

# 19 Religion

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## Chapter contents

Introduction

Religion and US foreign policy during the Cold War

Support for Israel

Global War on Terror

Faith-based diplomacy

Conclusion

## Introduction

It is perhaps no coincidence that the influence of religion on US foreign policy is making its first appearance in this the third edition of this key textbook on US foreign policy. Religion has been largely unacknowledged as a factor in international relations until comparatively recently. This is particularly surprising when considering US foreign policy, representing a country which has been unapologetically religious from the arrival of puritan settlers in the seventeenth century to the present day where religious actors have a profound influence on the outcome of elections, whether it is white conservative evangelical support for Republican candidates or African American and Jewish support for Democrats. This chapter does not claim that religion is the decisive factor in US foreign policy but does argue

that understanding the role of religion is necessary to develop our understanding of the subject and a failure to do so presents an incomplete picture.

Religion is indelibly part of American culture and identity. John Winthrop's vision of a 'city upon a hill', serving as an example to other nations of obedience to God and a demonstration of his blessing, undergirds America's sense of itself as a chosen nation. America's white protestant heritage has been able to incorporate other faiths over successive generations to contribute to a shared identity based on foundational myths of manifest destiny, exceptionalism, being an 'innocent' nation pursuing right intentions and yet constantly maligned and misunderstood, and a civil religion which conflates the will of God and US national interests (Marsden 2011).

The founding fathers in 1776 declared that all men were 'endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights' and that an independent America would maintain 'a firm reliance on Divine Providence'. The first amendment to the Constitution separated religion and state ostensibly to protect religion from the power of the state and prevent an established church from dominating American society as it had in Britain. This enabled Christian, and later other faiths, to develop unfettered by state control, and remain a vital component of American society. The separation of church and state sought to differentiate between the private and public sphere and limit the role of religion in influencing policy and the state in influencing religion. Yet, religion has shaped the experience of individuals and communities throughout American history.

American notions of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are religious constructs, which when combined with exceptionalism, lead to the desire to propagate values, which successive administrations have held to be universal. In these values lay the roots of free markets, democracy and human rights promotion, humanitarian intervention and religious freedom. The classical realism of mid twentieth century international relations was informed

by views of human nature, deriving from the nation's Judeo-Christian heritage. The constructivist turn in international relations, which gives voice to ideational, identity and cultural norms as influences on foreign policy necessitates that we acknowledge the potential for religious faith to play such a role. This is especially pertinent in a culture where biennial elections afford citizens a regular voice in the political process.

The capacity of individual agents including presidents, secretaries of state, academics and public intellectuals to shape US foreign policy may be limited by structural constraints and yet who would seek to deny that the faith of a Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter or George W. Bush had a profound impact on their presidency? Even where the president's own faith might be minimal or non-existent they are still subject to the entreaties of religious leaders who minister to a significant proportion of the American population. Clearly religious actors do not all speak with one voice on the same issues and at certain periods influence will be greater than others. What this chapter seeks to achieve is to alert you, the reader, to the role religion has played and continues to play in US foreign policy despite its omission in so much of international relations theory and US foreign policy literature.

## **Religion and US foreign policy during the Cold War**

The United States emerged from the war as the preeminent world power and set about building a world order based on the principles of collective security, decolonisation and open markets through the United Nations and Bretton Woods' institutions. These were in part inspired by The Federal Council of Churches, consisting of mainline liberal Protestant denominations and intimately involved in post war planning, establishing a Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in December 1940. The commission produced the *Six Pillars of Peace* in 1943 which it considered essential components of a pacific world order. These

included the need for an overarching international organisation (United Nations), economic justice, reform of the world system, decolonisation, disarmament and the protection of individual freedoms of religion and intellectual liberty.

## **Truman**

Ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and United States turned into geopolitical competition from the earliest stages of the post war period. Religious actors in the United States across the faith spectrum had little doubt that the two systems were incompatible. For Truman the main factor differentiating Soviet communism from American liberalism was religion, from which individual liberty, conscience and democracy flow. A view reinforced by Christian realists Reinhold Niebuhr and George Kennan, the latter arguing that the Soviet Union represented a rival ideology, was not amenable to peaceful coexistence and should be contained (Kennan 1946, 1947). Truman reinforced this message arguing that the success of containment was dependent upon a moral offensive, which could only be supplied by religion (Truman 1950). This assumed greater significance as communist military strength and political influence grew in the aftermath of the war. The successful Soviet atomic bomb test and Mao Zedong's victory in China in 1949 was viewed in America, at least, through the prism of a dualistic world order. A narrative that evangelist Billy Graham, who was to become a confidant of successive presidents from Truman to George W. Bush, used effectively in religious crusades across America and the rest of the world (Graham, 1952, no date; Frost 2014).

## **Eisenhower**

Graham's anti-communism fitted well with the Republican administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower and growing anti-Soviet sentiment. Eisenhower was overt in his use of religious

imagery and faith to unite the nation, corresponding with a significant increase in religiosity across the decade. He introduced prayer in the inaugural address, before cabinet meetings and attended the National Prayer Breakfast, introduced 'Under God' to the pledge of allegiance and 'In God We Trust' to currency and as the nation's motto. In his first inaugural address he contrasted American faith to communism: 'Freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against the dark. The faith we hold belongs not to us alone but to the free of all the world' (Eisenhower 1953). Eisenhower was ably supported in his task by another committed Christian, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Dulles saw no division between his religious belief and US national interests and entered office determined to pursue policies designed to promote free enterprise, democracy and religious faith in a pacific world order which could only be assured by continuing policies of containment and constant vigilance. His family background of Presbyterian Calvinism gave him a missionary zeal and a belief in absolute good and absolute evil (Kinzer 2014). The outworking of Dulles and Eisenhower's dualism viewed international affairs through an ideological paradigm, where popular discontent was interpreted as communist expansionism which was to be resisted.

