



U.S. Democracy Promotion  
During and After Bush

Thomas Carothers

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CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

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FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

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## *Executive Summary*

The future of democracy promotion as part of U.S. foreign policy is uncertain. Under George W. Bush, democracy promotion has been widely discredited through its close association with the Iraq war. Only a minority of the U.S. public now supports democracy promotion as a U.S. policy goal, and both the Republican and Democratic parties are internally divided on the subject.

The actual extent of the Bush commitment to democracy promotion is much less than the president's sweeping rhetoric would suggest. Although the administration insists that the Iraq intervention was a democratizing mission from day one, this proposition remains intensely debated at home and abroad. Bush policy in the rest of the Middle East temporarily diverted from the traditional line of supporting autocratic Arab allies but has returned to it during the past year. Beyond the Middle East, Bush policy is semi-realist. It includes some low-key, pro-democracy diplomacy and assistance but is primarily driven by economic and security interests that often clash with support for democracy, such as in China, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, and many other places.

The positive effects of Bush policy on global democracy have been sparse. Despite hope in 2004–5 that the Middle East was experiencing a “Baghdad Spring,” the region remains stuck in authoritarian rule. The spread of democracy has stagnated in the rest of the world, with democratic reversals or backsliding outweighing gains. The Bush combination of idealism in words and semi-realism in deeds is not in itself a significant departure from recent predecessors. The foreign policies of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton all combined in various proportions an emphasis on democracy with substantial realist elements. Yet to the extent the Bush approach to democracy promotion is distinctive, its distinguishing features—the centrality of military intervention, the focus on the Middle East, and the tie-in with the war on terrorism—have all been highly problematic.

The next administration will have a significant opportunity to put U.S. democracy promotion on a better track. Three components of a changed approach are crucial.

First, democracy promotion must be *decontaminated* from the negative taint it acquired under President Bush. This can be accomplished by improving U.S. compliance with the rule of law in the war on terrorism, ending the close association of democracy promotion with military intervention and regime change, and reducing the inconsistency of U.S. democracy policy by exerting real pressure for change on some key autocratic partners, such as Pakistan and Egypt.

Second, democracy promotion must be *repositioned* in the war on terrorism. The idea that democratization will undercut the roots of terrorism is appealing but easily overstated. Promoting democratic change may in some countries help encourage moderates over radicals, but it is far from an antiterrorist elixir. The next administration should deescalate rhetorical emphasis on democracy promotion as the centerpiece of the war on terrorism and escalate

actual commitment to the issue in pivotal cases where supporting democratic change can help diminish growing radicalization.

Third, U.S. democracy promotion must be *recalibrated* to account for larger changes in the international context. A host of ongoing developments, such as the rise of alternative political models, new trends in globalization, and the high price of oil and gas, have eroded the validity of a whole set of assumptions on which U.S. democracy promotion was built in the 1980s and 1990s. The next administration will need to respond in large and small ways, such as by drawing an explicit tie between energy policy and democracy policy, reengaging internationally at the level of basic political ideas, reducing the America-centrism of U.S. democracy building efforts, and strengthening the core institutional sources of democracy assistance.

## *Introduction*

Although President George W. Bush and his foreign policy team still have many international ambitions, a sense of ending with regard to Bush foreign policy is palpable. The remaining ambitions, whether victory in Iraq or peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, have the character more of hopeful wishing than realizable plans. Moreover, the accumulated fatigue at home and abroad with both the substance and style of the Bush international approach is powerful. With the presidential campaign already under way, visions for a post-Bush foreign policy are multiplying. Over the next year these visions will begin to command greater attention than the existing policies.

A central issue in these unfolding debates is the appropriate place for democracy promotion in U.S. policy. With President Bush having so greatly raised the visibility of the democracy issue—both by casting the war in Iraq as a democratizing mission and rooting the war on terrorism in a global “freedom agenda”—democracy promotion is now an unavoidable part of any serious foreign policy debate. Democracy promotion achieved significant bipartisan support within the U.S. policy community and public from the late 1980s until the early years of this decade, but that consensus has shattered. The Republican Party is riven by disputes between realists determined to pull Washington back from transformative goals abroad and neoconservatives still ferociously attached to such ideas. Although less clearly fractioned, the Democratic Party is also divided. A strong vein of liberal internationalism runs through the community of Democratic foreign policy specialists, but significant skepticism about America’s ability to project its political values abroad is common in the Democratic ranks. Moreover, the U.S. public is increasingly doubtful regarding democracy promotion, with the Iraq war triggering a substantial decline in public support for it. In a recent U.S. poll, fewer than half of the persons polled (45 percent) agreed with the proposition that the United States should promote democracy abroad. A partisan divide marks the public’s views on this subject as well: Only 35 percent of registered Democrats accepted the idea, while 64 percent of registered Republicans did.<sup>1</sup>

U.S. debates over the appropriate role of democracy in U.S. foreign policy often take place at the level of symbols, myths, and other abstractions. Very general notions about what the United States should or should not do are advanced and debated with disturbingly little reference to the actual record and capabilities of the United States in this domain. This has been especially true in the past five years, most notably on the part of the administration and its supporters, but at times also by its critics.

If the emergent debates over post-Bush policies are to be more fruitful, it is crucial they be grounded in a secure knowledge base. For that reason, this report starts by offering answers to three fundamental questions about the Bush period. First, what has Bush policy on democracy consisted of in actual practice, that is to say, what deeds lie behind the resplendent rhetoric? Second, what effects has Bush policy had on democracy around the world? And third,

to what extent is the Bush emphasis on democracy new—what are the elements of continuity and discontinuity in the Bush policy compared with those of its recent predecessors?

The report then proceeds to the question of what place democracy promotion can and should play in U.S. policy going forward. It emphasizes the need to avoid getting stuck in stale realist versus idealist debates and argues that a positive set of steps should be taken: decontaminating democracy promotion from the negative taint with which Bush policies have saddled it, repositioning the place of democracy promotion in the war on terrorism, and recalibrating democracy promotion to better fit broader changes that have occurred in the overall international context.



# *The Place of Democracy Promotion in Bush Foreign Policy*

## **The Rhetorical Framework**

Identifying the precise role or place of democracy promotion in U.S. policy is always difficult. In part this is because any administration's approach to democracy is inevitably an amalgam of highly varied policies and programs toward dozens of countries, a mix of high policy and low policy, forward-leaning and backward-leaning postures, confrontation and engagement. Often it is marked by one or two very high-profile, exceptional country cases that dominate external perceptions and assessments of the overall democracy policy, leading to an unbalanced view of the entirety. In addition, the exuberant rhetoric that typically surrounds U.S. democracy policy causes some observers to mistake words for deeds.

These obstacles to understanding are very much present in the case of the current Bush administration policy. Democracy promotion under George W. Bush, as under all recent U.S. presidents, spans cases as distinct as Egypt, Indonesia, Liberia, Russia, Ukraine, and Venezuela. Iraq, however, dominates the landscape, attracting and absorbing the lion's share of both internal and external attention, leading many observers to perceive Bush democracy policy only in terms of this singular case. In addition, the administration's pro-democratic rhetoric is unusually florid. According to President Bush and his top advisors, this administration is deeply committed to promoting democracy not only in Iraq and the broader Middle East but in the entire world.

This sweeping rhetorical line emerged in the lead-up to the Iraq war when President Bush added a democracy rationale to the list of reasons for invading Iraq. In his February 2003 speech at the American Enterprise Institute, for example, he declared that "the world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder." As other rationales for invading Iraq fell away after the initial intervention—most notably the need to stop Saddam Hussein's acquisition of weapons of mass destruction—administration officials increasingly emphasized the democracy rationale. They turned the Iraq intervention (at least rhetorically) into a democracy mission first and foremost and asserted a broader Middle East policy putatively aimed at supporting a democratic transformation of the entire region. This strong rhetorical push on Middle East democracy soon broadened into a global rhetorical framework. In his second inaugural address, President Bush set out what came to be known as his "freedom agenda," declaring that "America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs.... It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture."

This framework explicitly roots the freedom agenda not only in America's ideals but also in its interests. According to President Bush, it is the lack of political freedom in some countries, especially in the Middle East, that fosters political extremism and anti-Western terrorism. Promoting democracy in these places will therefore, it is hoped, help undercut the roots of terrorism. Democracy promotion is thus presented as an intrinsic, even central, element of the U.S. war on terrorism.

President Bush has also affirmed the freedom agenda in remarkably personal, religious terms. In a July 2007 meeting he stated: "I come at it [his belief in spreading liberty globally] many different ways. Really not primarily from a political science perspective, frankly, it's more of a theological perspective. I do believe there is an Almighty, and I believe a gift of that Almighty to all is freedom. And I will tell you that is a principle that no one can convince me that doesn't exist."<sup>2</sup>

## The Middle East Push

The administration's expansive rhetoric on democracy promotion has been clear enough. What then of its actual policy? Even a cursory look at Bush policy reveals a substantial gap between talk and action on democracy, whether it is the continued cozy relations with the Saudi government, the U.S. embrace of Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf, or the largely uncritical line toward China's continued authoritarianism. Yet this is hardly surprising. Every U.S. administration in recent decades talked much more grandly about supporting democracy around the world than it acted. The question is what are the particular dimensions of that gap under the Bush reign? Where has the administration made a real effort, where has it not, and why?

By its own account, the Bush team has made the Middle East the front line of its freedom agenda, reflecting the close tie it draws (at least in theory) between the war on terrorism and democracy promotion. When asked to specify what they have done to advance democracy in the Middle East, Bush officials usually highlight the following:

- The administration has ousted two dictatorial regimes in the region (counting Afghanistan as part of what the administration likes to call "the broader Middle East") and overseen their replacements by elected governments. Although both these governments are struggling to defeat stubborn, bloody insurgencies, they represent, in the administration's view, a significant pro-democratic advance over their predecessors.
- The president and some of his top advisors have spoken out loudly and clearly about the possibility of and need for democratic change in the Arab world. Administration officials believe that this public line both creates pro-democratic pressure on governments in the region and encourages or even inspires ordinary citizens to push for positive political change.

