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WORLD & NATION

Albright: Religion secondary concern in U.S. foreign policy

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Although religious freedom and tolerance "will continue to play a significant role in U.S. foreign policy," Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright said that role should not always be first and foremost.

"It is in our interest, and it is essential to our own identity, for America to promote religious freedom and human rights," she said. "But if we are to be effective in defending the values we cherish, we must also take into account the perspectives and values of others."

Albright, speaking Oct. 23 at The Catholic University of America to note its law school's 100th anniversary, took issue with the Wolf-Specter bill, which would govern U.S. reaction to religious rights violations in other nations.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., would create a White House Office for Religious Persecution Monitoring that would automatically impose sanctions against countries where religious freedoms are not fully observed.

Sanctions include an export ban to foreign governments engaging in abuses, a shutoff of U.S. aid to such nations and a requirement that the U.S. government block loans to them by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"Although well-intentioned, this bill would create an artificial hierarchy among human rights with the right to be free from torture and murder shoved along with others into second place," Albright said.

"It would also establish a new and unneeded bureaucracy and deprive U.S. officials of the flexibility required to protect the overall foreign policy interests of the United States," she added.

"We should be mindful of one danger, which is the possibility that — as we pursue the right goal — we may choose the wrong means," Albright said.

As great and generous as America may be, she said, "even the most patriotic among us must admit that neither morality, nor religious freedom, nor respect for human rights were invented here — nor are they perfectly practiced here."

Albright added, "If we are to be effective in defending the values we cherish, we must also take into account the perspectives and values of others."

She noted that at the time of Catholic University law school's founding in 1897, "the prevailing mood in our country and around the world was one of anticipation and hope."

Instead, "there followed two world wars, several attempted genocides, the Holocaust, and the bloodiest hundred years in human history," Albright said.

In 1997, also "a hopeful era of relative peace and startling technological change," people must struggle between "our most selfish and aggressive instincts and what Abraham Lincoln referred to as 'the better angels of our nature,'" she said.

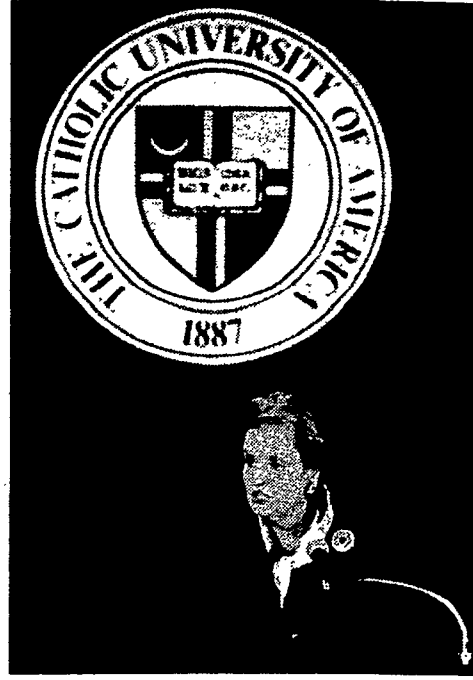
Despite America abiding by the principle of separation of church and state, "this principle has never blinded us to religion's impact on secular events," Albright said.

"We believe that nations are stronger, and the lives of their people richer, when citizens have the freedom to choose, proclaim and exercise their religious identity," she said.

"It is an important part of American policy to promote greater freedom of religion and to encourage reconciliation among religious groups," Albright added, citing U.S. efforts to broker a lasting peace in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and Bosnia.

Albright outlined a five-point plan for U.S. vigilance on religious rights abroad:

- The promotion of religious freedom as a foreign policy priority, with instruc-



CNS/Nancy Wiechec

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in an address at the Columbus School of Law at Catholic University of America in Washington Oct. 23, said although religious freedom and tolerance issues play a significant role in foreign policy, it's not one that should always be first and foremost.

tions given to U.S. diplomats to provide "frequent and thorough reports" on the status of religious rights in their posted nations.

- Highlighting religious freedom issues in annual U.S. human rights reports.

- Making sure those fleeing religious persecution are treated fairly when they make asylum requests.

- A quilt-work of foreign broadcasting, international exchange and multinational cooperation efforts.

- Raising religious freedom issues with foreign leaders, such as with Russian President Boris Yeltsin over Russia's new religion law, and as was expected with Chinese President Jiang Zemin during his U.S. visit on the religious rights of Tibetan Buddhists and whether "China's growing Christian community is allowed to worship freely, without harassment or intimidation."

Albright lauded Pope John Paul II's role in bringing down the Iron Curtain through his visits to his native Poland. "He challenged the artificial division that Stalin had imposed by reasserting the fundamental unity of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals," she said.

Bishops remove Mass obligation for Nov. 1 feast

WASHINGTON (CNS) — All Saints' Day will be a holy day for U.S. Catholics this year, but not a holy day of obligation.

That is because this year Nov. 1 falls on a Saturday.

In 1991 the U.S. bishops voted to lift the obligation of attending Mass for U.S. Catholics on three specific holy days of obligation whenever those feasts occur on a Saturday or a Monday.

The three are: the feast of Mary, Mother of God, Jan. 1; the feast of the Assumption, Aug. 15; the feast of All Saints, Nov. 1.

When those days fall on a Saturday or Monday, their liturgical celebration remains the same: They are among those major feasts in the liturgical calendar that are called solemnities.

The only difference is that the obligation to attend Mass is lifted. Catholics are still invited and encouraged to celebrate those feasts by attending Mass.