Should Democracy Be Promoted or Demoted?

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In his second inaugural address on January 20, 2005, President George W. Bush used the word *freedom* 25 times, *liberty* 12 times, and *democracy* or *democratic* 3 times. Bush did not enter the White House with a mission to promote freedom around the world. Rather, as a presidential candidate, he put forward a modest foreign policy agenda that eschewed nation-building. The events of September 11, 2001, however, radically jarred his thinking on the nature of international threats and triggered a fundamental reevaluation of his administration's national security policy that elevated democracy promotion as a central objective of his foreign policy agenda.

In the years since September 11, though, the rhetorical attention devoted to the advance of freedom, liberty, and democracy has greatly outpaced any actual progress in expanding democracy. To date, democracy has failed to take hold in the two countries where Bush ordered the forcible ouster of autocratic regimes: Afghanistan and Iraq. In its 2006 survey of freedom around the world, Freedom House labeled Iraq as "not free" with a 6 rating on a 1-7 scale (with 1 being most free and 7 being least free). Afghanistan barely earned the designation "partially free" with a 5 ranking. Nor did the toppling of these dictatorships send liberty rippling through the greater Middle East as some Bush officials and supporters had hoped. Instead, autocratic regimes in the region have used the excuse of terrorism (Egypt, Pakistan) or the alleged threat of US invasion (Iran) to tighten autocracy. Outside this region, some countries have made some progress toward developing democracy (Georgia, Ukraine) but just as many have moved toward greater autocracy. Freedom House concluded, "The year 2006 saw the emergence of a series of worrisome trends that together present a potentially serious threat to the stability of new democracies as well as obstacles to political reform in societies under authoritarian rule…the percentage of countries designated Free has failed to increase for nearly a decade…."[1] In sum, then, Bush's new attention to democracy promotion has not resulted in more people living in freedom.

Not surprisingly, many in Washington on both the left and right are pressing for a change in US foreign policy objectives. Only those at the extremes on both ends of the political spectrum advocate the complete abandonment of democracy promotion as a US foreign policy objective.

Instead, skepticism is largely couched as "realism," and a "return" to a greater focus on "traditional" US national security objectives. From this perspective, democracy promotion should take a back seat to strategic aims such as securing US access to energy resources, building military alliances to fight terrorist organizations, and fostering "stability" within states. A partisan gap has also emerged on this issue. In a German Marshall Fund survey released in June 2006, 64 percent of Republicans agreed that the United States should "help establish democracy in other countries," but only 35 percent of Democrats concurred.

We do not reject the importance of focusing on the more traditional goals of national security. However, we do reject the simple assumption that there is a zero-sum trade-off between these traditional security objectives and democracy promotion. We also share the negative assessments of the Bush administration's efforts to promote democracy in the past few years. However, our response to this mixed, if not disappointing, record of achievement is not to downgrade or remove democracy promotion from US foreign policy priorities. Rather, after presenting the case for why the United States should promote democracy, we suggest new strategies and better modalities for pursuing this objective.

Our paper proceeds in three parts. Part One outlines the positive case for including democracy promotion as an important component of US foreign policy. Part Two then presents the counterarguments, followed by our reasons for viewing them as ultimately unpersuasive.

The Stanley Foundation's Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide project brings together pairs of foreign policy and national security specialists from across the political spectrum to find common ground on ten key, controversial areas of policy. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of their organizations or the Stanley Foundation. The series is coedited by Derek Chollet, senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security; Tod Lindberg, editor of the Hoover Institution's journal *Policy Review*; and Stanley Foundation program officer David Shorr.

Part Three outlines some new modalities for promoting democracy—including a return to several established practices—that can make US and international efforts to promote democracy more effective.

The Case for Democracy Promotion

American Interests

No country in the world has benefited more from the worldwide advance of democracy than the United States. Not all autocracies are or have been enemies of the United States, but every American enemy has been an autocracy. Because of geography and US military power, most autocracies over the last 200 years have lacked the capacity to attack US territory. But the exceptional autocracies that became sufficiently powerful either did attack the United States (Japan, Al Qaeda) or threatened to attack (Germany under Hitler, the Soviet Union, North Korea). Conversely, Great Britain and France do have, at least theoretically, the military capacities to threaten the United States, but the thought of French or British attack is inconceivable simply because both are democracies.