- The administration has taken a series of interrelated measures to motivate and push friendly autocratic Arab governments to move forward with political reforms: 1) public and private jawboning of Arab leaders, particularly of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; 2) rewarding reformers, with praise and economic benefits, such as the free trade agreements with Bahrain and Morocco; 3) establishing a new aid program, the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), to support economic, political, and social reform initiatives throughout the region; 4) revising existing bilateral aid programs, such as the Egyptian bilateral aid program, to increase their pro-democratic content; and 5) setting up regional pro-democratic diplomatic and aid initiatives, such as the Foundation for the Future.
- Through economic sanctions, diplomatic initiatives, and special new democracy aid funds, the administration has exerted pressure for internal political change on the two governments in the region it views as hostile: Syria and Iran. This pressure included a special effort in 2004 to get Syria to withdraw from Lebanon, which helped make possible the subsequent Lebanese Cedar Revolution.

As this list indicates, the Bush administration has indeed engaged on the issue of democracy in the Middle East, certainly more so than any previous U.S. administration. The post-September 11 conclusion in Washington policy circles that pervasive Arab autocracy is a cause of the violent Islamic radicalism provoked a genuine questioning of the traditional U.S. policy of support for "friendly tyrants" in the region. Yet the new approach was deeply torn from the start both by an uncertain commitment to it from all parts of the U.S. government and by conflicting imperatives deriving from other U.S. interests.

For example, although the administration now characterizes its interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq as democratizing missions, in both cases the story is much more complex, with security objectives playing a major role. The intervention in Afghanistan was clearly security driven, although once the Taliban had been ousted the United States helped broker a democratically oriented political reconstruction process. Since the initial intervention, however, the Bush administration has been unwilling to commit a sufficient level of forces to secure order, allowing the elected government of President Hamid Kharzai to come under severe pressure from a renewed Taliban insurgency.

How much democracy figured in the administration's decision to topple Saddam Hussein is still fiercely debated in Washington, more than four years after the fact. No simple answer is possible because different members of the core Bush team had differing views. Some key members, such as former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney appear to have supported the Iraq intervention both as a way to assert U.S. strength (in keeping with their view that the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, because Al Qaeda perceived it to be lacking the will to fight back) as well as out of a genuine concern over Saddam Hussein's assumed effort to acquire weapons of mass destruction. They had little real interest in whether a post-Saddam Iraq would be democratic as long as it was

led by a pro-U.S. government, as evidenced by the Pentagon's effort to hurry Ahmed Chalabi into Iraq as soon as Saddam was driven out.

Others in the inner Bush circle, most visibly former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, pushed for the intervention out of a real belief in the possibility and value of democratizing Iraq. Wolfowitz and others hoped democratization would transform Iraq into a pro-Western state and create a democratic example for the rest of the Arab world, thereby triggering a wave of democratization in the region.

Although the motivations going in were important to determining the nature of the intervention, equally or more important are U.S. actions once there. Here too the picture is mixed. The administration labored to get an elected government in place (after the Iraqi Shia leadership essentially forced the Coalition Provisional Authority to agree to elections) and to help it survive. Yet at the same time the administration failed to commit the number of U.S. forces necessary to stabilize the country, while also showing little interest in democracy aid efforts in the country, and demonstrating a frequent impulse to stage manage post-Saddam Iraqi politics with scant regard for democratic principles.

Concerning the administration's policy of pushing friendly autocratic Arab allies toward greater political reform, such efforts have been half-hearted at best. The administration exerted the greatest pressure on Egyptian President Mubarak, but even that has ended up largely toothless. The Egyptian strongman has paid no price (other than a delay of free trade agreement negotiations) for pointedly defying the administration's plea for free and fair elections in 2005 and subsequently cracking down on political opposition forces. Other U.S. autocratic allies in the region have felt almost no pressure at all, despite the Bush team's grand pronouncements about its commitment to a politically transformed region. The pro-reform U.S. aid programs, such as MEPI, though well intended, are only modest, nonconfrontational efforts safely within the comfort zone of autocratic governments accustomed to engaging in partial political reforms for the sake of alleviating pressures for deeper change.

The administration's drive to encourage democratization among its autocratic partners in the region was inhibited from the start by the inescapable fact that the administration still needed the close cooperation of these governments on several fronts, such as antiterrorism, access to oil, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The margin for pushing hard for political change was very limited, a fact of which the Arab governments in question were well aware. Moreover, despite the new idea in Washington that political change in Arab countries is necessary to undercut political radicalism, many people within the U.S. government still feared that any decisive move toward greater political openness would allow Islamists to come to the fore and thus did not support the new line.

Several political developments of the past two years have further undermined this only partial commitment to democracy in the Middle East. The strong showing by Islamists in several key recent elections in Lebanon and Egypt and the victory of Hamas in Palestine in January 2006 greatly sharpened the concern within the U.S. policy establishment that Arab democratization would result in Islamist takeovers. Further deterioration of the political and security situation in Iraq, particularly the sharp downturn starting in 2006, undercut any lin-

gering credibility that still attached to the administration's claim it was engendering a democratic transformation of that country.

The administration's rising concern about Iran's strategic position and intentions has further sidelined the democratization agenda. Seeking to mobilize a coalition of friendly Arab states to check Iran's influence in the region, the administration has recently been tightening ties with friendly autocrats in the region, including offering an extremely large new package of military sales and assistance for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the smaller Gulf states. The administration describes this effort as unifying the "moderates" against the "radicals" in the region, implying that it is actually a pro-democratic policy. That the moderate camp is made up of a collection of firmly nondemocratic states, some highly repressive, belies this idea, however.

By the beginning of 2007 it was evident that the Bush push for Middle East democracy was effectively over. The United States is still fighting in Iraq of course but for the more basic goals of keeping the country from breaking apart and achieving at least basic order. Some of the soft elements of the democracy push in other parts of the region remain in place, like MEPI. The core of it is gone, however, broken on the shoals of Iraqi political realities and U.S. security and economic interests throughout the region. Despite President Bush's continued statements about U.S. pro-democratic intentions and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's insistence that "a new Middle East" is emerging, U.S. policy has ended up a semi-realist venture. Toward most of the region it has fallen back into the old pattern of accepting or embracing useful autocratic friends. Iraq policy remains a singular case, one that eludes categorization on realist-idealist lines, being too transformative and cost-unconscious to be classically realist, yet too entwined with hard U.S. interests to be considered truly idealist.

## **Beyond the Middle East**

Beyond the Middle East, the administration's foreign policy has also followed a semi-realist line. The administration talks sweepingly about democracy and pursues some modest efforts to support positive political change in different places. At the same time, it gives paramount attention to the pursuit of economic and security interests and where those interests clash with the stated democracy interest, as has occurred in many places, the administration puts democracy on the back burner and maintains or cultivates warm relationships with nondemocratic governments.

This pattern is evident in at least three types of cases. First, toward its two principal power rivals, Russia and China, the administration has sought to maintain cooperative relations based on mutual interests, primarily security-related in the case of Russia and economic-related in China. That both countries have in recent years been moving backward on political freedom or liberalization has not caused the administration to modify its approach. Bush officials have sometimes publicly regretted these political developments, particularly in the case of Russia, but have not let the democracy issue derail the search for mutually produc-

tive security and economic cooperation. In recent months President Bush and his advisors have ratcheted up their criticisms of Russian President Vladimir Putin's autocratic practices, but they appear to have done so primarily in response to a more hostile line from Putin generally, not in response to any dramatic new developments in terms of domestic Russian political backsliding. Thus the somewhat more critical line on democracy appears as an adjunct to frustration over Russia's security posture, not as a principled policy line.

Second, in prosecuting the war on terrorism, the administration has embraced various non-democratic governments it perceives as useful partners. This is a familiar pattern in the Middle East where the close antiterrorism cooperation in recent years between the United States and a host of autocratic regimes, including those in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, is an extension of a long-standing approach. Under the war on terrorism this pattern has spread to other regions, including South and Southeast Asia and Africa.

For example, the Bush team has championed Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf as a key ally in the war on terrorism, overlooking his glaring antidemocratic character for the sake of his (at least hoped for) help in going after Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The administration provides lavish diplomatic support, military assistance, and economic aid to the Pakistan strongman. The Bush bear hug is not tempered by any pro-democratic component—no real push on constitutional reform, free and fair elections, return to civilian rule, or human rights abuses. The absence of any noticeable concern with Pakistan's democratic deficit is partly the result of the administration's intense focus on obtaining Musharraf's cooperation and not wanting to raise troublesome political issues that might muddy the waters of friendship. It is also due to the Bush team's belief that Musharraf is holding together a potentially unstable, dangerous political situation, and that desirable as democratization might be in theory, in practice it is too risky to try.

Ethiopia is another case. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is an undemocratic strongman who manipulates elections and limits political freedom in a country many hoped would move forward on democracy during this decade. The Ethiopian government is useful to the United States as a security partner, however, especially in connection with the U.S. struggle with Islamists in Somalia, and the administration has downplayed the democracy issue for the sake of cooperative ties. Confident in this relationship, Zenawi took the bold step in 2005 of expelling several major U.S. democracy promotion organizations during the lead-up to national elections—elections it subsequently strong-armed in its favor. The Bush administration regretted these moves but carried on with the close relationship.

