seems that the decision to increase spending partly reflected the influence of the evangelicals. It has been reported that when George W. Bush asked his speech-writer and fellow evangelical Michael Gerson about a plan to spend \$15 billion fighting AIDS the answer was: "Mr President, if this is possible, and we don't do it, we will never be forgiven".⁵⁶ Not unexpectedly, Mr Gerson has been characterized as "the conscience of the White House".⁵⁷ Interestingly, the content of the US program on AIDS was heavily influenced by the president's evangelical backers, emphasising abstinence and faithfulness at the expense of condom distribution. In 2003, under the influence of groups like the *Focus on the Family*, the US administration decided to introduce a three-pronged strategy against Aids, based on promoting abstinence, faithfulness and only, when appropriate, condoms.⁵⁸

As a result the program has faced heavy criticism from many activists and health experts. Among the critics, the UN secretary-general's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa has accused the United States policy arguing that its emphasis on abstinence has contributed to a shortage of condoms in some African countries like Uganda.⁵⁹ "To impose a dogma-driven policy that is fundamentally flawed is doing damage to Africa" said the UN official.

But the influence of evangelicals was also evident and in US development assistance programs that do not focus on AIDS. For decades. US policy avoided intermingling aid programs and religious proselytizing. This has partly been abandoned. President Bush has almost doubled the percentage of US aid going to faith-based organisations and, despite imposing some restrictions mainly at the request of the Congress, the separation between religious services and donor

⁵⁴ Daniel Bergner, 'The Call', *New York Times Magazine*, January 29, 2005.

⁵⁵ Michael A. Fletcher, 'Bush has Quietly Tripled Aid to Africa', *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2006.

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Bumiller. 'White House Letter: Last-minute touches for Bush's speech writer', *International Herald Tribune*, January 17, 2005; 'Right on: Bob Geldof and Bono have some unlikely friends in America', *The Economist*, June 30, 2005.

⁵⁷ 'Foreign policy: In the world of good and evil', *The Economist*, September 14, 2006.

⁵⁸ Michael Kranish, 'Religious right wields clout: Secular groups losing funding amid pressure', *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 2006.

⁵⁹ Jeevan Vasagar and Julian Borger, 'Bush accused of AIDS damage to Africa', *The Guardian*, August 30, 2005.

activities became more blurred than ever.⁶⁰ After all, since many religious organisations combine private and public money, they feel unrestricted about proselytizing as long as they can argue that they were using private money. In 2006, the US government's General 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".⁶¹

Conclusion

Several observers of US politics are seriously questioning the view that lumps together all evangelicals in a single group when examining their political views. A sizeable number of evangelicals, they note, do not share the uncritical superpatriotism and the disdain for the United Nations that the religious Right exhibits. Neither these evangelicals support Bush's domestic or foreign policy decisions. David Neff, the editor of *Christianity Today*, the leading 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.

Walter Russel Mead of the Council of Foreign Relations makes a crucial distinction between fundamentalists and evangelicals.⁶² Though both groups embrace biblical literalism, he argues, they are very different in their political views and orientation. The evangelicals tend to be more politically active while the fundamentalists are more pessimistic and introvertive. Many agree arguing that it is a great mistake to lump all evangelicals "together into one mass and then confound the lumping by quoting the wackiest people you can find".⁶³ In a recent article, a leading evangelical notes that "by lumping evangelicals and fundamentalists into one indistinguishable mass we cede to the religious Right more weight and power than it deserves".⁶⁴

Moreover, there is evidence to believe that even the influence of the religious Right and the religiosity of George W. Bush's administration are overestimated by many journalistic accounts. As an analyst aptly comments, 'Bush in fact swims within the mainstream of presidential religiosity' and 'any likely Republican president, born again or not, would behave much the same way'.⁶⁵ The evidence is that Bush's moralistic rhetoric does not place him outside the American foreign policy tradition at times of war. 'Bush', writes this observer,

⁶⁰ Farah Stockman, Michael Kranish, Peter S. Canellos and Kevin Baron, 'Bush brings faith to foreign aid', *The Boston Globe*, October 8, 2006.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Walter Russel Mead, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.

⁶³ 'In the world of good and evil', *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Peggy L. Shriver, 'Evangelicals and World Affairs', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 23 (3), p. 58.

⁶⁵ Leo P. Ribuffo, 'George W. Bush and the Latest Evangelical Menace', *Dissent*, Vol. 53 (4), Fall 2006, p. 42 and p. 46.

'seems to me the worst president since Nixon, but he is neither a zealot nor a simpleton'.⁶⁶

However, this paper has shown that evangelical influence on US foreign policy towards Africa is not only real but is probably much deeper, consistent and able to survive a change of US administration than the evangelical impact on any other area of US foreign policy. And there are four reasons for this:

First, issues like poverty and disease unite rather than divide right and left-wing evangelicals, fundamentalists or not. Also these issues do offer ample opportunities for co-operation with not only other religious groups (like the Catholics and Muslims) but also with the organised civil society in general, including left-wing activists, development NGOs and ethnic (like the Jewish-American and the Afro-american) lobbies. The anti-poverty agenda also fits well in the ideological landscape of the Democrats.

Secondly, Africa is far more marginal in US foreign policy than probably any other world region. This means that any (Republican or Democratic) US administration can satisfy evangelical demands in Africa much more easily, avoiding the need for compromises with other important foreign policy objectives. For example, in another case and in sharp contrast to Africa an eager to develop the trade relationship with China George W. Bush has "brushed aside evangelical worries about government persecutions of Christians".⁶⁷

Thirdly, within the 20th century the centre of gravity of evangelical Christianity has moved from the north to the south. In 1900 only 7 per cent of the world's evangelicals lived in the area we describe as the Third World. By 1985 this share has shifted to 66 per cent⁶⁸ and continues to rise. This demographic shift means that for US evangelicals Africa is becoming more and more important. Moreover, as more African leaders and politicians are evangelicals, they are more likely to use their religious credentials to build support in Washington. Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda have used their evangelical identity to increase their political clout in the United States.

Fourthly, in a period where the international image of the United States is probably more negative than ever, evangelicals in Africa are one of the strongest pro-American groups in the developing world. In the words of an observer:

"Grateful for years of patronage by the 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".⁶⁹

The US evangelical community's international connections are important for any American government. They wield a kind of soft power that neither a Republican

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ 'In the world of good and evil', *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ J. Nederveen Pieterse, ed., *Christianity and Hegemony: Religion and Politics on the Frontier of Social Change*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Andrew Rice, 'Evangelicals v. Muslims in Africa: Enemy's Enemy', *The New Republic*, August 9, 2004, p. 19.

nor a Democrat President could ignore. In short the evangelical influence on US foreign policy towards Africa is here to stay and grow.

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