Democratic governments in Guatemalan and Iran were overthrown, US troops became embroiled in Vietnam and neutrality in the competition between the Soviet Union and United States was regarded as immoral and being pro-Moscow. Religious conservatives, who were replacing mainline Protestants as the dominant religious actors, supported such policies and coalesced around Dulles' anticommunism and American nationalism. Liberals, including the National Council of Churches, challenged the administration on its hypocrisy of castigating the immorality of communism while presiding over racial injustice and gross inequality at home. They urged dialogue with the Soviet Union, nuclear disarmament, human

rights, support international economic development, and for the People's Republic of China to replace Taiwan in the UN Security Council.

## **Kennedy and Johnson**

The 1960 election saw a narrow victory by John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic president. Catholicism at this time was regarded with deep suspicion by both the liberal and conservative protestant majority. Attempts by Truman and Eisenhower to enlist the support of the Vatican in an anti-communist crusade were met with suspicion by American protestant leaders which viewed Catholicism as another form of totalitarianism. In order to assuage this hostility Kennedy pledged that his faith was a private matter and that he would not be subject to instruction or influence from the Pope (Kennedy 1960). The overt religiosity of the three preceding presidents was replaced by an increasingly secular approach to governance and foreign policy.

The 1960s marked a significant shift in established norms and traditions within society across much of the world and America in particular. US anti-communism was challenged by a new generation which emphasised civil rights, love, peace, race, social justice and poverty over religiosity. Liberal theologians challenged the deity of Christ and increasingly emphasised a social gospel based on world peace and social justice, which they argued began at home and extended to US foreign policy. A new relativism, openness to eastern religion, non-violent resistance, existentialism, and liberation theology ensued. The Immigration and Nationality Act 1965 opened up a wave of immigration and further weakened white Anglo Saxon Protestant dominance.

The Vietnam War divided the country and increasingly became the main focus of discontent between liberal and conservative Christian and Jewish leaders. Those who had been active in the civil rights and disarmament campaigns of the 1950s and early 1960s now

coalesced around opposition to the war. Kennan and Niebuhr opposed the war on the basis of just war theory and being inimical to US interests. Martin Luther King led Christian opposition to the war through his co-chairmanship of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam lamenting that: 'the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government' (King 1967). Christian peace activists Norman Morrison and Roger Allen La Porte self-immolated in protest against the war, making a lasting impression on Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who witnessed the first of these incidents.

Religious opposition to the Vietnam War was by no means universal, however, with many Catholics supporting their co-religionist Ngo Dinh Diem's government against the Viet Cong. Conservative evangelicals in the American Council of Christian Churches and in the churches tended to support the war. Billy Graham, a personal friend and confidant of Lyndon B. Johnson, supported the war and urged support for the president in resisting the communist tide. Culture wars increasingly divided religious communities with conservative evangelicals, fundamentalists and Catholics increasingly uncomfortable with an increasingly liberal society.

### **Nixon, Ford and Carter**

In reaction to the cultural reformation of the 1960s white evangelicals, fundamentalists and Catholics became increasingly conservative and Republican as the Democratic Party grew more secular. Mainline Protestant churches experienced declining membership and influence as conservative evangelicals started to grow in numbers in response and opposition to cultural changes sweeping America. The increased separation of church and state enforced by the Supreme Court through the decision to legalise abortion in 1973 sent a clear message that the America was a secular state. The influence of the women's liberation movement, the adoption of a secular social gospel by mainline denominations and opposition to US foreign

policy all contributed to strengthening countervailing forces of evangelicalism and socially conservative Catholicism.

This pushback extended opposition to domestic reforms in society to the international arena. At home conservative evangelicals and Catholics opposed government interference in church and the states. In the international arena they added their support for policies which put American interests first, maintaining a strong military, pursuing unilateralist policies and opposing any attempts to constrain US interests by international organisations including the United Nations. Billy Graham maintained a close friendship with Richard Nixon, although there is little evidence to suggest that Nixon's foreign policy owed anything to the relationship. Indeed Kissinger's policy of *détente* smacked of an accommodation with atheistic communism. Religious freedom was an important issue for religious liberal and conservatives and through the Jackson-Vanik amendment in 1972 Nixon was prevented from offering most favoured nation status to the Soviet Union, or any other country, if they did not have an open emigration policy. The amendment was specifically targeted at the Soviet Union's reluctance to allow Soviet Jews to migrate to Israel.

Defeat in Vietnam, Watergate, the ineffectual Ford presidency and an increasingly liberal society prepared the ground for a religious right to emerge and play an active role in seeking to impact domestic and international politics. Jimmy Carter, a born again Christian, was seen as the antidote to Nixon's moral frailty and evangelicals held out great expectations that his presidency would roll back on core issues such as abortion and separation of church and state. Carter's faith impacted his policy in advocating for human rights but his unwillingness to advance evangelical causes and perceived weakness in foreign policy, at a time of the Iranian revolution and seizure of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 alienated many evangelicals.