These cases and others like them (including in Rwanda, Mauritania, and Malaysia) point to a central contradiction in the war on terrorism. The Bush administration insists that advancing freedom is central to this campaign, as a means of undercutting Islamic radicalism. Yet in practice, antiterrorism measures require close cooperation with the security and intelligence services of many nondemocratic governments.

Third, in its pursuit of reliable supplies of oil and gas and investment opportunities for U.S. energy companies in foreign energy fields—a pursuit greatly intensified by the upswing in energy prices in the middle of the decade—the administration has also cultivated cozy rela-

tions with energy-rich autocrats. Again, this is a long-established policy pattern in the Middle East but one that has been spreading in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and sub-Saharan Africa.

For example, the administration punted on any serious engagement with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev or Azeri President Ilham Aliyev over democracy issues for the sake of useful friendships with each. Both those countries held national elections in 2005, and in the lead-up to those elections Nazarbayev and Aliyev assured U.S. officials that they would take substantial steps toward more free and fair elections. Yet in the end both leaders fell back on old habits, manipulating the electoral processes to ensure their continued political control and defying the U.S. administration's urgings to do better. Neither government paid any price with the U.S. government for its repressive actions. In less than a year after the election Vice President Cheney was in the Kazakh capital expressing his admiration for Nazarbayev's achievements.

It is of course hardly new for a U.S. administration to find itself nurturing warm, forgiving ties with friendly tyrants for the sake of economic or security interests. It is striking, however, that despite President Bush's grand freedom agenda, the number of such cases has increased during his time in office. Moreover, it is difficult to identify a single case (other perhaps than Egypt for a brief period) in which the administration seriously pushed one of these friendly autocrats on his democratic shortcomings. Of the forty-five "non-free" (according to Freedom House) countries in the world, the Bush administration maintains friendly, unchallenging relations with the governments of more than half. This reality stands in deflating contrast to the rousing proclamations about supporting "the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture."

The weakness of the Bush commitment to global democracy is manifest not just when one looks at the Bush approach to nondemocratic governments. In some regions, new democracies face daunting pressures from within as the initial "third wave" momentum has slowed and obstacles to deepening democracy have multiplied. Yet here too the administration's ambitious pro-democratic language has not been matched by deeds.

Latin America is an important case in point. During this decade, Latin America has been experiencing serious political tensions, or even what some observers characterize as a crisis of democracy. Many Latin Americans are bitterly disappointed with the results of 20 years of democracy, seeing few improvements in daily life, including still-high levels of inequality, poverty, corruption, crime, and state inefficiency. Increasing numbers of voters in many countries have been turning to populist candidates with an uncertain fidelity to democratic principles, such as Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia. Political polarization between these antisystematic challengers and the traditional political establishments is rising.

Although the health of democracy in Latin America is clearly vital to America's overall interests in the region, the Bush administration has failed to engage on this issue in any high-level or sustained way. Not only has the Bush team been otherwise absorbed by Iraq and other Middle East headaches, its standing in the region is extremely low due to Iraq (which hit a major nerve in a region with its own negative legacies of U.S. interventionism), narrowing the

space for productive engagement. President Bush's five-nation tour of the region in March 2007, in which he spoke for the first time of an interest in supporting greater social justice and declared a commitment to immigration reform, was widely perceived both in Washington and the region as too little too late. The trip ended up only underlining the larger pattern of U.S. neglect. It was evident that the Bush administration was finally making some noise about engaging less out of any apparent concern about the troubled state of democracy than from a desire to check Hugo Chávez's increasingly assertive bid for regional influence.

## The Democracy Side

Although replete with realist components, Bush foreign policy is nevertheless only semi-realist. It does contain significant pro-democratic elements beyond just the overreaching rhetoric. As discussed above, the administration did attempt to make Middle East democracy a priority, partial and problematic though it turned out to be. Pro-democracy initiatives and efforts have taken various forms in other regions.

The administration has been tough on several dictatorial regimes, criticizing them publicly, attempting to mobilize multilateral diplomatic action against them, and funding assistance programs aimed at bolstering pro-democratic dissidents. It has followed this approach toward states such as Belarus, Burma, Cuba, and Zimbabwe where the United States has no significant interests in oil, antiterrorism cooperation, or other issues that would render friendship with the regime beneficial.

In several dozen countries the administration has supported modest measures to help advance democratic transitions that are moving ahead or restart transitions that have become blocked. These efforts usually entail a mix of diplomatic steps (such as pro-democratic advice or jawboning) and democracy assistance, including aid to support free and fair elections, the reform of state institutions, and civil society development. The diplomatic side usually emanates not from the president or secretary of state but from officials one or more steps down the hierarchy. The democracy assistance is typically small doses of technical assistance, often costing no more than a few million dollars a year in any one country. This quiet, generally long-term support for democracy is not a Bush innovation. It is a continuation of a pattern of modest, quiet support for democracy (often overridden or neutralized by other policy priorities) that emerged in the early 1980s (or late 1970s if one considers human rights policy an early form of it) and has been followed by every administration ever since, gradually being institutionalized into the U.S. foreign policy and foreign aid bureaucracies over time.

In this decade, for example, the U.S. government has supported Indonesia's ongoing democratic transition through democracy aid and diplomatic backing for key political reforms. After Nepal's King Gyanendra carried out a takeover of all executive authority in February 2005, the Bush administration responded by stopping lethal military assistance, suspending economic aid programs, and exerting diplomatic pressure for a return to a political pluralism. In Liberia, the Bush administration worked decisively to mobilize international diplomatic



and financial support for the new reform-oriented government led by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Many more such examples could be cited.

The Bush administration's support for the democratic breakthroughs in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004, respectively, falls into this general category of long-term, limited but nevertheless worthwhile pro-democratic diplomacy and aid. Both cases attracted enormous amounts of international attention with some observers suggesting that these were "made-in-the-USA" revolutions and examples of Bush regime change efforts. In both cases, however, the U.S. government had been carrying out democracy aid since the early 1990s. The increase in pro-democratic diplomatic and assistance efforts in the lead-up to the 2003 Georgian elections and the 2004 Ukrainian elections was an amplification of a long-standing approach, not a new Bush policy. Despite the conspiracy theories about Washington being the prime mover in these electoral revolutions, the U.S. role was at most that of a useful helping hand to domestic political and civil forces that forged the breakthroughs by dint of their own skills, determination, and courage.

By some calculations, the overall amount of U.S. democracy aid increased under Bush, but such comparisons are difficult due to governmental changes in what gets counted as democracy aid, with the Bush administration adopting a more inclusive definition over time. To the extent there was an increase, it came almost entirely in the Middle East. U.S. democracy funds for other regions, such as the former Soviet Union, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America have remained largely unchanged or have decreased in this decade.

One noteworthy new initiative under Bush that contributes on the democracy front is the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). Announced at the 2002 Monterrey Summit on Development and set up in 2003, the MCA has committed more than \$3 billion in grant aid funds to approximately twenty-two countries. MCA funds are aimed at promoting economic growth. Yet the MCA seeks to make a positive effect on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in the developing and former communist worlds by giving out funds on the basis of countries meeting a set of social, economic, and political performance indicators, thus creating positive incentives for better performance in all these areas. The actual pro-democracy effects of the MCA remain to be determined, and some observers argue that the weighting of democracy in the selection criteria is insufficient. Nevertheless, the MCA represents a significant addition to the U.S. assistance realm and an innovative effort to use aid as a positive policy incentive.

In sum, the notion that Bush policy represents any kind of all-out democracy crusade is an illusion, fueled by the exceptional and confusing case of Iraq. President Bush's pro-democratic rhetoric is grand, but his policy is semi-realist. Its main pillars—the basic framework of strategic relations with Russia and China, the war on terrorism, and the quest for good relations with foreign energy producers—are realist endeavors in which democracy plays at most only a minor role. The policy encompasses many cases of pro-democracy diplomacy and assistance, but these efforts are largely modest in scope, directed at countries of less importance to the United States, and largely represent a continuation of efforts by previous administrations.

## *The Effects of Bush Policy*

### **Hard Time for Democracy**

What effects have the Bush administration's policies had on democracy worldwide? Before addressing this question directly it is useful to take stock briefly of democracy's global state.

This has been a difficult decade for democracy in the world. As recent Freedom House surveys indicate, democracy has basically not advanced in the world since the late 1990s. Moreover, democracy is under stress in many places. As discussed above, significant parts of Latin America find themselves in troubled political waters, characterized by high levels of citizen discontent, challenges to democratic institutions, and heightened polarization. Russia's movement toward semiauthoritarian rule has cast a pall over the already weak prospects for democracy in many parts of the former Soviet Union, especially Central Asia and the Caucasus. Asia continues to experience serious democratic deficits with political deliberalization in China, a military coup in Thailand, marked political deterioration in Bangladesh, continued military rule in Pakistan, entrenched nondemocratic rule in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam. Even in Central and Eastern Europe, the most successful region for democratization in the 1990s, political illiberalism, polarization, and conflict have surged, for example, in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.

Democracy's troubled state has multiple causes. To some extent a loss of forward momentum after a period of rapid democratic expansion of the sort that occurred from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s is almost inevitable. The third wave of democratization involved the establishment of at least formally democratic systems in many countries lacking many of the facilitating factors that help democracy succeed, such as a high level of economic development, significant previous experience with political pluralism, and no strong identity-based societal divisions. Not surprisingly, many of these countries have struggled to make democratization work and have ended up in an uncomfortable gray zone between democracy and dictatorship. In addition, those autocratic regimes that survived the third wave of democracy are the well-entrenched, adaptive ones that are good at resisting pressure for change.