The transformation of powerful autocracies into democracies has likewise served US national security interests. Most obviously, the end of dictatorship and the consolidation of democracy in Germany, Italy, and Japan after World War II made the United States safer. Beyond keeping imperial and autocratic leaders out of power, democratic consolidation in these countries served as the basis of US military alliances in Europe and Asia. At the end of the 20th century, regime change in the Soviet Union ended the Cold War and greatly reduced this once-menacing threat to the United States and its allies. Russia today lacks the military strength of the Soviet Red Army from 20 years ago. Yet Russia today remains the only country in the world capable of launching a massive military attack against American people on American soil. The threat of such an attack has significantly diminished because of regime change in the Soviet Union. And it is not a coincidence that Russia has become more antagonistic toward the United States and the West at the same

time that the current regime there has become increasingly authoritarian.[2]

During the Cold War, some viewed the Soviet threat as so paramount that all enemies of communism, including dictators, had to be embraced. They predicted that any political change to the status quo in autocratic societies would not produce democratic regimes and US allies, but communist regimes and American enemies. There were enough examples of this trajectory—Cuba, Angola, and Nicaragua—to warrant worry. But these are the failed cases of democratic transition, and US involvement in the internal changes of these countries can hardly be called democracy promotion. In contrast, successful democratic transitions did not undermine US security interests. Transitions in Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, Chile, and South Africa helped deepen American ties with these countries.[3]

The parallels to today are obvious. Once again facing a new worldwide ideological threat in the form of radical Islamism, American strategic thinkers both in and outside of government worry that political change in autocratic US allies will produce theocratic regimes hostile to American interests. The concern is valid, but is often overplayed by the very same autocrats as they seek to retain to power. So far, successful democratization has never brought to power a government that then directly threatened the national security interests of the United States or its allies. In the Palestinian Authority (which is not a country), we are witnessing the first case of such a potential outcome. Hamas seems to be capitalizing on its new status and resources to threaten America and its allies. In the long run, however, participation in democratic institutions and the assumption of responsibility for governance might moderate Hamas or undermine its popularity. It is still too early to assess the results of this transition (see the discussion of Hamas below).

The advance of democracy in Europe and Asia over the last century has made the United States safer—giving reason to hope that democracy's advance in other regions of the world will also strengthen US national security. But this is a hypothesis about the future based on analogy, and not a certainty. In the long run, we expect consolidation of democratic regimes in the greater Middle East would increase the legitimacy of the governments and thereby reduce the appeal of anti-systemic movements like Al Qaeda. In the shorter term, democratic government throughout the region would increase internal stability within states since democracies have longer life spans than autocracies. If democratic regimes ruled all countries in the region, conflicts between states would be less likely, and consequently demand for weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, would decrease. Finally, a more secure and stable region would reduce the need for a US military presence, just as a Europe whole and free dramatically reduced the need for American deployments in that region. And for major powers such as Russia and China, democratic development also should reduce the possibility that they would pursue balancing policies against the United States.

In the short run, however, there are potential risks for US security associated with democratic development in the greater Middle East. Without question, the toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan deprived Al Qaeda of a base of operations that had more assets than its current base in Pakistan. Yet this advantage for US strategic interests is not a result of democratization. In fact, the difficult process of developing democratic institutions in Afghanistan has failed to produce stable government or a growing economy to date—a situation that has created an opening for the Taliban's resurgence. In Iraq, neither democratic government nor an effective state has taken root. To date, the American people are not safer as a result of regime change in Iraq. In both countries, US-led invasions brought about regime change. But because these operations were neither launched to bring democracy nor followed through toward that end, the resulting new or resurgent threats to US national security emanating from Afghanistan and Iraq cannot be blamed on democratization in general or US democracy promotion in particular.

Elsewhere in the region, the limited progress toward democratization in recent years is also tenuously tied to US security. The Cedar Revolution and subsequent 2005 pullout of Syrian troops from Lebanon raised hopes for stability there. Yet the Hezbollah-Israeli war in the summer of 2006 underscored how premature these hopes were. Soon after President's Bush second inaugural speech, Egypt's President Mubarak seemed to react by implementing incremental political reforms. A year later, he rolled them back almost entirely, a development that has heightened tensions within Egypt and strained US-Egyptian relations. We have yet to see whether partial reforms in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco will lead to further incremental political liberalization or serve instead as camouflage for continued autocratic rule. The net effect of these reforms on US security is still entirely unclear.

We admit that we do not know whether the analogy between democratization in the wider Middle East and democratization in other regions will hold and yield the same benefits. The destruction of fascist and communist regimes and the emergence of more democratic regimes, first in Europe and Asia after World War II and more recently in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, significantly enhanced US national security. It is reasonable to expect a similar outcome in the wider Middle East; that is, the emergence of more democratic regimes in the most autocratic region of the world should also make the United States more secure. As we say, it is still an untested hypothesis.