## **Reagan and George H.W. Bush**

The increasing popularity of conservative religion and subsequent decline of mainstream denominations throughout the 1970s led to the formation of numerous socially conservative religious organisations. These included Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum (1972) dedicated to traditional family values and a strong US foreign policy, James Dobson's Focus on the Family (1977) and Family Research Council (1981), Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, the Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice and Concerned Women for America (1979). This new wave of organisations brought together right wing evangelicals and Catholics in a Christian Right, which found a new champion in California Governor Ronald Reagan.

Reagan, although not evangelical, was sufficiently religious and politically astute, to win the friendship of Graham and support of conservative evangelicals who were rapidly emerging as a significant force in domestic politics. Before the election he announced to a meeting of evangelical leaders in Dallas that although they could not endorse him, he was happy to endorse them. The Moral Majority which comprised white evangelicals, fundamentalists and white Catholics coalesced around opposition to abortion and gay rights, and support for school prayer, traditional family values, small government, a strong military and Israel. Reagan seemed the surer bet in reversing Roe vs. Wade and countering communism and other threats facing the United States. For evangelicals being courted by a contender for the presidency proved irresistible.

Reagan did open the doors of the White House to conservative evangelicals and instituted normal diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Although there were little gains for the religious right domestically, on foreign policy Reagan reintroduced a focus on civil religion. The conflict with the Soviet Union and communism was framed as religious conflict, a struggle between the forces of good and evil. The depiction of the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire' was given in an address to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983,

and reflected evangelical thoughts which viewed the Cold War through both a moral and ideological prism. The Christian Right supported the policy of increased arms expenditure, including nuclear proliferation, and opposing communist advances anywhere in the world, especially in Latin America.

For religious liberals in the mainstream denominations civil religion was no longer a unifying force but further divided religious actors. Religious liberals opposed US support of right wing dictatorships and death squads in Latin America. Catholic bishops and those churches with a peace testimony, including the Quakers, opposed the nuclear weapons programme. For conservative evangelicals Reagan represented the restoration of American pride and prestige after defeat in Vietnam and the debacle of the Iranian embassy siege.

While Reagan was feted his Vice President, Episcopalian George H. W. Bush, did not fare so well. While Reagan could make common cause with conservative evangelicals Bush remained somewhat aloof and awkward in their company. Although Jerry Falwell backed Bush in 1988 he was opposed in the primaries by televangelist Pat Robertson. Although Bush won the nomination and presidency he did so with reduced evangelical support. The campaign also marked a significant change in the strategy of the Christian Right. The outcome of Robertson's challenge was to persuade religious conservatives that rather than seek bipartisan influence they could achieve their aims more successfully by dominating the Republican Party.

In 1989 Robertson founded the Christian Coalition and began a process of taking over local Republican parties so that today the Christian Right makes up about forty percent of the Republican base, ensuring that they are able to influence the outcome of presidential, congressional and gubernatorial nominations. Bush lost the 1992 election, despite presiding over the end of the Cold War and decisive victory in the Gulf War, through a failure to reach the same levels of Christian Right support enjoyed by Reagan.

**[Insert KEY QUOTES 19.1: Religion and US Foreign Policy in the Cold War]**

**[Insert Keypoints 1]**

## **Support for Israel**

The US-Israel bilateral relationship is America's closest, developing and intensifying over the years. Truman's decision to recognise the state of Israel in 1948 was taken in opposition to clear advice from the foreign policy establishment, which emphasised US national interests were better served by support for Arab nations with their oil reserves, which were susceptible to Soviet influence. Truman's motivation may partly have been in order to secure the large Jewish vote in New York but was also influenced in no small measure by his Christian faith. Special Council to the President Clark Clifford recalled that Truman was influenced by his knowledge of the Bible and specifically passages in Deuteronomy he would quote, asserting the legitimate historical right of Jews to Palestine (Clifford 2008).

Since that time US support for Israel has grown and developed into what successive presidents have described as an 'unbreakable bond' even when that relationship would appear inimical to US national interests. The issue of peace and stability in one of the world's largest oil producing regions, the importance of the Suez Canal to maritime trade, and the spread of Islamist ideology and anti-Americanism would seem to suggest US interests lay in persuading Israel to agree a two-state solution with Palestinians and reconcile with her Arab and Iranian neighbours. And yet the US has been unwilling to use its diplomatic and financial influence to secure Israeli concessions in pursuit of peace.

On the contrary, Israel is the largest recipient of US military assistance receiving over \$130 billion in foreign aid since 1949 (Jewish Virtual Library 2017). The outgoing Obama administration signed a memorandum of understanding pledging \$38 billion in military assistance from 2019 – 2028, following \$30 billion assistance over ten years agreed by the previous Bush administration (Sharp 2016). The United States has defended Israeli interests

in vetoing UN Security Council resolutions critical of its actions on over forty occasions. Peace plans brokered by G.H. and G.W. Bush, Clinton and Obama were all thwarted by a combination of Israeli intransigence and Palestinian suspicion. Demographic changes in the occupied territories of East Jerusalem and the West Bank through large scale settlement building and the erection of a separation wall have altered 'facts on the ground' and made a two-state solution increasingly improbable despite successive US governments claiming this as a key foreign policy objective.