In the 1990s Western liberal democracy had no apparent ideological rivals with potentially wide appeal, but a decade later rivals are on the rise. China's continued economic success and Russia's notable economic growth of recent years have given new life to the stronghand model of development, that is, a system that combines aggressive capitalist growth with tight, centralized political control, and significant protected pockets of crony capitalism. This model is attractive to powerholders in many parts of the world (especially the former Soviet Union, East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa) and is increasingly held by them as an alternative to a Western-prescribed democratic model. In Latin America,

Hugo Chávez proclaims “Bolivarian democracy” a preferable political alternative, and his line has been taken up by politicians in various places.

The surge in oil and gas prices in this decade is another factor contributing to democracy’s travails. With many oil-rich or gas-rich countries being nondemocratic, or at best only partially democratic, the heightened flow of revenues from energy resources is not strengthening the democratic side of the global ledger. Governments in Angola, Azerbaijan, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela are among the main beneficiaries, and many energy-poor, weak democracies are hit with punishingly high energy bills. Moreover, heightened concern about access to reliable energy supplies reduces the willingness of Western governments to push energy-rich governments on their democratic shortcomings. The efforts by some countries— notably Iran, Russia, and Venezuela—to counter U.S. political influence in their regions with political export work of their own type is financed by the surging oil and gas proceeds.

### **The Bush Effect**

What is the place of Bush pro-democracy policies in this mix of broader factors bearing on the state of democracy around the world? In the greater Middle East, center stage of the Bush freedom agenda, the results are largely discouraging. The United States did remove a dictatorial regime in Afghanistan and bring about the establishment of a democratically oriented elected government there. Yet this nascent democracy is extremely weak, under siege from the resurgent Taliban, and politically limited by the continued power of regionally based warlords. Iraq is now liberated from dictatorial rule but embroiled in a horrendously violent civil war that has caused tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths and injuries, an enormous outpouring of Iraqi refugees to neighboring countries, and huge negative socioeconomic effects on many other fronts, to say nothing of the costs on the U.S. side.

With regard to the rest of the Middle East, the results of the administration’s pro-democracy push are very limited at best. In late 2004 and early 2005, a confluence of encouraging events—relatively peaceful elections in Iraq, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, President Mubarak’s decision to hold direct presidential elections in Egypt, and movement toward elections in Palestine—caused some talk in Washington of a “Baghdad Spring” in the region. Bush officials and supportive pundits seized on these events as evidence that the U.S. democracy push was bearing fruit. Although President Bush and his top advisors still valiantly try to argue that the region is seeing democratic gains, the hopes of that earlier period have faded. The administration’s forceful talk about the need for democracy in the region did stir up some greater currents of discussion about the question of democracy, embolden some activists to push harder for change, and encourage some Arab leaders to carry out mild liberalizing reforms. At root, however, the Arab world remains stuck in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule. The new talk about democracy has not translated into new broad-based citizen constituencies and movements in support of such change. Political reforms put for-

ward by Arab governments in recent years still conform to a strategy not of democratization but defensive liberalization—alleviating internal and external pressure for change through modest reforms that do not threaten the underlying levers and structures of autocratic rule.

Furthermore, the hope of advancing a regional democratic agenda has been deeply undercut by the Iraq war. Arab leaders are able to use the war to reinforce their long-standing message to their citizens about the perils of rapid democratic change. Day after day Arab citizens see on their televisions tens or even hundreds of Arabs dying as a result of a “democratic experiment” in their region. The spillover problems of the war—refugees, new terrorist groups, rising Shia–Sunni tensions—cause other Arab governments to feel less rather than more latitude to try political openings. More generally, that the democracy agenda is continually put forward (at least rhetorically) by the United States, whose policies in the region most Arabs detest, taints the very concept in many Arabs’ minds.

Continued efforts by President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to claim that a democratic transformation of the Middle East is somehow still in the making ring hollow against the harsh contrary reality: The Middle East not only remains deeply stuck in non-democratic politics, it is wracked by violent conflicts in Iraq, in Lebanon between Hizbollah and Israel, in Palestine, and between Palestine and Israel, as well as gripped by rising Shia–Sunni tensions and the growing influence of Iran.

Outside the Middle East it is difficult to find evidence of any major positive U.S. impact on the state of democracy. With the Bush administration not attempting any substantial engagement on democracy or political reform issues in many of the major places where such issues are at stake, such as Central Asia, China, Russia, South America, and South Asia, the search for positive effects is limited in scope. As has been the case for many years, U.S. pressure on entrenched dictatorships such as in Belarus, Burma, Cuba, and Zimbabwe has had little apparent effect, due to a basic lack of leverage.

Through its generalized support for attempted democratic transitions in many countries— involving mid-level diplomatic engagement on key elections, democracy aid, and economic incentives—the Bush administration, like its predecessors, has played a minor but useful role in helping various countries move ahead on democracy or at least avoid slipping backwards. In a few cases this sort of quiet, long-term support for democracy crystallized around particularly consequential political junctures, such as the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, prompting some credit-taking by U.S. officials. Even in such cases, however, the U.S. role was at most a facilitating rather than determinative factor.

In assessing the effects of Bush policies on the state of democracy in the world, it is also necessary to take note of negative effects. Major elements of the Bush approach to the war on terror and to foreign policy in general have significantly damaged the cause not only of democracy but also of democracy promotion.

To start with, the Bush administration’s trampling of the rule of law in its antiterrorist pursuits—the repeated, shocking abuses of detainees and prisoners in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo; the secret CIA prisons; the unauthorized domestic eavesdropping; the stripping away of rights of designated “enemy combatants”; and all the rest—has done grievous, even

devastating harm to America's status as a promoter of democracy and human rights in the world. Although difficult to measure, the power of positive example has long been one of the most important—perhaps the most important—means by which established democracies assert a pro-democratic influence in the world. It is enough to talk to any democracy or human rights activist abroad, many of whom have traditionally relied on U.S. leverage to bolster their position, to understand how damaging the loss of U.S. legitimacy in this domain has been under Bush.

On top of this, over the past four years President Bush has closely associated democracy promotion with a military intervention in Iraq that is widely viewed as illegitimate, illegal, and the cause of tremendous human suffering. This constant association has done enormous damage to the legitimacy of the very idea of democracy promotion. In the 1990s democracy promotion gradually shed much of its baggage as a Cold War cover for instrumental political interventionism, gaining reasonably wide legitimacy as an increasingly normal part of international relations. The Iraq war has reversed that progress, effectively rebranding democracy promotion as a tool of hegemonic interventionism—this time with a militaristic coloring. This taint has contributed significantly to the growing pushback against democracy assistance by governments in many places.

This pushback has also been a reaction to the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and the perception by powerholders in other post-Soviet states and elsewhere that U.S. democracy programs were an important causal factor in these events. Although U.S. democracy aid in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan dated from the 1990s, and was rather gradualistic in nature and modest in scope, the temporal contiguity of these dramatic electoral revolutions with the Iraq intervention prompted many observers in different parts of the world to associate them with Iraq and to see them as part and parcel of a Bush drive to transform the world politically by direct action.

The Bush administration has only magnified this problem by flirting with the idea of regime change through pressure against governments it views as security threats, such as those of North Korea, Iran, and Syria, and wrapping this line in the language of democracy promotion. The tendency of the administration to take sides in certain foreign elections—as it did in favoring Fatah in the Palestinian elections of January 2006 and the political forces opposing Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua's 2006 elections—to try to produce outcomes favorable to U.S. interests further bolstered the harmful image of democracy promotion as a cynical exercise in power politics.

## *Continuity Amid Discontinuities*

As discussions start to take shape in Washington about the role democracy promotion should play in a post-Bush U.S. foreign policy, they often proceed from mythical assumptions. For example, both supporters and critics of the administration talk at times as though Bush policy has represented a full press on democracy promotion when in fact, as analyzed earlier, this is not the case. Some discussions thus begin from a misleading starting point, from the idea that Bush went all out on democracy promotion and that has only led to trouble, and therefore the next administration must back away from the issue.

Another incorrect assumption is that the Bush push on democracy, such as it is, is something new in U.S. policy, that other administrations of recent decades have not emphasized democracy promotion in the same way or to the same degree. This assumption reflects the fact that the Washington policy community can be strikingly ahistorical at times due both to the constant turnover and influx of people within the community and to the determinedly forward-looking ethos that frequently pervades it.

### **Elements of Continuity**

The semi-realist framework of Bush policy—soaring pro-democracy rhetoric wrapped around a policy that seeks in principle to connect democracy promotion to America’s main strategic goals but sacrifices democracy in many specific places for the sake of countervailing economic and security interests—largely defined the approach of recent administrations as well.

President Ronald Reagan, for example, unfolded a wide umbrella of pro-democracy rhetoric over its challenging stance toward the Soviet Union—a stance that included not just a major U.S. arms build-up and pointed criticisms of the Soviet system but also a determined effort to roll back Soviet influence in the developing world. It also launched and began to institutionalize democracy assistance through the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the establishment of democracy programs within the U.S. foreign aid bureaucracy. Alongside its loudly proclaimed democracy policies and programs, however, the Reagan administration continued long-standing Cold War friendships with autocratic governments that were useful to the United States either as bulwarks against Communism or lucrative trade partners, such as President Suharto of Indonesia, President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, the military dictatorship in Pakistan, China’s Communist government, the Saudi royal family, the smaller Gulf monarchies, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and so forth. And substantial parts of the administration’s tough line against the Soviet Union, such as its aid to rights-abusing militaries in Latin America, exemplified serious tensions between anticommunist and pro-democratic goals.

The other foreign policy of recent decades most associated with democracy promotion was that of President Bill Clinton. Yet Clinton's policy too, despite its significant references to democracy concerns, was also in practice semi-realist. President Clinton and his top advisors asserted a broad-gauged rhetorical commitment to advancing democracy's fortunes abroad. They reconfigured this line to fit the post-Cold War globalization context, emphasizing the positive association between democracy and peace and highlighting the attractive notion that with the Cold War over; U.S. ideals and interests were now fused. The Clinton team made democracy a serious component of its policy toward some parts of the world, including Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Russia, and parts of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. And they expanded democracy assistance and furthered the incorporation of democracy promotion into the machinery of policy making.

