

# Task force criticizes U.S. foreign policy

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WASHINGTON — In a scathing report, a nonpartisan task force warned Monday that the United States soon will face serious dangers and enormous costs because its foreign policy establishment has not come to terms with global changes a full decade after the Cold War ended.

At the heart of the problem, the task force said, is a State Department in a serious state of disrepair and plagued by "long-term mismanagement, antiquated equipment and dilapidated and insecure facilities."

"No government bureaucracy is in greater need of reform than the Department of State," it said.

The report is the work of a panel chaired by Frank C. Carlucci, a former Defense secretary, national security adviser and retired career foreign service officer. The task force was created to assess America's foreign policy capability and develop an action plan for the new administration. It was co-sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, both independent think tanks.

If the "downward spiral" is not reversed, the prospect of relying on military force to protect U.S. national interests will increase because Washington will be less able to avoid, manage or resolve crises through the use of statecraft, the report predicted.

## Myriad problems

The State Department is inadequate in mission, organization and skills, the task force said. Personnel policies have left some 700 diplomatic positions unfilled — a staffing shortfall of 15 percent, the report said. More than 90 percent of overseas posts have obsolete equipment to handle classified communications, and 88 percent of all embassies don't meet basic security standards. One-quarter of all diplomatic posts are seriously overcrowded.

The problems "render U.S. for-

ign policy increasingly ill-equipped to shape and respond to the realities and challenges of the 21st century. Failure to address these shortcomings will prompt significant negative consequences that will undercut national security," the report said.

The task force argues that revitalization of America's foreign policy establishment will require a presidential directive declaring that the secretary of state is the principal architect and spokesperson on foreign policy. It should also declare reform of the State Department to be a national security priority because diplomacy has become an even more essential tool to promote U.S. interests overseas as societies are transformed in the post-Cold War era.

Previous attempts at reform were no more than a series of "half-hearted, selective and ultimately insufficient half-steps," the report said.

One effort that backfired was the merging of the U.S. Information Agency into the State Department, according to an addendum by individual members of the task force. It has failed to enhance U.S. outreach overseas, said Robert E. Hunter, a former NATO ambassador now at the Rand Corp.

## Reforms a priority

As a result of botched reforms, Congress has been reluctant to appropriate resources needed to carry out American diplomacy, viewing the State Department as flawed, wasteful and virtually irreparable.

The Bush administration appears to be taking the task force's advice seriously. At his Senate confirmation hearings, Secretary of State Colin Powell pledged that reforms would be a priority.

In one of his first consultations since taking office last week, Powell discussed the report's findings and recommendations at length with Carlucci. The two men worked together at the White House during the Reagan administration, Carlucci as national security adviser and Powell as his deputy.