## **The Israel Lobby**

How then can we explain this bilateral relationship which seemingly operates in the interests of the smaller party? Israel is a liberal democracy and a market economy in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes or weak governance. The country has strategic importance in a volatile region, where military capability and intelligence gathering can be of benefit to US security interests. This is only part of the explanation and for realists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt a fuller one can only be found in domestic sources of foreign policy and the disproportionate influence of the Israel Lobby (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007).

Mearsheimer and Walt argue that the bilateral relationship is unique and does not behave as other relationships being premised on unconditional assistance and is immune from criticism by US politicians. The Lobby convinces US politicians to support Israel under all circumstances and uses its influence to elect supporters to key positions, pressure politicians, and control political discourse. They argue that the special relationship is in neither's best interest as the Lobby prevents America being an honest broker in resolving Middle East conflict (Mearsheimer and Walt (2007)).

The Lobby comprises neoconservatives, a largely secular pro-Israeli group seeking the maximum projection of US power which were instrumental in the drive for war against

Iraq in 2003 featuring prominently in the first George W. Bush administration. Real lasting influence, however, resides with pro-Israel American Jewry represented by organisations such as American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Zionist Organisation of America, and Anti-Defamation League. Not all American Jewry are uncritical of Israel and organisations including J-Street offer a critical friend rather than partisan approach in supporting it. The third dimension of the Lobby, Christian Zionists were prominent in the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition and comprise many pro-Israel groupings at local and national level but since 2006 have been effectively represented by John Hagee's Christians United for Israel (CUFI).

### **American Israel Public Affairs Committee**

Since its founding in 1951, AIPAC has emerged as one of the most effective interest groups in the America. With a membership of over one hundred thousand people committed to the bilateral relationship and prepared to act in support of Israel the organisation enjoys unprecedented bipartisan influence in Congress and the White House. AIPAC lobbies on behalf of Israel to secure US military and economic assistance, protection from critical UN Security Council Resolutions, to provide diplomatic cover to enable Israel to complete military operations and continue settlement construction, and to bring about a two-state solution with a Jewish State and a demilitarised Palestine, on such land as Israel is willing to concede. The Jewish population of the United States is less than two percent, concentrated in just a handful of states and yet AIPAC has been able to mobilise its supporters and garner politicians' attention across the political divide so effectively that no resolution critical of Israel has prospects of success in House or Senate.

AIPAC organise their supporters through emailing, conferences, public meetings, training workshops, and an extensive range of publications to lobby their congressional

representatives on issues highlighted to them. Politicians from both parties are courted and taken on expenses paid study visits to Israel reinforcing the need to defend Israel and the importance of the special relationship. Regular policy briefings and a legislative agenda on Israel-related issues are provided for politicians and scorecards of their voting records distributed to supporters hold them to account. The annual AIPAC Policy Conference held in Washington DC attracts 18,000 pro-Israel Americans including, two thirds of members of Congress, majority and minority leaders, and some cabinet members. In election years presidential candidates attend to pledge unwavering support for Israel.

AIPAC has been effective in directing resources to political campaigns by those who support their legislative agenda. Discussion on Israel is controlled by the interest group through providing press briefings, instant rebuttals of criticism, denying platforms for those opposed to Israeli policy and closing down debates through labelling opponents as anti-Semitic. This has led to policy successes in substantial and ongoing US military assistance and cooperation to Israel, continued expansion of Israeli settlements, congressional resolutions and statements affirming Israel's right to self-defence, and the introduction of the Iran Sanctions Act.

### **Christian Zionism**

Complementing the work of AIPAC are conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists who ascribe to Christian Zionism. This group endorse an eschatology known as premillennial dispensationalism, taught by John Nelson Darby in the nineteenth century and popularised by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind* series of end time novels. Human history is divided into seven time periods, or dispensations, beginning in the Garden of Eden and continuing to the seventh dispensation Christ's second coming and reign on earth. Premillennial dispensationalists consider that humanity is towards the end of the

sixth dispensation and that the second coming can be hastened. Signs of that Second Coming relate specifically to the return of Jews from around the world to Israel (Jeremiah 23:7-8). They argue that the covenant between God and the Jewish people is eternal, exclusive and cannot be abrogated (Genesis 12:1-7; 15:4-7; 17:1-8; Leviticus 26:44-45; Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

They believe that the historical land of Israel/Palestine has been given to the Jewish people in perpetuity. The biblical promise that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those who curse it will be cursed (Genesis 12:3) is applied to the United States today where its attitude towards Israel determines whether or not God blesses America (Marsden 2009). The founding of the state of Israel and subsequent seizure of East Jerusalem and the West Bank confirmed to dispensationalists their reading of the end times. The Moral Majority made Israel one of their top priorities because in the words of Jerry Falwell: 'Every nation that has ever persecuted the Jews has felt the hard hand of God on them. Every nation that has ever stood with the Jews has felt the hand of God's blessing on them. I firmly believe God has blessed America because America has blessed the Jew' (Falwell 1980: 113).

Since 2006 John Hagee has organised Christian Zionists across America and beyond to publically support Israel, in celebration nights to honour Israel, and in lobbying Congress and the White House. With a membership of over three million people the growth of the interest group has been exponential. CUFI comprises mainly, but not exclusively, of conservative evangelicals who make up the base of the Republican Party. Their bipartisan reach is not as extensive as AIPAC but their influence in Republican circles is greater. Hagee insists that Israel has a right to the land archaeologically, historically, strategically, as humanitarian concern to provide them a protected homeland, to counter terrorism and ultimately because 'God said so!' (Hagee 2007: 239-39).