American Values

Debates about democracy promotion cannot be couched solely as a balance sheet of material benefits and liabilities for the United States. American values must also enter the discussion. Since the beginning of the American republic, US presidents have to varying degrees invoked America's unique, moral role in international affairs. The loss of this identity, both at home and abroad, would weaken domestic support for US involvement in world affairs and undermine American ability to persuade other countries to support our foreign policies. Apart from serving US strategic interests, democracy promotion is also the right thing to do.

First and foremost, democracy is the best system of government. Winston Churchill was right: democracy is a terrible system of government, but still better than all of the others that have been tried. Democracy provides the best institutional form for holding rulers accountable to their people. If leaders must compete for popular support to obtain and retain power, then they will be more responsive to the preferences of the people, in contrast to rulers who do not govern on the basis of popular support. The institutions of democracy also prevent abusive rule, constrain bad rule, and provide a mechanism for removing corrupt or ineffective rule. Furthermore, democracy provides the setting for political competition, which in turn is a driver for better governance. Like markets, political competition between contending leaders, ideas, and organizations produces better leaders, ideas, and organizations (which is the premise of the Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide project). At a minimum, democracy provides a mechanism for removing bad rulers in a way that autocracy does not. The absence of political competition in autocracies produces complacency, corruption, and has no mechanism for producing new leaders.

Second, democracies provide more, and more stable, welfare for their people than do autocracies. Democracies avoid the worst threats to personal well-being, such as genocide and famine. Over the last several decades, democracies around the world have not produced higher economic growth rates than autocracies: "the net effect of more political freedom on growth is theoretically ambiguous."[4] Instead, compared to democracies, autocracies produce both much higher and much lower rates of growth. For every China there is an Angola. Democracies tend to produce slower rates of growth than the best autocratic performers, but also steadier rates of economic development. The old conventional wisdom that dictators are better at economic modernization than the democratic counterparts is not supported by data.

Third, the demand for and appeal of democracy as a system of government are widespread, if not universal. Public opinion surveys of people throughout the world, including the wider Middle East, show that majorities in most countries support democracy.[5] Ideological challengers remain, such as the modernizing autocrat or Osama bin Ladenism. But compared to earlier historical periods, these opponents of democracy have never been weaker.

The United States, therefore, has a moral interest in promoting democracy. If democracy is the best system of government, demanded by the majority of people around the world, then the United States should help promote its advance. Conversely, any US involvement in sustaining autocracy is immoral. Obviously, American leaders constantly face situations in which immediate security interests require cooperation with autocratic regimes. But such policies should not be defended on moral or ethical grounds.

Engaging the Case Against Democracy Promotion

Three broad categories of reasons are offered for why the United States should not pursue democracy promotion. The first is normative, based on the view that democracy is culturally rooted and not a universal good; the second prudential, concerning the principle of respect for sovereignty as the basis for international order; and the third also prudential, concerning the need for sequencing in the introduction of democratic reforms.

The first argument—that democracy is not a universally valid or desirable goal—has a number of proponents. Postmodernism and other relativist philosophies argue that there are no universally valid political or institutional orders because it is impossible to arrive at philosophical certainty per se. A more common assertion is that democracy is culturally rooted, and that societies with other cultural backgrounds may choose other forms of government as they wish. Samuel Huntington, while preferring liberal democracy for the United States, makes this kind of case.[6] According to him, liberal democracy is rooted in Western Christianity, which proclaimed the universal dignity of man made in God's image; thinkers from Tocqueville to Nietzsche have argued that modern democracy is simply a secularization of Western values. There is no particular reason why other civilizations based on other cultural premises should prefer democratic government. Lee Kwan Yew and other proponents of "Asian values" have argued that, given the poor performance of many democratic regimes in non-Western settings, this form of government is distinctly less desirable than a growth-oriented authoritarian regime.

Full consideration of this argument is beyond the scope of this paper. There are certainly serious philosophical and political cases to be made against the universality of liberal democratic values on a number of grounds. While acceptance of democratic norms and basic human rights has spread far and wide since the onset of the Third Wave of democratization, there are still parts of the world where they are openly rejected on cultural grounds. The Chinese government, various East Asian leaders and thinkers, Islamists of assorted stripes, and many Russian nationalists are among those arguing that their cultures are inherently inimical to one or another aspect of liberal democracy.

We offer the following observations in contention. In the first place, democracy promotion never implied the "imposition" of either liberalism or democracy on a society that did not want it. By definition this is impossible: democracy requires popular consensus, and works only if the vast majority of a society's citizens believe that it is legitimate. Democracy promotion is intended only to help reveal public preferences in the society itself. Dictatorships often resort to violence, coercion, or fraud to prevent those preferences from carrying political weight; democracy promoters simply try to level the playing field by eliminating the authoritarians' unfair advantages.