At the same time, however, Clinton policy also had substantial realist elements. U.S. ideals and interests no longer cleaved over Cold War concerns, but major U.S. economic and security interests—from trade and access to oil to cooperation on Middle East peace efforts—still led the U.S. government to seek friendly relations with nondemocratic governments in many parts of the world, including China, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere.

Reaganites (or, with the passage of time, neo-Reaganites) and Clintonites tend to dispute the pro-democratic bona fides of each other's administrations. Painting the Reagan years as an era of seamless, heroic American commitment to freedom, neo-Reaganites criticize the Clinton years as a troubled time of strategic confusion and weakness. Clintonites extol their post-Cold War emphasis on democracy and highlight the serious tensions between Reagan's often strident anticommunism and promotion of democracy abroad, such as in Central America. Regardless of the merits of these views, one point remains clear: Democracy promotion was a foreign policy issue of major concern in both periods. U.S. policy during both was an amalgam of heady pro-democracy rhetoric and mixed pro-democratic and traditional realist policies.

Likewise, both neo-Reaganites and Clintonites tend to portray the years of the George H. W. Bush administration as a time of diminished attention to democracy promotion. The initial inclinations and positions of the elder Bush's administration were indeed largely realist. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, democracy promotion pushed its way into Bush policy, a trend further fueled by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Bush team's rhetoric ended up embracing the democracy theme to a notable degree with Secretary of State James Baker articulating the emergent post-Cold War framework as "beyond containment lies democracy.... President [George H. W.] Bush has defined our new mission to be the promotion and consolidation of democracy."<sup>3</sup> Democracy promotion became an integral element of U.S. policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s not only in Central and Eastern Europe but also in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) adopted democracy as one of its four main goals in 1990. Democracy aid increased substantially in those years with the passage of the Support for East European Democracy Act and the Freedom Support Act (for the former Soviet Union) and the spread of such aid in Africa. Of course the first Bush administration maintained dominant realist ele-

ments in its policy throughout, from the subdued reaction to China's crackdown on the Tiananmen Square demonstrators to the continuation of cozy relations with friendly autocrats in the Middle East, Asia, and other regions. But the idea of a sharp, post-Reagan lurch away from serious attention to democracy promotion is a myth.

### **Elements of Discontinuity**

In short, despite what one often hears, there is significant continuity with regard to the place of democracy promotion in U.S. foreign policy going back more than 25 years. Semi-realism (publicly presented as exuberant idealism) has largely prevailed. Nevertheless each administration has shaped or directed its democracy-related policies in its own ways. In the case of the current Bush administration, three distinctive elements of its approach to democracy promotion have done much to negatively change the tenor of the topic.

First, the centerpiece of George W. Bush democracy policy is an invasion of another country. Presidents Reagan, Bush senior, and Clinton also invaded countries in the name of democracy—Grenada, Panama, and Haiti, respectively. But the Iraq intervention differs in that Iraq is a large, strategically important country, not some small backwater country. And the intervention is far from the United States, not in its Central American or Caribbean “backyard.” Furthermore, the invasion has not been, as the earlier ones were, a quick tactical success but a protracted, bloody fiasco.

Second, the Bush democracy line is intimately linked with the war on terrorism. Previous administrations have also integrated democracy promotion into their geostrategic frameworks—such as the Reagan administration's Cold War strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. But this particular geostrategic framework is unusually unpopular in the world as a result of how the administration has framed and executed it. This is especially true in the Islamic world where the war on terrorism is widely (and tragically) viewed as a war on Islam.

Third, the Bush democracy line focuses on the Middle East, a region that has never before been the main target of such attentions. All regions present particular challenges for democracy promotion, but the Middle East is especially daunting territory. Not only is it a region with extremely high sensitivities about Western, especially U.S., political interventionism, but it is populated by entrenched autocratic governments that are not in a democratizing mode and are useful to the United States on important economic and security grounds. In previous decades, U.S. democracy promotion efforts concentrated on challenging governments either hostile to the United States (such as the Soviet government) or ones already in democratic flux, such as in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. Trying to push for democracy against friendly autocratic governments not already facing an impending transition is unusually hard to do and something with which the United States has little record of success.



## *The Way Forward*

Democracy promotion has gone badly awry under President Bush. How can the United States get back on track in this vital policy domain?

Debates over the appropriate role of democracy promotion in U.S. foreign policy typically take the form of arguments about where the U.S. government should position itself along the realist–idealist continuum. The emergent debate about democracy promotion after Bush is following that pattern. Some analysts or commentators, interpreting Bush policy as an over-the-top drive for global democracy, assert that the United States must shift decidedly back in a realist direction. Others of a more idealist ilk highlight the ways Bush has fallen short between word and deed on democracy and argue for a leap ahead toward greater idealism.

In fact, however, movement in one direction or the other along the realist–idealist continuum is not the key. As argued above, the overall place of the Bush administration’s foreign policy on that spectrum is not greatly different from that of its recent predecessors—it is somewhere in the middle, in the familiar semi-realist zone in which substantial elements of realism are mixed together with less weighty pro-democratic components. Given the underlying configuration of U.S. interests in the world, it is unlikely that the next administration’s policy will shift decisively away from this middle zone.

Those voices calling for a bracing realist corrective, for example, overlook several significant facts. First, with the exception of Iraq, the main lines of Bush policy, such as toward China and Russia, are already substantially realist. Even in the Middle East, where Bush did mount something of a democracy drive, the policy has already lapsed back to a predominantly realist mode. Second, where democracy concerns have been somewhat integrated into Bush policy—in the modest pro-democracy diplomacy and assistance in some parts of Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the former Soviet Union, and South and Southeast Asia—democracy is not in tension with U.S. economic and security interests. Rather, in these cases the various interests reinforce each other, such as in South America where the successful consolidation of democracy will further U.S. economic and security interests. Therefore, the realist case for abandoning an interest in democracy in these less prominent cases is hollow. Third, although much of the U.S. public is disillusioned with Bush democracy promotion, it has been conditioned over the past 30 years to expect at least some U.S. concern for the state of democracy and human rights abroad. Most of the public would be unlikely to support an unalloyed realist policy for long.

Calls for an idealist, pro-democratic surge to replace Bush foreign policy also run into some stubborn countervailing facts. First, the basically realist approach to America’s two main strategic challengers, China and Russia, is very unlikely to change anytime soon given both the weighty U.S. economic and security interests involved that point to a need for cooperative relations and the lack of any real U.S. capacity to affect the domestic politics of those countries. Second, the scarring U.S. experience in Iraq has rendered the U.S. policy commu-

nity profoundly cautious about any vigorous new ventures cast as democracy promotion. Third, the sobering experience with pushing for Middle East democracy in general, beyond Iraq, has further dampened the U.S. appetite for any grand gestures in the realm of democracy promotion.

All this is not to say that changes cannot and should not be made with regard to how the United States is or is not attempting to support democratization in specific countries. Several such cases are discussed below. It does mean, however, that the basic semi-realist framework of U.S. policy is strongly rooted and will probably not change much in the foreseeable future. The key to moving forward on democracy promotion lies elsewhere than in movement along the realist–idealist axis. It is a threefold challenge. First and foremost, the next administration must take clear, well-conceived steps to restore credibility both to the United States as a promoter of democracy and to the very concept of democracy promotion. Second, democracy promotion must be repositioned within the war on terrorism, away from its status as a rhetorical centerpiece to a more modest, realistic place. Third, the next administration must recalibrate democracy promotion to better fit the larger international context. Most of the current democracy promotion programs and policies grew out of the late–Cold War and early post–Cold War years, the height of democracy’s third wave. They are based on a set of assumptions from that period about the U.S. place in the world and about democratization—assumptions that must now be revised.

## Rebuilding Credibility Through Decontamination

Rebuilding the credibility of the United States as a symbol of democracy and of democracy promotion as a legitimate, valuable element of international relations will be slow and difficult. As in other domains, reputational damage in foreign policy accrues quickly but takes years to overcome. The departure of President Bush from office will open the door to such a process, as it will unfreeze important U.S. foreign policy options and gain the United States a new hearing on the global stage. Nevertheless, the arrival of a new U.S. administration will only be an opportunity, not the accomplishment of change in this domain. Rebuilding credibility will not be gained simply through the declaration of a new approach; it will accumulate only gradually through persuasive actions. The central operative concept for this process should be *decontamination*. U.S. policy relating to democracy building must be decontaminated from a host of negative practices and associations intrinsic to Bush policy. *Decontamination* is a harsh but unfortunately necessary term, a reflection of the genuinely serious taint that now afflicts the democracy promotion domain.

Decontamination begins at home. The manifold U.S. abuses of the rule of law and human rights in the name of fighting terrorism must stop if the United States is to regain credibility as a global symbol of democracy. Inevitably, fighting terrorism creates tension with legal restraints on the government and with individuals’ rights. Many well-established democracies struggle with this dilemma. Setting forward a detailed plan to bring U.S. antiterrorism poli-

cies and practices at home and abroad into better compliance with the rule of law is beyond the scope of this paper. The main lines of such a revision, however, have been amply and ably mooted by various U.S. rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union. As set out in a recent *New York Times* editorial, these revisions include the following:<sup>4</sup>

- Restore habeas corpus
- Limit domestic spying
- Ban torture in law and practice
- Close the secret CIA prisons
- Fully account for all “ghost prisoners”
- Ban extraordinary rendition
- Tighten the definition of “enemy combatant”
- Improve prisoner screening methods
- Close the Guantánamo detention camp

The specifics of each of these steps are certainly open to debate, and the list itself may need broadening. The basic point, however, is clear. Whereas U.S. antiterrorism policies and practices are often debated within the United States either in terms of their relationship to U.S. domestic law or foreign security policy, they must also be understood as having a fundamental bearing on U.S. efforts to promote democracy around the world. Without substantial improvement in this domain, any post-Bush effort to relaunch U.S. democracy promotion will be stillborn.