CUFI operates on a similar basis to AIPAC in terms of lobbying but also enjoys many more supporters and activists within the thousands of churches across the country. At a moment's notice thousands of activists have been prepared to march on Washington or fill their representative's email box with supplication on Israel's behalf. It makes common cause with AIPAC in encouraging sanctions and opposing US rapprochement with Iran, in seeking to criminalise and demonise the global Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement through equating opposition to Israeli policies with anti-Semitism, and restrict funding to the Palestinian Authority. The Trump administration consists of a number of Christian Zionists including Vice President Mike Pence who confirmed during the 2017 CUFI Washington Summit that Israel's cause 'is our cause, her values are our values, and her fight is our fight' (Pence 2017).

**[Insert Keypoints 2]**

## **Global War on Terror**

The attacks on Twin Towers and Pentagon by Al Qaeda on 11 September 2001, early in the presidency of George W. Bush transformed US foreign policy and set the country on a global war against Islamist terror groups which continues to the present day. Bush was a conservative evangelical whose faith heavily influenced his world view and actions (Bush 1999). He had secured the overwhelming backing of white evangelicals to deliver the narrowest of victories in the disputed 2000 election. Once in office Bible study and prayer became a fact of life for those in the administration. Evangelicals were welcome in the White House and appointed to key positions including chief speechwriter Michael Gerson, Attorney General John Ashcroft and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice (Aikman 2004).

Bush's response to the attack was to frame it in religious terms of good and evil, call people to prayer, emphasise the Judeo-Christian nature of American society by use of



Biblical references and affirm American exceptionalism. In his address to the nation on the day of the attacks he declared that ‘America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world ... Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature’. He prayed that the country would be ‘comforted by a power greater than any of us’ before citing Psalm 23 verse 4 and declaring that ‘we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world’ (Bush 2004: 2-3). The following day was declared a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance to find healing and recovery in the face of evil for a nation which would ‘remain strong and united, “one Nation under God”’ (Bush 2004: 4).

A ceremony held in the National Cathedral, Washington D.C. on 14 September provided Bush with the platform to share his worldview with a grieving nation: ‘This world He created is of moral design. Grief and tragedy and hatred are only for a time. Goodness, remembrance, and love have no end’ (Bush 2004: 6). The homily ends quoting Roman 8: 38-39 that nothing ‘can separate us from God’s love’. On 23 September at a joint session of Congress he emphasised that America’s quarrel was not with Muslims but rather with ‘a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them’ (Bush 2004: 14). Nations were given a choice of either being with America or with the terrorists. For Bush ultimate victory was assured because God watches over America and: ‘Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them’ (Bush 2004: 17).

The Manichean division of light and darkness, good and evil was to become a continuing theme of the Bush administration’s approach to the war on terror, and to extend to approaches to Islamists, and later Iraq, Iran and North Korea depicted as an Axis of Evil. Such a worldview resonated with conservative evangelicals who remained the most steadfast supporters and participants in the war on terror and Iraq War with US military recruitment

disproportionately from the Bible belt (Kane 2005). Many conservative evangelical leaders found Bush's portrayal of Islam as a religion of peace and Islamism as a distortion problematic. Franklin Graham, son of Billy, did not see Islam as 'a wonderful peaceful religion' but rather 'wicked, violent and not of the same god' and Jerry Falwell described Muhammad as a 'terrorist' (Marsden 2008: 237). CBN and other Christian broadcasters regularly portrayed Islam as violent and inimical to American values.

Bush consistently opposed such views and confirmed his view that Islam was a peaceful religion and sought to incorporate Muslims within civil religion rhetoric (Bush 2002). However, as America became increasingly embroiled in conflicts in Muslim majority countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan, and support for Israel's military actions in the West Bank, Gaza and Southern Lebanon, the distinction between Muslims and jihadist and Islamist groups became less clear. President Obama continued the policy of incorporating American Muslims within a civil religion discourse and set out to restore US relations with the Muslim majority world through a key speech in Cairo in 2009. One of his liberal evangelical spiritual advisors, Jim Wallis had been a constant critic of Bush's foreign policy and the influence of the Christian Right on politics (Wallis 2005). Evangelicals for the most part remained unconvinced and considered Obama suspect on account of his family background and describing America as no longer a Christian nation but one of many faiths and none (Obama 2006).

General Jerry Boykin, who had been in charge for the hunt for Mullah Omar, bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, saw the war on terror as a spiritual battle between Christianity and Islam spoke in churches across America during Bush's first term in office. After military service Boykin maintained this position throughout the Obama administration accusing US mosques of 'spewing out jihadist rhetoric' and 'almost every Islamic organisation in America is a front for funding Islamic extremism' (Boykin 2009). In 2012 he was appointed Executive

Vice President of the Family Research Council. Ralph Drollinger, an evangelical minister set up Capitol Ministries in 2010 to hold weekly evangelical Bible studies in Congress sponsored by around seventy members of both houses of Congress. The group produced a 'Terrorist Training Sensitivity' booklet for congressional representatives to provide a 'biblical' perspective on combatting terrorism. The booklet asserts that: 'not every Muslim is a terrorist but every international terrorist in recent history has been a Muslim' (Capitol Ministries 2014: 4).