A second counterargument that is somewhat more difficult to make is that human rights and the democratic institutions that spring from them are immanently universal. In keeping with the case made by Tocqueville in

Democracy in America, the historical arc toward universal human equality has been spreading providentially for the past 800 years. It has now encompassed not just the Western, culturally Christian world, but has spread and taken root in many other parts of the world as well—India, Japan, Korea, and South Africa. This suggests that democracy has spread not as a manifestation of a particular civilization's cultural preferences, but because it serves universal needs or performs functions that are universally necessary, particularly at higher levels of economic development. One can argue, for example, that the procedural rules of liberal democracy guarantee that governments behave in a transparent, law-governed way and remain accountable to the people they serve. Even if a culture does not put a value on individual rights per se, liberal democracy is ultimately required for good governance and economic growth.

The second argument against democracy promotion is made by international relations "realists," namely, that world order depends on states accepting the Westphalian consensus to respect each other's sovereignty and mutual agreement not to meddle in the internal character of each other's regimes. The Westphalian consensus arose out of Europe's wars of religion following the Reformation, when European princes fought over the confessional allegiances of their neighbors. Peace was obtained only when all agreed to a principle of *cuius regio*, *cuius religio*, and noninterference in each other's internal politics.

Among contemporary writers, Henry Kissinger has been one of the most articulate and consistent proponents of this view. Since his earliest writings,[7] he has argued that idealistic concern with the internal character of other regimes leads to messianic crusades that in the long run provoke resistance and undermine world order. The idealistic Tsar Alexander I prolonged the destabilization of Europe begun by the French Revolution. International peace and stability reigned from 1815 to 1848 only due to the efforts of the arch-conservative Metternich to forge a balance of power in Europe, heedless of ideological concerns.

There are countless variants of realist theory today, united primarily in their opposition to democracy promotion as a component of foreign policy. Some argue not from a world-order point of view, but from the perspective of narrower American interests: the United States needs oil, security, trade, and other goods that are compromised by an emphasis on human rights or democracy. These views have acquired particular resonance since the Iraq war, which was seen as being driven by a neoconservative agenda of democracy promotion and political transformation in the Middle East. These critics would argue that US pressure for liberalization of political space and calls for elections have brought to power groups like Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, all of which are illiberal and hostile to US interests. There has been criticism especially of the Bush administration's use of coercive regime change as a means to spur the political transformation of the Middle East.

We make several arguments in response to the realists. The first has to do with prudence in means. To say that the United States should promote democracy in its foreign policy does not mean that it should put idealistic goals ahead of other types of national interests at all times and places—or that it should use military force in pursuit of these goals. Indeed, the United States has never made democracy promotion the overriding goal of its foreign policy. The Bush administration invaded Iraq primarily out of concern over weapons of mass destruction and terrorism; democracy promotion was a tertiary goal that received heavier emphasis only ex post, when the other justifications for the war proved hollow. The United States has promoted democracy in places like Germany and Japan after World War II, but only when in concert with its security goals. In these cases, transformation of two former enemies into democratic countries did indeed align with US strategic interests, and few realists would argue that the United States would have been better served by an alternative policy.

The real trade-offs come in regions like the Middle East, where the United States' closest strategic allies are autocracies like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, or Egypt. The Bush administration has made the general argument that the deep root cause of terrorism and Islamist radicalism is the region's lack of democracy, and that promoting democracy is therefore one route to eradicating the terrorist threat. Natan Sharansky has argued that the Oslo peace process was fatally flawed because the United States and Israel relied on Yasser Arafat's authoritarian Fatah as an interlocutor, instead of pressing for democracy in Palestine prior to peace negotiations.[8] Prior to the invasion of Iraq, some observers similarly hoped that a democratic Iraq would be a strategic partner of the United States and recognize Israel. By this view, democracy, security, and peace with Israel all went hand in hand.

It is quite clear in retrospect that this reading of the sources of Arab radicalism was too simplistic. The deep sources of terrorism are much more complex than just the Middle East's democratic deficit. One can argue in fact that it is precisely the modernization process that produces terrorism and that more democracy is likely to exacerbate the terrorism problem, at least in the short run.[9] Many of the Iraqis who went to the polls in the various elections of 2005 were Shiites who wanted not liberal democracy but Shiite power, and who have subsequently worked to establish an Iranian-style Islamic republic in areas under their control. The winners of democratic elections elsewhere in the region tend to be profoundly illiberal Islamist groups, who are also more hostile to America's ally Israel than to the authoritarian governments they would like to displace. The political tide in the Middle East is not running in favor of pro-Western liberal opposition groups. In addition, the United States' authoritarian allies like Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan have been quite clever at sidelining liberal opponents to accentuate the threat from the Islamist opposition. The assertion of President Bush's second inaugural address that there is no necessary trade-off between US security interests and its idealistic goals would thus seem to be false.

