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Title: The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 as an Act Against Freedom, the Truth, and Religious Freedom

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Abstract. This article suggests that the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 masks agendas antithetical to the stated intent of the Act's many supporters.

The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) was signed into law by United States (U.S.) President Bill Clinton on October 27, 1998. The IRFA requires the President to take various actions against countries that the U.S. State Department concludes to be violating the religious rights of their citizens. These actions may range from private diplomatic communications to severe sanctions.

The IRFA is an act against freedom because it exemplifies that U.S. law must be obeyed by other governments and their citizens. As with analogous U.S. legislation that can penalize countries for various economic interactions with Cuba, Libya, and Iran and that authorize the U.S. apprehension of alleged perpetrators of terrorism against U.S. citizens from other countries regardless of where the terrorism allegedly occurred, the IRFA can be said to violate sovereignties throughout the world. Moreover, the IRFA employs concepts of "religious rights" and their "violation" that must be applied worldwide even as these concepts do not address social and cultural differences concerning "religion," "rights," "violations," and other parameters--e.g., ethnicity and economic phenomena--affecting conflict. Instead, the IRFA's public rationale is largely based on an ideology of universal rights that is ultimately founded on blind faith in those rights and is interpreted through a culture-specific lens--that of some hypothesized moral culture in the US.

The IRFA also is an act against the truth because many of its supporters--and, perhaps, a majority of these supporters are conservative Republicans--view political and social movements against the violations of religious rights as vehicles to coopt "rights Issues" from the political left. Through the rhetoric of the right to follow one's religion ensconced in a rightist notion of social conservatism, the political right is freeing itself from the political trap of conflating "rights" with oppression of the masses and the utilitarian redistribution of assets to the majority of the world population in dire straits. The IRFA becomes a weapon of domestic political struggle not of international struggle for the violated.

And from this one can surmise that the IRFA is an act against religious freedom and that the "Religious Freedom" in its Title is Orwellian in nature. If religious violations were to disappear or greatly decrease, the political value of the IRFA would disappear. So would the psychological and social value that IRFA supporters garner in creating aspects of their own identity by being against something. As one cannot be for the right unless there exists a wrong, so the disappearance of the wrong can entail the disappearance of the right along with a reason to Believe as well. Lastly, the financial benefits and increases in membership accruing to religious, political, and other entities supporting the IRFA could very likely cease with religious rights violations. So there is a huge population--along with the perpetrators of religious rights violations--who have vested interests in the continued existence of these violations. Luckily, the actions to be generated through the IRFA will not likely affect violations in any significant fashion.

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As with the targets of much legislation and many programs with avowed humanitarian intent, the victims described in the IRFA are the least likely to be helped. (See Goodstein, L. (November 9, 1998). Churches find new focus in opposing persecution. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Helminiak, D.A. (1997). Killing for God's sake: The spiritual crisis in religion and society. *Pastoral Psychology*, 45, 365-374; Helwig, C.C. (1997). The role of agent and social context in judgments of freedom of speech and religion. *Child Development*, 68, 484-495; Norager, T. (1996). Metapsychology and discourse: A note on some neglected Issues in the psychology of religion. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 6, 139-149; Williams, R.H. (1996). Religion as political resource: Culture or ideology? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35, 368-378.) (Keywords: Human Rights, Religion, Sovereignty.)