This blurring of distinctiveness between the radical Islamism practised by Al Qaeda, Daesh, other jihadist organisations and mainstream Sunni and Shiite Muslims has been a common feature of conservative evangelical approaches to the war on terror and where they are able to exercise influence seek to link Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda and Daesh as a common threat. Such thinking also lay behind the Trump administration attempt to ban travel to the United States from seven designated Muslim majority countries.

Trump secured the 2016 presidential election with 81 percent support from white evangelicals and maintains an evangelical advisory board. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics have greater access to the White House than ever before and are regularly consulted on policy matters. Ralph Drollinger conducts weekly Bible studies in the White House sponsored by nine evangelical members of the cabinet including Vice President Mike Pence, CIA Director Mike Pompeo and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley is also an evangelical ensuring that religion continues to play a key role in determining approaches towards the global war on terror.

**[Insert 19.1 MAJOR DEBATES AND THEIR IMPACT: Iraq – Just or Unjust]**

[Insert KEY QUOTES 19.2: Religion and the Global War on Terror]

## **Faith-based diplomacy**

In 1994 Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson edited a seminal work entitled *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* behind the initiative laid the changing realities of international politics after the Cold War. Rather than ideological divisions Johnson, like Huntington (1997), envisaged a world where conflict would be based on clashes of communal identity ‘on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, nationality or religion’ (Johnson and Sampson 1994:3). Where Huntington offered a counsel of despair, highlighting the problem of multiculturalism as threatening western civilization, Johnson proposed recognising and enhancing the capacity of religion to be part of the solution. Unfortunately the US foreign policy establishment was ill equipped to do so operating in a secular paradigm out of step with much of the rest of the world. The solution was to actively engage with religious actors in diplomacy and educate and train those working in foreign affairs (Johnson and Sampson 1994; Johnson 2003, 2011).

## **International religious freedom**

Religious actors continued to pressure their political representatives on issues of religious persecution. Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom, Freedom House worked with Michael Horowitz from the Hudson Institute in bringing together a coalition of conservative evangelicals, Jews, Catholics and neoconservatives to campaign on the issue in the mid-1990s. The Christian Right organised supporters to lobby congressional

representatives. A task made easier by Republicans taking control of both houses of Congress in the 1994 mid-term elections, resulting in Christian Right stalwarts Jesse Helms and Sam Brownback being appointed chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and subcommittee chair on Near Eastern and South Asia Affairs respectively.

Shea and Horowitz's campaign was taken up by Congressman Frank Wolf and Senator Arlen Specter who introduced The International Religious Freedom Act 1998, ensuring that US foreign policy thereafter must take into account, and respond to, violations of religious freedom perpetrated by other countries. The Act required an annual report to Congress on progress, established an Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, a special advisor within the National Security Council, and a Commission on International Religious Freedom. Shea was appointed as commissioner serving 1999-2012. Other prominent commissioners included Richard Land (2001-2012), Elliott Abrams (1999-2001, 2012-14) and John Bolton (1999-2001). Sam Brownback was nominated by Donald Trump in 2017 as Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom. The Commission produces its own report on religious freedom highlighting countries of particular concern, which the Department of State must report on and consider for action.

### **Faith-based initiatives and US foreign policy**

Entering office in 2001 one of George W. Bush's first acts was to issue an executive order establishing the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives. As a born again Christian he believed in the transformational power of faith to solve individual and societal problems. As governor of Texas he had permitted the funding of faith-based organisations (FBOs) to run prison and drug rehabilitation programmes and set about encouraging the involvement of federally funded faith-based provision at a national level

(Bush (1999, 2010). FBOs were to be encouraged to bid for grants to deliver federal programmes, the only proviso being that they could receive funding for service delivery but not for religious activity including prayer and proselytising. In December 2002 the initiative was extended to the State Department and to USA International Development (USAID).

The USAID Centre for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was now to actively encourage conservative evangelical FBOs to deliver programmes. In the first five years of the programme these received \$1.7 billion, including World Vision (\$374 million), Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse (\$31 million), Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing (\$392,000) and Voice of the Martyrs \$306,000 (Marsden 2008: 130). The problematic nature of US largesse being delivered by proselytising FBOs, where the distinction between religious mission and US assistance became increasingly blurred, was largely overlooked by the Bush administration.

The popularity of this initiative within religious communities and the value in US FBOs subcontracting work to partners in the field encouraged Obama to continue the programme throughout his administration. Working through local FBOs had the benefit of utilising their developed infrastructure and expertise with less likelihood of corruption than distributing resources through local or national government. Under Obama the trend towards preferring Christian, especially evangelical FBOs, altered with Jewish and Muslim FBOs also received funding.

### **President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)**

Conservative evangelicals made good use of their new status and increased access to the Bush White House and were instrumental in bringing about significant US assistance to seek to eradicate HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Africa. Jesse Helms was convinced by U2 lead singer Bono of the need to support the campaign for debt relief for poorer countries

and assistance programmes, particularly around the issue of AIDS. Helms persuaded the White House to meet Bono and eventually facilitating George W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Africa. The programme enjoyed bipartisan support and between 2004 and 2017 received \$72 billion to provide treatment, testing, care, counselling and training.