In our view, the appropriate policy in response to this political landscape needs to be a calibrated one that takes account of particular circumstances. There are some countries like Saudi Arabia where there is no realistic democratic alternative to the current authoritarian leadership, or where likely alternatives would clearly be worse from a strategic perspective. In these cases, authoritarian allies indeed represent the lesser of two evils. While quiet pressure on Egypt to liberalize might be appropriate, provoking a major showdown to strong-arm Cairo into permitting free and fair elections is not likely to work. On the other hand, there is a democratic alternative to General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan—in the form of the newly created alliance between the Pakistan People's Party's Benazir Bhutto and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. While this group had an uneven record when they were in power, they have pledged to crack down on the Taliban in the Northwest Frontier Province and may indeed prove to be more reliable allies than Musharraf. An open election in Pakistan would risk further gains by Islamist parties, but the country has a sizable middle-class electorate and significant public sentiment that is wary of an anti-Western course.

Hamas in Gaza represents a more difficult case, since it is not only illiberal but also committed to the destruction of America's ally Israel. The strategic problem here is whether it is better to have this group on the inside of a long-term peace and Palestinian state-building process or outside as obstructionists. Hamas represents a significant part of the Palestinian electorate, and the party will continue to play an influential role in Palestinian politics regardless of whether the United States and Israel accept it. A strong argument can be made that it is better to relent to Hamas' participation in a government in hopes that their goals will moderate over time. It is, in any event, difficult to see how reliance on a corrupt Fatah government as in the past will help bring peace or even a legitimate interlocutor in the Palestinian Authority.

The final argument against the current agenda of democracy promotion concerns the sequencing of democratic reforms, especially elections. State-building, creation of a liberal rule of law, and democracy are conceptually different phases of political development, which in most European countries occurred in a sequence that was separated by decades if not centuries. State-building and creation of a rule of law are more critical for economic development than democracy is. Jack Snyder and Edward Mansfield have argued that democratization's early phases pose special dangers of promoting nationalism and illiberal politics.[10] Authors from Samuel Huntington[11] to Fareed Zakaria[12] have consequently argued that US policy ought to focus on a broad governance agenda and delay pushing for democracy until a higher level of economic development has been achieved. This so-called "authoritarian transition" has been followed by a number of countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and Chile, and is often recommended as a model for US policy in regions like the Middle East.

There is no question that such liberal authoritarianism has worked quite successfully in places like Singapore, and even less liberal variants, as in China, can boast impressive economic growth rates. If these countries eventually follow the Korean and Taiwanese paths toward a broadening of political participation, it is not obvious that an accelerated democratic transition would bring about a better long-term result. In addition, there are specific instances (primarily in post-conflict/failed state settings) where outside pressure for early elections arguably resulted not in the emergence of democratic political parties, but rather the locking in place of the same groups responsible for the original conflict.

As Tom Carothers has recently pointed out, however, there are a number of problems with the sequencing strategy.[13] First, in most parts of the world it is very difficult to find liberal, developmentally minded authoritarians on whom such a strategy can be built. The more typical cases in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America have been characterized by authoritarian governments that are corrupt, incompetent, or self-serving. The vast majority of liberal or developmentally minded authoritarian regimes or leaders are clustered in East Asia, for reasons that probably have roots in the region's Confucian culture. This means, in practice, that in most of the world, exactly the same groups want both liberal rule of law *and* democracy; it is simply not an option for the United States to promote the former and delay the latter.

A further problem with the sequencing strategy is that it presumes that the United States and other foreign powers can somehow control democratic transitions, holding back pressure for democratic elections while pushing for rule of law and good governance. This vastly overestimates the degree of control outsiders have over democratic transitions. The toolbox for democracy promotion is more modest, a subject that we will consider next.

Modalities of Democracy Promotion

To argue that the United States has strategic and moral interests in the spread of democracy does not mean that the United States *can* spread democracy. Domestic factors, not external forces, have driven the process of democratization in most countries. Consequently, and especially in light of the tragedy in Iraq, some have argued that Americans can best promote democracy abroad by simply watching it develop "naturally."

We disagree. While we recognize the limits of America's ability to promote democracy abroad—limits that have become more severe in the past few years—we also know that US policies can be very important in helping nurture democratic development. The war in Iraq has fostered the false impression that military force is the only instrument of regime change in the US arsenal, when in fact it is the rarest used and least effective way to promote democratic change abroad. A wiser, more effective and more sustainable strategy must emphasize nonmilitary tools aimed at changing the balance of power between democratic forces and autocratic rulers and, only after there has been progress toward democracy, building liberal institutions.