Second, decontamination demands breaking the close association in the world’s eyes of U.S. democracy promotion with U.S. military force. Given the catastrophic experience in Iraq, it seems probable that the next U.S. administration, or probably the next several, will not conceive of military force as a promising tool for the democratic transformation of other countries. If future administrations decide that a U.S.-led military ouster of another government is necessary for hard security reasons, they should justify such an action on those grounds and avoid casting it as a pro-democracy mission. Doing so would not build support for such an action and would do further harm to the democracy promotion concept.

Of course breaking the association in the world’s eyes between U.S. democracy promotion and U.S. military force will be difficult to do as long as the intervention in Iraq continues, which it almost certainly will into the next administration. At the same time, however, the Iraq war is above all President Bush’s war. If the next president makes clear to the world that he or she does not believe that invading Iraq as a democratizing mission was a good idea, he or she will at least make possible the start of such dissociation. This is true even if that president decides it is necessary for the United States to stay militarily engaged in Iraq for some further time for the sake of preventing still worse developments there.

The Iraq war has prompted many people within and outside the United States to assert categorically that military force is intrinsically illegitimate as a method of democracy promotion.

This proposition is overly broad. It is noteworthy, for example, that the 1994 U.S. invasion of Haiti, justified by Washington as a democratizing mission, did not provoke significant international opprobrium. The distinguishing differences from Iraq were several: 1) the Haiti intervention received clear UN approval (under Chapter VII of the UN Charter); 2) there existed a legitimately elected Haitian president (Jean-Bertrand Aristide) whom the intervention restored to power; it was not a case of attempted democratization from scratch; and 3) there were no other significant U.S. security and economic interests at stake in Haiti (beyond stopping the flow of Haitian refugees to the United States) that caused people to view the democracy rationale as a smokescreen. Thus, a more precise rendering of the necessary dissociation as that between democracy promotion and military force may be between democracy promotion and the use of force unauthorized under international law.

A third vital element of decontamination is to return to using the term *democracy promotion* only to describe policies and programs whose central purpose is actually democracy promotion. The Bush administration has fallen into the habit of using democracy promotion as a cover for U.S. efforts to change or shape political outcomes in other countries for the sake of U.S. security interests with little real regard for whether the effect on the other country is in fact pro-democratic. Leaving aside the strenuously debated question of whether Iraq is such a case, the Bush administration's regime change policies beyond Iraq are examples. These are efforts to isolate, pressure, and punish governments hostile to U.S. security interests—such as the governments of Iran, North Korea, and Syria—in the hopes of triggering their collapse. The administration packages these policies as democracy promotion and thus compounds the Iraq problem: It gives people around the world the clear impression that when the United States says it is seeking to build democracy abroad it really means the attempted ouster of unfriendly governments that the United States views as strategic threats.

Whether or not regime policies are an effective way to pursue U.S. security interests, a source of much debate, is beyond the scope of this paper. The point for democracy promotion is that selling such policies under the democracy label undercuts genuine efforts at democracy promotion. One could argue that democracy promotion efforts directed at dictatorial governments such as in Belarus, Burma, and Zimbabwe are also about “regime change” given that they seek to increase the chance of fundamental change in the existing political regimes. Yet there are several important differences between regime change policies and genuine democracy promotion efforts directed at dictatorships:

- U.S. regime change policies are driven by the perceived threats that the target regime presents to U.S. security interests rather than by the regime's nondemocratic character.
- Regime change policies focus on ousting governments; they give little attention to what sort of government will replace the ousted one beyond the hope that it will be friendlier to the United States.
- Regime change policies rely significantly on covert methods, such as covert financing of potential coup-makers or opposition groups, sometimes mixing covert methods with officially sponsored overt democracy programs.

- Regime change policies are usually pursued by the United States alone, as direct expressions of near-term U.S. security interests; they are not part of a broader multinational set of pro-democratic efforts that grows out of a more general international response to the democratic shortcomings of a government.

A fourth area for decontamination is reducing inconsistency in democracy promotion, that is, the tendency of the United States to push hard on democracy in some countries while embracing nondemocratic governments in others. Inconsistency is always a problem with U.S. democracy promotion (and, to varying degrees, with the democracy promotion policies of all governments engaged in the issue) given the range and complexity of U.S. interests around the world. Yet harmful perceptions of U.S. hypocrisy—a primary symptom of such inconsistency—have reached new heights during the Bush years. The perceptions of hypocrisy have been caused by the confluence of unusually sweeping pro-democracy rhetoric (Bush committing the United States to ending tyranny in the world) with greater cozying up to friendly tyrants by Washington (due to the need for security cooperation in the war on terrorism, the spiking of oil and gas prices, and other factors as discussed previously).

Reducing this global perception of U.S. hypocrisy will be another crucial task for a new administration interested in rebuilding international credibility. To start with, the rhetoric on democracy has to be brought under control. Political speeches are inevitably rhetorical and a certain amount of overstatement is unavoidable, especially on value-oriented topics. Nevertheless, a little modesty from Washington would go a long way. Rather than advancing grandiose ideas about the U.S. commitment to democracy, it would be better to characterize the U.S. interest in democracy abroad as what it really is—at most one of several main U.S. interests—and to acknowledge that the United States balances its interest in democracy against its other interests and often struggles to match its actions to its ideals.

At the same time, the next administration should do more to push America's many autocratic friends on democracy and human rights issues. Dramatic or decisive measures are almost never available in such situations, and finding a productive balance between the contending interests at stake is always difficult. The temptation to follow the path of least resistance—uncritically embracing the friendly tyrant—is inevitably strong. Yet, in some cases a better approach is possible, one that does not overlook democracy yet is still compatible with other interests.

Egypt is one example. The Bush administration has made a mistake in giving up its push for Egyptian political reform. The Mubarak government is indeed a useful regional security partner for the United States. But as some noted Egypt experts have pointed out, the United States maintained good security relations with Cairo even at the height of the short-lived U.S. push on democracy.<sup>5</sup> Mubarak's current political crackdown is stifling what was a genuine possibility for badly needed inclusive, pluralistic political change in his country. Washington has only limited influence on Egyptian politics, but it does have some. Focusing diplomatic attention on key issues—such as establishing an independent electoral commission, opening up the legalization process of political parties, and reducing human rights violations—would

help increase the chance of a more open, democratic leadership succession in Egypt. Such a transition would be good for Egypt's long-term political health, which in turn would be good for the U.S. government's long-term security interests in the country.

Pakistan poses another example. The Bush administration has erred in giving President Musharraf a pass on his autocratic politics. Pakistan's political life is extraordinarily treacherous, and past attempts at democracy have failed under the weight of accumulated political fecklessness and corruption. There is no simple path to democracy in Pakistan, and the U.S. interest in Pakistan's cooperation on antiterrorism is powerful. As Pakistan specialist Frédéric Grare argues in *Rethinking Western Strategies Toward Pakistan*, Musharraf's autocratic rule has not served U.S. security interests in the country but instead fed "a climate of insecurity and sectarian violence" that has helped both Al Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>6</sup> A near-term return to civilian, constitutional rule followed by a long-term process of democratization would likely improve the country's economy, reduce political extremism, and allow the state a chance to gain more coherent authority over the national territory. As Grare emphasizes, "antiterrorism policies would benefit from the legitimacy of a freely elected government."<sup>7</sup> Washington should use its influence, which due to the extravagant U.S. aid to Pakistan's military is significant, to push Musharraf to take or permit pro-democratic reforms.

These are just two of many such potential cases that include Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Rwanda, and others. Helpful autocrats always present dilemmas for U.S. policy-makers, and the United States can only have very modest effects on their overall political direction. In all these cases, however, pushing the autocratic leaders to avoid the temptation of consolidating absolute power is a better recipe for the long-term political health of the country. If done carefully but incisively, it can be carried out without harming near-term U.S. economic and security interests. Moreover, even just limited efforts in this direction would gain the United States significant credit in the eyes of people the world over. It is essential to rebuilding U.S. credibility on democracy promotion that the next administration reduce the glaringly high level of inconsistency in U.S. policy, banishing the widely held impression that the U.S. stance can be characterized as "for my friends, anything; for my enemies, democracy."

## Repositioning Democracy Promotion Within the War on Terrorism

All of the above-described components of decontamination—rectifying America's rule of law abuses, breaking the association between democracy promotion and the unauthorized use of force, and decreasing both the instrumentalization and inconsistency of democracy promotion policies—relate to the war on terrorism. That is to say, all four reflect the fact that intermixing democracy promotion with problematic components of the war on terrorism (interpreted broadly by the Bush team to include the invasion of Iraq) has been at the heart of the contamination of democracy promotion. This points to an important question for the next administration: Is it necessary to detach democracy promotion from the war on terrorism to rebuild the credibility of democracy promotion? This question then connects directly

to a broader policy issue: Is democracy promotion in fact a necessary element of U.S. efforts to combat terrorism (or, more precisely, to combat anti-Western violence coming from radical Islamist groups)?

The next administration will face an enormous challenge in renovating and revitalizing the war on terrorism, including, one hopes, moving away from that vague overreaching concept toward a more focused conception of what the task really is. Trying to figure out how this can be done, not surprisingly, is becoming a minor cottage industry in the U.S. policy and scholarly communities. It is a question, or set of questions, that goes well beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of reformulating the U.S. approach to democracy promotion, however, this issue of the overall place of democracy concerns within antiterrorism efforts is vital.

