

Washington Shifts Focus in Human Rights Report

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WASHINGTON, D.C., The U.S. State Department's upcoming 2024 human rights report is expected to mark a clear change in tone and direction, with a sharper focus on global threats to free speech and a step back from previous criticism of American allies, particularly Israel.

According to a draft obtained by The Washington Post, the section dedicated to Israel has been significantly shortened from roughly 100 pages in last year's report to just 25. The updated version reportedly omits earlier mentions of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legal proceedings and concerns over judicial reforms. Allegations related to surveillance practices and restrictions on Palestinian movement have also been excluded.

These changes appear to signal a move away from domestic political controversies and a renewed focus on the core foreign policy objectives of the United States. A senior State Department official, speaking to The Washington Post, said the report will prioritize defending global freedom of expression and addressing broader authoritarian trends, rather than policing allies' internal politics.

This change comes amid a wider review within the department. Earlier this year, internal guidelines were circulated recommending a reduction in the report's length to the statutory minimum. Topics such as government corruption, gender-related violence, and LGBTQ+ concerns, issues that were prominent during the Biden administration, have reportedly been scaled back or removed entirely.

Keifer Buckingham, a former State Department adviser who left earlier this year, criticized the revised format, particularly regarding countries like Russia. In comments featured by The Washington Post, Buckingham expressed concern over the omission of content on the Russian government's treatment of LGBTQ+ groups, which have recently been branded as "extremist" and subjected to raids.

Nonetheless, supporters of the updated approach say the report now offers a more streamlined and strategically focused document. Rather than engaging in politically sensitive critiques of allied nations, the revised edition highlights broader threats to freedom of speech, a growing concern in regions where democratic norms are under threat.

While some critics fear the changes could undermine the report's influence as a diplomatic tool, others argue that the U.S. must prioritize its long-term interests by concentrating on fundamental freedoms rather than contentious domestic policies in friendly nations.

The official version of the 2024 report is expected to be published later this month.