Restoring the American Example

Inspiration for Democrats struggling against autocracy and a model for leaders in new democracies are two US exports now in short supply. Since the beginning of the republic, the American experiment with democracy provided hope, ideas, and technologies for others working to build democratic institutions. Foreign visitors to the United States have been impressed by what they've seen, and American diplomats, religious missionaries, and business people who traveled abroad inspired others by telling the story of America's democracy. In the second half of the 20th century, when the United States developed more intentional means for promoting democracy abroad, the preservation and advertisement of the American democratic model remained a core instrument.

Today this instrument needs repair. The American model has been severely undermined by the methods that the Bush administration has used to fight the so-called global war on terrorism. Irrespective of the legal particulars that may or may not justify the indefinite detention of combatants/terrorists at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, opinion polls demonstrate overwhelmingly that most of the world views US detention policies as illegitimate and undemocratic. Thankfully, senior American officials did not try to defend the inhumane treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in 2004. The news media's exposure of the abuses committed at Abu Ghraib and adherence to the rule of law through the prosecution of guilty soldiers was a first step in correcting the problem. But the failure to hold higher-level officials accountable for the breakdown in authority raised questions about how seriously the United States took the issue, and the images of torture greatly damaged America's international reputation. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the unauthorized wiretappings of American citizens helped create an impression (false) abroad that the US government will sacrifice the civil liberties of individuals in the name of fighting terrorism—the very argument that autocrats across the world use to justify their repressive policies. Finally, the Bush administration's propensity for unilateralism, most centrally in its decision to invade Iraq, coupled with its general suspicion of international law and international institutions, has encouraged the perception that Americans do not believe in the rule of law. Again, the merits of these claims about American behavior are debatable. But it is indisputable that America's image abroad as a model for democracy has been tarnished.

Therefore, the first step toward becoming a more effective promoter of democracy abroad is to get our own house in order. To begin with, the political costs to America's credibility as a champion of democratic values and human rights outweigh the value of holding prisoners at Guantanamo indefinitely. The facility should be closed, and the law passed last year on enemy combatant detentions should be repealed or amended. In place of legalistic attempts to pretend that the United States does not engage in torture, a broader range of prohibited techniques should be explicitly defined and ruled out. More generally, the next president of the United States must demonstrate a clear commitment to restoring and perfecting the US democratic system of government.

In parallel, our efforts at public diplomacy have to improve.

The United States cannot hope to recruit people to its side, or to the side of democratic values, if it does not pay attention to what non-Americans say they want, rather than what we think they should want. In the Middle East, many Arabs have argued that America is disliked not for its basic values, but for its one-sidedness in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its lack of sympathy for Palestinian aspirations. In Latin America, populist leaders like Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales have gained enormous support by promoting social policies aimed at the poor, an issue that America's democratic friends in the region have largely ignored. The starting point for a better public diplomacy therefore is to stop talking so much about ourselves and to start listening to other people, to compare the product we're offering to the actual aspirations of democratic publics around the world.

Indeed, in light of the Bush administration's widespread unpopularity, it may be better for the United States to dramatically tone down its public rhetoric about democracy promotion. The loudly proclaimed instrumentalization of democracy promotion in pursuit of US national interests (like the war on terrorism) taints democracy promotion and makes the United States seem hypocritical when security, economic, or other concerns trump our interests in democracy (as they inevitably will). Acting in concrete ways to support human rights and democratic groups around the world, while speaking more modestly about American goals, might serve both our interests and ideals better.

The idealistic component of US foreign policy has always been critical to maintaining a domestic American consensus in favor of a strongly internationalist stance, so we do not recommend permanently abandoning this rhetorical stance. We have to recognize, however, that the Iraq war and other events related to the war on terrorism have for the moment tainted valid and important concepts like democracy promotion and democratic regime change. This is the case not only for foreign audiences but for many Americans as well. Until this perception changes, administrations will have to "sell" foreign policy to domestic audiences on different grounds.

Revitalizing Dual Track Diplomacy

It is naive to believe that the United States should only deal with other democracies. After all, in our own history, the creation of the United States as an independent country required military assistance from France's absolute monarchy. The alliance with Stalin's Soviet Union—perhaps the most diabolical regime in human history—was necessary for victory in World War II. Today the wide range of US security, economic, and environmental interests around the world necessitates diplomatic engagement with autocracies.