Although PEPFAR represented the greatest investment in foreign assistance to Africa ever seen the programme was not without its controversy. The re-implementation of the global gag rule prevented those in receipt of US assistance from being able to provide advice on abortion. A caveat in the assistance restricted reproductive health advice and one third of the funds available for family planning advice were designated to the promotion of abstinence until marriage programmes and allowed FBOs to refuse to work with high risk groups they found morally objectionable such as gays and prostitutes. The Christian Right succeeded in getting needle exchange programmes banned and defunding International Planned Parenthood and Marie Stopes because of their willingness to provide advice on abortion. Such stipulations were rescinded under the Obama administration and the programme continues to make a significant contribution to the eradication of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Africa.

**[Insert 19.1 CONTROVERSIES: The Mexico City Policy]**

## **Office of Religion and Global Affairs**

The Obama administration sought to build on the faith-based initiatives of the Bush administration. On entering office Obama established the President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships comprising prominent faith leaders who were tasked, among other things, with examining religion and global affairs. One of the key

recommendations was establishing the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (ORGA). The Office was established in 2013 and advises the State Department leadership on all matters pertaining to religion. ORGA reflects recognition in the administration of the need for religious literacy across government and particularly in foreign affairs. Under successive administrations religion has become increasingly important and is now factored into training at the Foreign Service Institute and the Department of Defense.

ORGA informs government about the impact of religion in different international contexts and engages with faith-based actors and experts to develop training and education around religious literacy and its value in foreign affairs. Three positions have been created to reflect this increased engagement: Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The aim is to utilise religion and religious actors to achieve US foreign policy objectives through effective soft power. Increased religious literacy has now become a requisite across the US foreign policy establishment.

**[Insert Keypoints 3]**

## **Conclusion**

Religion has been a constant factor in US foreign policy, often unacknowledged but present nonetheless. At times religion's presence is overt and recognisable as when Truman defied his foreign policy establishment to recognise the state of Israel, Reagan invoked images of the 'Evil Empire', or Bush created the Centre for Faith Based and Community Initiatives. At other times it is harder to detect when religious voices become disparate among so many critiquing or supporting US foreign policy. The nature of American exceptionalism and deployment of civil religion as a rhetorical device by presidents together with the continuing



active presence of religion in the lives of so many Americans means that it is impossible to disaggregate religion from all aspects of the US polity.

This chapter has shown that religion is an essential component, which contributes to our overall understanding of US foreign policy. Even if we were inclined to view foreign policy through an exclusively secular lens the events of 9/11 brought into stark relief the continued relevance of religion in the international arena. The Bush and Obama administrations sought to address some of these issues by engaging FBOs in delivering assistance, upholding religious freedom, and increasing religious literacy within government and the foreign policy establishment. The Trump administration's close relationship with the Christian Right supporters ensures that religion will remain vital to any understanding of US foreign policy.

## **Questions**

1. How important is religion in US foreign policy?
2. Were Christian Realists right in arguing that the main difference between communism and liberalism was religion?
3. To what extent did Truman's faith influence his decision to recognise Israel?
4. What role, if any, did religion play in the conduct of the Cold War?
5. What is civil religion?
6. Is the Israel Lobby inimical to US national interests?
7. Does the Global War on Terror represent a clash of civilisations?
8. Was the Iraq War a just war?
9. What is the global gag rule?
10. Could faith-based diplomacy transform US foreign policy?

## **Further Reading**

**Albright, M.** (2007), *The Mighty & The Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and world affairs* (New York: Harper Perennial).

Secretary of State's insight into US's international role, ethics and religion under Clinton and Bush

**Brog, D.** (2006), *Standing with Israel: Why Christians support the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, Florida: Front Line).

An insider's theological and political perspective on evangelical support for Israel.

**Johnston, D.** (2011), *Religion, Terror, and Error: US foreign policy and the challenge of spiritual engagement* (Santa Barbara: Praeger).

A key text calling for a greater understanding of religion and culture in world politics.

**Marsden, L.** (2008), *For God's Sake: The Christian Right and US foreign policy* (London: Zed Books).

A comprehensive overview of the influence of the Christian Right on US foreign policy during the George W. Bush presidency.

**Niebuhr, R.** (2008), *The Irony of American History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).

A seminal text on statecraft warning of the dangers of moral complacency by America's foremost post war theologian.

**Patterson, E.** (2011), *Politics in a Religious World: Building a religiously informed US foreign policy* (New York: Continuum).

A strong defence of the need for religious literacy in US foreign policy making.

**Preston, A.** (2012), *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf)

An outstanding historical account of the influence of religion on American diplomacy and statecraft from the Puritans through to the end of the Cold War.

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## **KEYPOINTS 1**

- American identity is built on foundational myths of manifest destiny, exceptionalism, 'innocent' nation, and civil religion.
- Eisenhower and Reagan viewed the Cold War through a religious paradigm contrasting atheistic communism with liberty and religious belief.
- Religious actors were deeply divided over the Vietnam War with liberals leading the anti-war movement and conservatives more supportive of US policy.

- The emergence of the Christian Right led to greater input by religious conservatives in the Republican Party and advocacy of a strong defence of US national interests.

## **KEYPOINTS 2**

- Israel receives in excess of \$3 billion per annum in US military assistance.
- Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) claim the Israel Lobby actually works against US national interests through pressuring politicians to act in Israel's rather than US interests.

