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I was asked to talk about persecution of Christians in Latin America and about the UK's foreign policy regarding Latin America. First US foreign policy: Obama and Clinton and now. There is not a big difference in foreign policy towards Latin America. Obama and Clinton had a strong human rights discourse but little impact. eg the Cuba rapprochement had no human rights element. Trump says he won't lecture the world on human rights, but Pence is very concerned – cf the Pastor Brunson release. But little is happening in Latin America. But there are two things the US foreign policy does:

1. Produces an International Religious Freedom report from the State Department, but this misses a lot.
2. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom puts out interesting reports, but only for the worst countries in the world, so there is little focus on Latin America.

As for UK foreign policy, I am not an expert, but it is not visible in Latin America – eg not producing any reports like US State Department (producing such reports would be a good recommendation to make to the FCO). One important avenue for the UK is its Permanent Observer Status at the Organisation of American States – a very important institution (older than the UN) and influential. It has a Human Rights Court and a Commission. In practice, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights functions as an Appeal Court after national supreme courts. There is a Rapporteur for every vulnerable group at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights except Religious Freedom. Not seen as a priority. **The UK could raise this.**

In 2017, the Costa Rican government requested an advisory opinion on same sex marriage to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (similar to European Court of Human Rights). In its ruling, the Court declared that religious or philosophical convictions on this matter are inappropriate for consideration in court cases, which shows a large lack of religious literacy among these judges.

Also there is the issue of Religious Freedom in indigenous communities. No cases on internal dimension of self-determination. Only external (state or multi-lateral threats), so Religious Freedom within communities is ignored. There is also the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (Baroness Berridge is on the steering committee) which gives a strong role for Brazilian diplomacy.

So now, what do the US State departments (and many others) reports miss:

- Multidimensionality of religious freedom; not just a matter of freedom of worship;
- Behavioural dimension
- Role of non-state actors (organized crime and ethnic leaders in rural areas)
- Secular intolerance / aggressive secularism
- There is a tendency by many analysts to use very narrow definitions of religious freedom, and of religious persecution. The problem with using narrow definitions is that it leads us to neglect important aspects of religious freedom violations.
- It's important to look beyond the legal dimension of religious freedom violations. In this respect, the human security perspective is helpful because it moves our focus away from religious freedom violations as such, to try to understand how religious minorities can become vulnerable to human security threats in specific contexts.

- As far as the legal framework is concerned, there are no major obstacles to religious freedom in the vast majority of Latin American countries, with the exception of Cuba. From the perspective of human security, the enforcement of religious freedom, however, does pose challenges.
- Furthermore, when addressing religious conflict, we must understand that religious minorities can be vulnerable not only based on their identity, but also as a result of their behaviour. In some contexts, religious identity can be a cause of persecution. In such contexts, owning a Bible, using a religious symbol as part of your dress or changing your faith might get you into trouble. But in other contexts, it's not religious identity that causes you to be vulnerable, but rather the behaviour you display as a result of your religious convictions. Therefore, I recommend taking into account both religious identity and religious behaviour as sources of vulnerability, and not to limit the analysis to religious identity only.
- In Latin America, the majority of all citizens is formally Christian, but actively practising Christians – Christians who regularly attend church – are a minority. This minority is specifically vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses.

Four major categories of threats to the religious expression of Christians in Latin America:

- The regulation of religion by organized crime;
- The hostility towards Christian converts in indigenous communities;
- The restrictions on religious expression in communist and post-communist countries.
- Secular intolerance.

Recommendations

- This taskforce will hopefully provide useful insights for the international promotion of religious freedom as this is gradually becoming an integral part of the foreign policy of democratic nations.
- Special attention for the specific vulnerability of religious minorities is necessary in all efforts related to state reform and democratization.

➤ Religious literacy

- Numerous cases of persecution are not served because Christians don't know how to press charges or because the judges don't understand religious cases.
 - Little religious literacy (and religious freedom literacy) among policy-makers. A comprehensive understanding of the nature of the vulnerability of religious minorities is essential to build greater 'literacy' for government officials so they can act upon human rights violations.
 - No documentation of cases of persecution of Christians among denominational bodies
 - Raise awareness about human security threats that are faced by religious minorities
 - Include the multidimensionality of religious freedom in human rights monitoring.
 - Conscientiously document violations of religious freedom.
 - Develop and facilitate a reflection about coping mechanisms
 - Compile best practices of the application of coping mechanisms.
1. Latin American states are not always diligent enough in terms of investigating issues related to violations of freedom of religion and expression. We must urge Latin American governments to live up to their responsibility in this field.

2. The specific vulnerability of actively practicing Christians should be taken into consideration in both academic and advocacy work. The reduction of risks for Christians caused by organized crime should also become an integral part of foreign policy of all governments.
3. Special attention should be given to the issue of structural violence, impunity and corruption, as Mexico and other Latin American states are not always diligent enough in terms of investigating issues related to violations of freedom of religion and expression.
4. Pressure must be put on the Colombian government to counter the abuses in the realm of religious freedom of the constitutional provision that grants autonomy to indigenous territories.
5. All institutions, both government and religious institutions, should work together with Latin American states to create a system in which churches and Christian leaders who are victims of extortion feel safe to denounce threats against them.
6. More generally, governments, security experts and churches must work together to strengthen the resilience of religious communities around the world, including in Western countries. Resilience has many different dimensions that need to be integrated in a holistic approach. The spiritual or theological approach must be complemented by training to create awareness about legal rights, security, early warning systems, legal assistance, advocacy and social-economic development.

Q. Are there relative benefits of different local diplomatic missions and their engagement?

They are generally the same and FoRB is not a priority. Germany has a good role, and Russia, although not really in Latin America.

Q. How about the Peruvian & Bolivian Marxists? A lot of work has been done in the past, but it is not interpreted as a FoRB violation. Those conflicts evolved into drug trafficking and ideology is no longer important. But Christians are still persecuted. eg Mexico is the most dangerous country for Catholic priests. Therefore, there is a need to promote safe systems and denounce threats.

Q. Is Christian behaviour in opposing drugs gangs the issue? Yes, their vulnerability is related to their behaviour. The vast majority of Christians are very passive. Those that are active are vulnerable. Similarly, Organised Crime and atheist insurgencies persecute. There is always a struggle for legitimacy.

Q. Is there persecution related to Christian missionary activity? Yes, that makes you vulnerable too. Latin American legislation on human rights is nearly perfect, but not enforced. Much impunity, especially in rural areas. There are threats in indigenous communities, although sometimes they are provocative. Similar for reaching out to drug cartel members. Only surface compliance – application important too. Ability to tease out distinction between passive and active and differing types of Christian action and engagement important. There are also differences between historic denominations and evangelicals. Some have the idea that persecution has to have religious motives to be considered as persecution.

Q. What about Cuba and Venezuela? There is actual continuity in Cuba now – Raul Castro is still in control. Venezuela has an authoritarian regime using the Communist handbook to silence opposition.

Q. Would a civil war there lead to real change?

It didn't five years ago. The international community just let Cuba be. This was a missed opportunity for the Obama administration. In Venezuela the international community is currently withdrawing.

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