Nonetheless, American policymakers can conduct relations with their counterparts in autocratic regimes, while simultaneously pursuing policies that might facilitate democratic development in these same countries. US foreign policy officials must reject the false linkage between cooperation and silence on human rights abuses whenever autocrats make it a precondition of engagement. Few friendly autocratic regimes have ever stopped working with the United States on a strategic issue of mutual benefit because an American official criticized their antidemocratic practices.

When it comes to autocratic regimes with which the United States is friendly, American leaders have real leverage to press for evolutionary change, especially over countries dependent on US military protection or economic assistance. Rather than coercing them, US officials must first try persuading our autocratic friends that they can ultimately best protect their material and security interests by proactively leading a process of evolutionary change rather than by reactively resisting an eventual process of revolutionary change. American officials did exactly this, when they helped coax allies in South Korea, Chile, and South Africa into embracing democratic change. Careful diplomacy in the Philippines also helped keep the end of the Marcos dictatorship peaceful.

Paradoxically, the same logic of engagement applies when considering the promotion of democracy in dictatorships hostile to the United States. Attempts to isolate or sanction these regimes have rarely worked. Sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa only succeeded because the United States, Great Britain, and other European countries had developed deep economic ties beforehand. South African democrats, unlike the leaders of the democratic movement in Iran today, also wanted these sanctions. Because the United States does not have significant trade with or investments in Iran, Cuba, or Burma, sanctions against these autocracies do little to help the prodemocracy forces inside these countries. However, diplomatic relations with these regimes creates a more hospitable environment for internal democratic development.[14] In the USSR, for instance, democratic forces gained strength in the late 1980s when US-Soviet relations were improving, not earlier in the decade when tensions were high. With rare

exception, polices that open societies and economies up to international influence have helped spur democratic change while policies that isolate societies impede such progress.

Reorganizing Democracy Assistance

For most of American history, US foreign assistance did not explicitly aim to promote democracy. President Kennedy created the United States Agency of International Development in 1961 to counter communism and Soviet foreign assistance, but the focus was economic development. Twenty years later, Ronald Reagan made democracy promotion a central objective when he worked with Democrats in Congress to create the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. At the time, however, NED's budget was a fraction of total foreign assistance. Importantly, NED also was not constituted as an organ of the US government. While receiving its budget directly from Congress (and not through the State Department or USAID), NED established its own board, its own procedures for disseminating money, and made its own decisions about whom it would and would not support.

With the creation of NED came four affiliated organizations: the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS, formerly the Free Trade Union Institute [FTUI]), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). These organizations all had ties to US nongovernment institutions: NDI to the Democratic Party, IRI to the Republican Party, ACILS to the AFL-CIO, and CIPE to the US Chamber of Congress. The idea behind these affiliations was that organizations with democracy as a longstanding element of their missions could set their own agendas.

Over time, however, the US government has increasingly become a direct provider of democracy assistance. With the announcement of its "Democracy Initiative" in December 1990, the Agency for International Development (AID) made democracy promotion a core focus and soon became the main source of funding for many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the democracy promotion business, including NDI and IRI. As USAID funds for democracy assistance increased in the 1990s primarily in response to new opportunities in the former communist world, several for-profit contractors joined the democracy promotion business as well. Eventually, tension developed between USAID's leadership and USAID's nongovernment grantees. Over the 1990s, USAID employees—that is, government officials—gradually assumed greater responsibility for crafting democracy promotion strategies and treated the NGOs as merely "implementers" of their ideas. The recipients, and especially the NGOs, resisted the label of implementer and instead tried to preserve their identities as independent actors. The lines between government and nongovernmental actors, already blurred, became even more ambiguous.

After September 11, President Bush to his credit increased general foreign assistance funding, including support for democracy promotion. Within the State Department, the Bush administration established the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which became a new funding source for democracy assistance programs, among others. At State, the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Affairs received major increases in its democracy assistance budget. The Department of Defense also has become increasingly involved in democracy-related activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. To coordinate civilian, military, and intelligence operations in post-conflict settings better, the Bush administration established the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, a new office within the State Department but staffed with personnel on loan from DoD, USAID, and other parts of the executive branch. Most dramatically, under Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's new transformational diplomacy initiative, the department is trying to reform the way in which foreign assistance is funded and delivered. The reform aims to consolidate the funding accounts and to make strategic planning about assistance the purview of the State Department. As a first step, Rice created a new position within the State Department: the director of Foreign Assistance, who also serves as administrator of AID.