The central idea behind putting democracy promotion at the heart of the war on terrorism is the notion that the absence of democracy in many societies, especially in the Arab world, is allowing or even causing violent political extremism to fester. Promoting democracy, the idea goes, is therefore a key method of undercutting the roots of terrorism. The appeal of this idea is obvious. It promises a long-term, peaceful solution to a vexing problem. Applied to the issue of Islamic radicalism it does have at least some potential applicability. When Islamist political actors are prohibited from taking part in normal channels of political competition, they may become radicalized and turn violent. The inclusion of Islamists in competitive politics in Jordan, Morocco, and Yemen, for example, has strengthened the moderates over the radicals in the main Islamic movements in these countries. The more radical elements in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood are likely to be strengthened rather than weakened by a continued ban on the Brotherhood's political participation. Political extremism in Pakistan appears to be growing not lessening under autocratic rule.

Yet the idea that it is the lack of democracy that causes terrorism must not be treated as an iron law of politics and turned into a one-size-fits-all policy nostrum. Globally there is no correlation between authoritarianism and terrorism.<sup>8</sup> Many democracies suffer or have suffered from homegrown terrorism of one type or another. Spain is a telling example in that regard. Despite having experienced one of the most successful transitions to democracy of modern times, democratic Spain has been plagued for 30 years by Basque terrorism. Great Britain today is struggling to eradicate terrorism from domestic Muslim extremists. At the same time, some authoritarian governments have brought domestic terrorism under control, such as Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s, or do not experience it at all; as Gregory Gause notes, the proposition that authoritarianism breeds terrorism while democracy undercuts it is belied by the comparison of India and China.<sup>9</sup>

Even with respect to the more specific issue of terrorism connected to Islamic radicalism, the proposition is at best only partly true or sometimes applicable. The causes of Islamic radicalism, as well as the reasons why it has sometimes erupted into anti-Western terrorism, are multiple and complex. They include very general, long-term factors, such as the tensions produced within many Arab societies (and Muslim societies more generally) by the conflict between religious traditions and the imperative of economic and social modernization. They also include more specific ones, such as anger over U.S. policies in the region, from the war

in Iraq to the special U.S. relationship with Israel. Reducing the causes of terrorism carried out by Islamic radicals down to the lack of democracy in specific countries is analytically misguided.

The Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand are cases in point. Despite a genuine process of democratization in the late 1980s, and the maintenance of at least relatively democratic governments there since that time, the Philippines has been unable to solve its problem with violent Islamic radicals. Since opening to democracy in the late 1990s, Indonesia has suffered more not less terrorism by radical Islamist groups than it did in the preceding two decades under authoritarian rule. Thailand's democratization of the last twenty years has coincided with a growing problem of violence by Muslim separatists.

Democratization can help encourage moderate Islamic actors and over time weaken more radical ones. But it can open the door to greater radicalism in societies with pent-up pressures for sociopolitical change and radical Islamist groups ready to seize on an opening to gain political ground, as in Algeria in the early 1990s and in Palestine recently with the election of Hamas.

Thus, as the next administration revamps the U.S. strategy for combating violent Islamic radicalism, it should not overstate the role of democracy promotion in that task. Doing so would cloud rather than clarify the actual challenges of combating violent Islamic radicalism. It would also continue to sew together democracy promotion with security-oriented policies that draw heavily on military force, covert intelligence operations, activist law enforcement, and governmental informational campaigns that will inevitably be controversial and often unpopular in places where they are carried out.

Above all, the next administration should avoid what the Bush team has done—making democracy promotion the rhetorical centerpiece of the war on terrorism yet in practice not giving much attention to it in central arenas of the antiterrorism campaign, such as Pakistan or many parts of the Arab world. A much more measured approach—noting that democracy promotion has at most a modest place as one element of an antiterrorism strategy but then taking that place seriously in some key contexts—would be better both for democracy promotion and for the struggle against violent Islamic radicalism.

## Recalibration

Although reversing the damage done to democracy promotion by certain Bush policies will be a crucial part of a new way forward, it will not be the whole approach. The high level of attention paid in the United States and abroad to highly controversial actions or policies of the Bush administration has caused many observers to overlook the fact that democracy promotion is facing challenges arising from a broader set of changes in the international domain, changes that have little or nothing to do with Bush policy.

Contemporary democracy promotion grew up in a distinctive formative period—the heyday of democracy's third wave—marked by a set of particular assumptions about the state of



democracy in the world and the place of democracy promotion in international affairs. These largely optimistic, expansive assumptions included the following:

- Democratization has a natural momentum—it is spreading around the world because of underlying structural factors such as economic growth and the naturally contagious appeal of political freedom.
- There is no significant rival to Western liberal democracy, no other political ideology or type of political system that commands attention and legitimacy in multiple regions of the world.
- The main dynamics of international economics, especially the spread of market reforms, are facilitative or even generative of global democratization.
- Globalization is basically a process of Westernization and as such contributes to the spread of democracy.
- The United States is the natural leader or at least the preponderant actor in democracy promotion.
- The political sophistication and skills of Western actors trying to promote democracy are generally greater than those of the local actors toward which such efforts are directed.

Due to various developments in the international domain of the past ten years, the validity of all these assumptions is now doubtful:

- Democracy has lost momentum. As discussed above, the number of electoral democracies has not increased in ten years. Significant recent cases of backsliding outnumber and outweigh major cases of democratic gains.
- The stronghand model of economic and political development, as practiced most visibly by China and Russia, has gained substantial ground. It appeals to political elites and some ordinary citizens in many parts of the world, including Central Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and East and Southeast Asia.
- Various significant developments on the international economic scene, such as the high price of oil and gas and citizen disillusionment with market reform efforts in some developing countries, are hindering democratization.
- As a result of the rising importance of China, India, and other non-Western economies and the aggressive use of the tools of globalization by anti-Western groups, such as Islamic radicals, globalization is no longer intrinsically tied to the spread of Western social and political values.
- The U.S. loss of credibility under Bush has ended the U.S. position as a natural leader on democracy promotion. Nor is the United States any longer the preponderant actor. European democracy aid now exceeds U.S. democracy aid, and a wide array of other national and multilateral organizations are substantially engaged in democracy building, sometimes exceeding the U.S. role in particular countries.

- The sophistication of political actors in the target or recipient countries has increased dramatically. A key part of the story of the rise of semiauthoritarianism in many parts of the world in recent years is a greatly increased understanding by shrewd strongmen of how to co-opt, block, belittle, or artfully mimic Western democracy promotion efforts.

In short, above and beyond the problematic elements of U.S. democracy promotion policies of this decade, the international context for democracy building has shifted unfavorably. Finding a positive way forward for U.S. democracy promotion will thus require not merely addressing the challenge of decontamination but also recalibrating U.S. policies and programs to respond to this new environment. No simple changes or sweeping solutions will do the job. Large-scale conditions like the general loss of positive democratic momentum are not amenable to easy answers. Instead a series of both smaller and larger ideas and initiatives should be mounted. Recalibration should not be a retreat in the face of adversity. At the same time, however, qualities such as persistence, patience, sobriety, and innovation will need to stand in where energy and enthusiasm may once have sufficed. The menu of possible modes of recalibration is open for debate and formulation. Some initial ideas include the following.

**DRAWING THE ENERGY CONNECTION:** Given that some international economic trends now conflict with global democratization, a new administration seeking to make a difference on democracy promotion will have to find ways to engage through the economic dimension. Drawing the connection between the high prices of oil and gas and democracy's travails in the world is one such approach. The negative political effects of high energy prices—both the bolstering of many energy-rich nondemocratic governments and the stress on energy-poor new democracies—are easily apparent. In this regard the Bush administration's stubborn pattern of essentially ignoring the ties between high energy prices and the state of global democracy is striking. It is no longer credible for a U.S. administration to claim that it is serious about advancing democracy's fortunes worldwide and then pursue energy policies that cut the other way.

If the United States were able to reduce the price of oil through substantial reductions in U.S. oil consumption, positive effects on democracy would occur. It is unclear, however, whether this is a feasible goal. Total U.S. oil consumption is a major (25 percent) though not dominant share of global consumption, but rising demand from China, India, and other fast-growing economies has made up for the modest reductions in U.S. consumption over the past decade. Also the world price reflects more than just consumption levels; it reflects available supplies and the risk of serious disruptions. Bush policies have unfortunately managed to raise rather than lower the price of oil. Energy experts estimate that the Iraq war, for example, has raised the price of oil by at least \$5 to \$10 per barrel.

By significantly reducing dependence on foreign oil and gas (such as through lowered consumption), however, the U.S. government could certainly reduce the pressure it faces to kowtow to energy-rich autocrats. The failure of the Bush administration to take serious steps to reduce this dependence contributed to the constriction of its pro-democracy policies. The

next U.S. administration could thus open a new door on democracy policy by making explicit to the U.S. public the connection between the two domains and implementing a set of meaningful measures (such as a carbon tax, tougher auto mileage standards, and major incentives for the use of renewable energy sources) to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

**BACK TO IDEAS:** The rising appeal of political models other than democracy means the United States must engage (or reengage) abroad in promoting the idea of democracy rather than proceeding from the assumption that the idea itself commands near-universal appeal. Such an effort should not mean a return to Cold War–style political propaganda exercises to tout democracy’s virtues. The Bush administration’s stepped-up public diplomacy campaign has at times entrapped itself along these lines, mistakenly assuming that promoting democracy abroad should be closely tied to promoting America’s image. Instead, reengaging in the task of boosting the idea of democracy means giving close attention to the concerns and uncertainties about democracy among people in other countries, especially in weak new democracies where disillusionment with the experience of democracy is high.