## **KEYPOINTS 3**

- In a world increasingly defined by cultural difference faith-based diplomacy has the potential to increase US soft power.
- The USAID Center for Faith-based and Community Initiatives enables faith-based organisations to deliver US overseas assistance.
- The use of faith-based organisations to deliver federally funded programmes challenges the separation of church and state but enjoys bipartisan support.
- Religious literacy in US foreign policy is increasingly seen as a requisite in advancing US national interests.

## **19.1 MAJOR DEBATES AND THEIR IMPACT: Iraq – Just or Unjust War?**

- The Bush administration's given rationale for war was that following 9/11 America had to embark on a 'global war on terror' to defeat its enemies. Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was alleged to be developing weapons of mass destruction, which posed a threat to American interests in the region and could fall into the hands of Al Qaeda.

- Just War tradition seeks to provide a moral and ethical compass for warfare. In the decision to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) there should be just cause, it should only be declared by a legitimate authority, embarked upon for the right intention, with a high probability of success, as a last resort, and the expected gains should be proportionate to the harms caused (Elshtain, 1992; Johnson 1981; Walzer, 1977).
- Once battle has commenced then ethical standards of warfare apply (*jus in bello*). Warfare is directed only at combatants and not civilian populations, the war must be proportionate with harm to civilians and property minimised. Military targets must be necessary to defeat the enemy, prisoners are to receive fair treatment and not tortured or made to fight against former comrades, and no extreme measures such as rape or weapons of mass destruction are to be used (Snauwaert 2004).
- Unjust War - Pope John Paul II and the US Catholic Bishops said it could not be Just because a potential attack by Iraq did not meet the criteria of just cause, right intention, last resort or proportionality (Brunijan 2003).
- Just War - Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention roused conservative evangelicals in support of going to war. As a direct response to the Pope, Land joined with other Christian Right leaders in writing to Bush supporting a preventive strike on Iraq as Just to halt Saddam Hussein's pursuit of WMD and threat to US interests (Land 2002).

## **19.1 CONTROVERSIES: The Mexico City Policy**

- Ronald Reagan to introduce the Mexico City Policy (MCP) at the 2nd International Conference on Population in Mexico City, Mexico in 1984.
- In order to receive US global family planning assistance the policy requires foreign non-governmental organisations to certify that they will not 'perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning' with funds from any source.

- Actively promoting includes advice on abortion, advocating abortion as a means of family planning, or promoting changes to a country's existing laws and practices, hence critics dubbed it the Global Gag rule.
- US organisations were not subject to the MCP because under the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act (1973) they are forbidden from carrying out, or promoting, abortion except for cases of incest, rape or the health of the woman (Kaiser Foundation 2017).
- The MCP has been rescinded by Democrat presidents and restored by successive Republican presidents.
- Significant sums of money are involved as US NGOs partner with local and international organisations overseas to deliver health care programmes. In FY2017 US global family planning assistance amounted to \$600 million.
- Ironically research suggests that where the MCP is applied the number of abortions actually increase as experienced family planning practitioners have fewer resources available to provide contraception and educational programmes (Bendavid et al. 2011).

## **KEY QUOTES 19.1: Religion and US Foreign Policy in the Cold War**

### **Billy Graham's revival speech on steps of Capitol Building 3 February 1952:**

All over the world today the spectre of communism is not only an appalling reality but communism today is sweeping from one end of the world to the other and infiltrating every nation of the world. I believe, today, that the battle is between communism and Christianity

and, I believe, the only way that we are going to win that battle is for America to turn back to God, back to Christ, and back to the Bible at this hour.

(Graham, 1952)

### **Reinhold Niebuhr in 1952**

We take, and must continue to take, morally hazardous actions to preserve our civilization. We must exercise our power. But we ought neither to believe that a nation is capable of perfect disinterestedness in its exercise, nor become complacent about particular degrees of interest and passion which corrupt the justice by which the exercise of power is legitimized.

(Niebuhr 2008: 8)

### **Dwight D. Eisenhower's statement on signing Bill to incorporate "Under God" in the Pledge to the Flag in June 1954**

From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing could be more inspiring than to contemplate this rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country's true meaning. . . . In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or in war.

(Eisenhower, 1954)

### **President Ronald Reagan's Evil Empire speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, Florida March 1983**

Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness -- pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict

its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world ...

While America's military strength is important, let me add here that I've always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith.

(Reagan, 1983)

## **KEY QUOTES 19.2: Religion and the Global War on Terror**

**Richard Land and leaders of Christian Right's letter of support for George W. Bush going to war in Iraq 2002**

We believe that your policies concerning the ongoing international terrorist campaign against America are both right and just. Specifically, we believe that your stated policies concerning Saddam Hussein and his headlong pursuit and development of biochemical and nuclear weapons of mass destruction are prudent and fall well within the time-honored criteria of just war theory as developed by Christian theologians in the late fourth and early fifth centuries A.D.

(Land, 2002)

### **President George W. Bush State of the Union address 2003**

Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity.

We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving god behind all of life and all of history. May he guide us now, and may God continue to bless the United States of America’.

(Bush, 2003)

### **President Obama’s Cairo speech to the Muslim world in June 2009**

I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles -- principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings’.

(Obama, 2009)

### **President Trump’s speech to Arab leaders in Saudi Arabia in May 2017**

This is not a battle between different faiths, different sects, or different civilizations.



This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it.

This is a battle between Good and Evil.

(Trump, 2017)