Whether and how democracy can produce better socioeconomic outcomes for ordinary citizens is one important such concern in many places. Most U.S. democracy promoters have long taken a purely political view of democratization, seeing its socioeconomic effects as a domain apart. Yet with citizens of nascent democracies questioning whether democracy is improving their daily lives and the growing attraction of other political models, democracy promoters need to respond. They can do so by giving much greater attention to ways that democracy-building programs and policies may be connected directly to socioeconomic development challenges.

Moving in this direction will require democracy promoters to inquire and experiment in a host of possible arenas: examining how democratizing reforms in core political institutions can be designed to have direct positive implications for socioeconomic policy development and implementation; incorporating socioeconomic issues more directly into democracy programs focused on civil society and media development; finding ways to strengthen political parties to enable them to address key areas of citizen concern on the socioeconomic front, and so forth. Initiatives in some of those areas are under way, but the U.S. democracy promotion community has not yet made a decisive step in this direction, wary that if democracy aid is integrated with socioeconomic development issues, it may lose its place.<sup>10</sup>

**LESSENING AMERICA-CENTRISM:** It may be tempting for the next administration to react to the loss of U.S. leadership on democracy promotion through an assertive quest for renewed primacy. A better approach is to reduce the America-centric spirit of recent U.S. democracy promotion efforts and seek instead to bolster the U.S. role by integrating it better with the work of like-minded actors.

One way to do this is to encourage partnerships between U.S. democracy promoters and non-U.S. organizations of a similar bent. Some partnerships do already exist, such as joint work done by National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy in southern Africa or by the International Republican Institute (IRI) with various Central European partners in the post-communist world.

The main funders of U.S. democracy aid, especially USAID and the State Department, could offer specific incentives to multiply such joint initiatives across the democracy promotion domain. More U.S. democracy aid could be channeled into multilateral funds or through multilateral organizations. The Bush administration's support for the creation of the UN Democracy Fund was a useful step in this direction. U.S. diplomacy could give greater emphasis to working with and through other countries and multilateral organizations on democracy issues. The Bush administration has not, for example, effectively worked with Latin American governments and the Organization of American States in attempting to exert pro-democracy pressure on Hugo Chávez.

The next administration could further contribute in this vein of lessening American-centrism by modifying the way it talks about democracy promotion. American politicians and officials often refer to democracy promotion as a specifically or even uniquely American calling, not mentioning the many other actors involved. A striking aspect of President Bush's 2005 Freedom Agenda speech was that he talked about U.S. support for freedom abroad with no specific reference to any other government or organization engaged in this endeavor. The fact that the United States is only one of many countries to work in this field and that some partners, such as a number of European governments, are deeply engaged in this domain was absent. President Bush presented the United States as a sort of noble, lone democratic eagle circling the desert of a tyranny-infested world. It would cost Washington nothing, and help foster greater acceptance of democracy promotion, if the next U.S. president highlighted that the United States stands side by side with many like-minded governments and international organizations in a commitment to supporting democracy in the world.

**REVISING INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS:** In the 1980s and 1990s, Washington developed a heterogeneous institutional arrangement for funding democracy assistance. Most U.S. democracy aid originates from three organizations—USAID, the NED, and the State Department—going either to non-profit or for-profit U.S. grantees or contractors which then implement the assistance, or to a lesser extent, directly to organizations within target countries. During these two decades, the largest share of democracy aid originated from USAID, followed by NED, with the State Department only a minor source.

The Bush administration changed this arrangement—increasing the role of the State Department in democracy aid and decreasing that of USAID. It has done so both by raising the relative share of democracy funds originating from the State Department and by bringing USAID under the operational direction of the State Department. This shift reflects the administration's view that democracy aid should be part and parcel of U.S. foreign policy, as part of its larger idea that foreign aid as a whole is not hewing closely enough to U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Integrating democracy aid into the foreign policy machinery sounds logical but in fact is potentially counterproductive. Due to a basic paradox or at least dilemma, the U.S. government will only pursue democracy assistance (and democracy promotion overall) seriously if it views such activities as furthering the national interest; yet if it treats democracy aid (and democracy promotion) simply as a tool to serve specific U.S. near-term interests, such assistance will lose

credibility. This dilemma has traditionally been mediated by establishing and maintaining a certain institutional distance between most U.S. democracy aid funds and the U.S. foreign policy machinery. The establishment of the NED reflected this distancing impulse. So too did using USAID, a development organization, rather than the State Department as the main U.S. government agency responsible for democracy aid. Subsuming democracy aid into the foreign policy bureaucracy is especially problematic now given the surging global distrust of democracy promotion. In this context, U.S. policymakers should be looking to increase rather than reduce the distance between democracy aid and near-term U.S. foreign policy pursuits.

It is certainly true that USAID has long fallen badly short in its democracy-related work. Its shortcomings in this realm, however, have not been due to its partial separation from the machinery of U.S. foreign policy but to various glaring institutional deficiencies such as over-bureaucratization, weak human resources, and congressional micromanagement. Rather than giving up on the partial distancing of democracy aid and proceeding with a State Department takeover of this area, it would be better to revitalize USAID and its role as a democracy aid provider. USAID's institutional problems are so deep that superficial fixes will not work. A fully renovated organization is necessary. The recent proposals for the replacements of USAID with a cabinet-level Department for International Development represent a usefully bold approach to this task of renovation.<sup>11</sup>

As part of this renovation the new U.S. development agency will have to fully accept and incorporate democracy promotion as one of its core priorities. Such acceptance and incorporation has been resisted off and on at USAID for many years. Yet it is possible to make democracy an intrinsic part of a development agency's mission, alongside social and economic development. Several northern European bilateral agencies have done so, such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Increasing the NED's share of U.S. democracy aid could also be part of retaining or fortifying a partial distancing of democracy aid from the U.S. foreign policy machinery. If NED's budget is substantially increased, the organization may need to operate in some new ways, such as opening regional offices rather than operating only from a Washington headquarters or opening up a new line of funds to other major potential U.S. grantees beyond the four long-standing core grantees (the two political party institutes and the institutes representing U.S. business and labor). Augmenting NED's funding simultaneously with a renovation of USAID would ensure that both the more political approach to democracy aid (that NED tends to follow) would be well supported at the same time that the more developmental approach receives a boost—a useful balance.

The State Department, through both the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the regional bureaus, can still usefully manage some democracy aid. At root, however, the State Department is a diplomatic agency, not an aid-giving agency, and the difference is significant. The State Department has a crucial role to play in U.S. democracy promotion, but this should be primarily exercised through democracy diplomacy, political analysis, setting priorities, inter-agency coordination, and strategic planning, not through funding and overseeing assistance programs.

## *Conclusions*

Getting the United States back onto a better track with regard to democracy promotion will not be easy. The damage that the Bush administration has wrought in this domain is considerable. Bush policies have engendered powerful suspicions abroad about the very idea both of the United States as a democracy promoter and of democracy promotion itself. This is true especially in the Middle East, the focal region of the Bush democracy drive. Agile antidemocratic leaders on several continents are taking advantage of these sentiments to mount a serious pushback against Western democracy support programs and policies. These facts, together with the general loss of momentum of democracy's third wave, make this the most daunting environment for democracy promotion in a generation.

The negative effects of Bush policy on democracy promotion are also felt at home. The U.S. public is now less supportive of democracy promotion than at any time in recent decades, with a sizeable percentage doubting the value to the United States of such efforts and the ability of the United States to have much positive impact in this domain. The doubters are distributed along the ideological spectrum, causing uncertainty and debate within both the Republican and Democratic parties. Adding to these muddied domestic waters is considerable confusion among many Americans about what the much-trumpeted Bush push on democracy abroad has consisted of in actual practice. The case of Iraq and the constant pro-democracy rhetoric from the president have misled many people to view the United States as having gone over the top on democracy promotion worldwide, heightening the sentiment that the United States should pull back significantly from it.

Nevertheless, positive change is possible. The intense personalization of the global antipathy toward Bush foreign policy—the remarkable concentration of that antipathy on President Bush himself—means that the next U.S. president will have a real opportunity to change America's negative image in the world. Furthermore, the policies that have done so much harm to America's status as a symbol of democracy and human rights are mendable. Every established democracy facing a terrorist threat struggles to get the balance right between the rule of law and the imperatives of antiterrorism. But finding a balance that substantially preserves rights and core democratic principles is possible.

In addition, although the state of global democracy is unusually challenging, a majority of citizens in most parts of the world favor democracy at least in the abstract (even when they are frustrated with the democracy they have), almost all the most developed, successful societies are democracies, and some of the main structural drivers of democratization, like economic development, are still advancing in many places. Although Bush policies have done significant harm to the image of U.S. democracy promotion, the quieter side of democracy promotion—the technical assistance programs carried out by the community of experienced U.S. democracy promotion organizations, and low-key, locally targeted diplomacy at crucial

political junctures in struggling democracies—remains largely intact. This quieter side is a foundation on which future policies can be built.

Finally, although many Americans have been soured on the idea of democracy promotion due to Iraq, the U.S. public maintains a belief in the sorts of underlying principles, such as multilateralism, U.S. global engagement, and the importance of human rights, that a new administration can use as the building blocks for rejuvenating public support for democracy promotion.

Positive change will not occur, however, merely through the departure from power of President Bush and the coming into office of a new president who affirms a renewed U.S. commitment to democracy abroad. Real modifications must be made to democracy promotion as a part of U.S. foreign policy: decontaminating it from the taint that has become attached to it, repositioning it within the war on terrorism, and recalibrating it to fit the challenging imperatives of the new political context of this decade. More than ever, U.S. democracy promotion must square a daunting circle—it must embody strong elements of modesty, subtlety, and the awareness of limitations without losing the vitality, decisiveness, and creativity necessary for success.

## Notes

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