This focus on how the government is organized to provide democracy assistance is badly needed. The reform ideas to date, however, have not been ambitious enough. Any strategy for more effective democracy promotion must include significantly greater resources as well as a reorganization of all US government bureaus and agencies that are tasked with providing democracy assistance. A new Department of International Development must be created, and its head must be a member of the Cabinet. All foreign assistance resources currently funneled through other agencies and departments—with the exception of military training and assistance—must be transferred to this new department. This new department would largely absorb AID, as well as DoD post-war reconstruction operations, rule of law training programs currently housed in the Department of Justice, agricultural aid now located in the Department of Agriculture, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. It is absolutely crucial that this department be, and be perceived as, autonomous from both the Department of State and the Department of Defense. The mandate of this new department would be very different from the traditional missions of the military and diplomacy: not regime destruction, but regime construction, including nurturing improved governance, economic development, and democratic consolidation. This separation of departments to fulfill different missions will help each to deepen expertise in its respective field, and also clarify to the outside world which arms of the US government are doing what. Soldiers should not kill terrorists one day and teach Thomas Jefferson the next. Diplomats should not negotiate a basing agreement with a government one day and then turn around and fund an opposition leader to that same government.

Once constituted, the new Department of International Development should direct and administer all assistance that is delivered *directly* to foreign governments. When the US government does provide direct assistance to a foreign government through this new department, it must be firmly conditioned on pursuit of development objectives. There will be situations in which the United States has a national security interest in providing an autocratic regime with military aid or antiterrorist assistance, but this aid must not be called *democracy* assistance or development aid.

At the same time, no democracy assistance to nongovernmental organizations should come from this new department—or from any other branch of the US government. Even if a new Department of International Development is not established, this firewall between state-to-state assistance and the aid given to nongovernmental actors should become a guiding principle for democracy assistance reform. For instance, it is appropriate for the USAID or some other part of the US executive branch to fund a technical assistance program for a justice ministry in a foreign country under the rubric of a bilateral government-to-government agreement.

Inevitably, conflicts of interest and misinterpretations of motives arise when the State Department provides direct financial support to an NGO in another country. Is this money provided to aid democracy? Or is it given to advance a concrete US economic or strategic interest? Non-American NGOs, especially those working in autocratic societies, are increasingly reluctant to accept American assistance for fear of being labeled a lackey of the Bush administration or a spy for the United States.[15] Such questions come up regardless of the exact origin of US funding. Increased separation between the US government and American funders of nongovernmental actors thus can only be for the better. This money for direct assistance to NGOs also must be protected from any punishments or conditionalities directed at the government of that country. When the White House decides to cut foreign assistance to a country in order to change its behavior at home or abroad, US funds earmarked to promote democracy through nongovernmental actors must not be part of the conditionality.

A vastly expanded NED would be one model. To assume this role, NED would have to provide direct grants to all American providers of technical and financial assistance for the nongovernmental sector, which will loosen its con-

nection with its four main grantees and require more involvement with for-profit contractors. NED would also need to open offices around the world. Because both of these changes might dilute NED's current mission, an alternative model would be the creation of a new foundation, modeled after NED, but with a wider mandate and a different mechanism for providing grants to both American organizations in the democracy promotion business as well as direct grants to local NGOs around the world.

Democracy promotion should be placed in a broader context of promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and furthering good governance. The four objectives are interlinked in multiple ways: good governance is widely accepted as a requisite for economic growth, widespread poverty undermines democratic legitimacy, growth reduces poverty, democratic accountability is often required to combat corruption and poor governance, and growth creates a favorable climate for democratic consolidation. Good governance in recipient countries is also critical to maintaining congressional and popular support for assistance programs. Nothing undermines support as much as the perception that US taxpayer dollars are going into a proverbial Swiss bank account. The United States cannot limit itself to the promotion of democracy; it must also use its leverage to promote development and good governance. These connections need to be reflected in how policy is articulated as well. Senior foreign policy officials in the Bush administration rarely invoke values such as equality and justice; yet historically, American leaders have considered these ideas fundamental to shaping our own government.

Enhancing and Creating International Institutions for Democracy Promotion

After World War II, the visionary American internationalists spearheaded the creation of a military alliance—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—to contain the Soviet threat in Europe, and crafted bilateral security pacts with Japan and South Korea to thwart the communist menace in Asia. American leaders also launched the Bretton Woods agreements and its institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as a strategy for maintaining an open, liberal capitalist order and avoiding a repeat of the protectionist-driven meltdown of the 1930s. Democracy promotion was not an explicit objective of either NATO or the International Monetary Fund. Member states in these institutions did not even have to be democracies. Nonetheless NATO's security umbrella, combined with American assistance through the Marshall Plan and other subsequent programs, did help prevent communist coups in Western Europe; keep the peace between formerly hostile countries within the alliance; and contain Soviet military expansion in Europe, which surely would have undermined democratic institutions.

The stable security environment was conducive to the deepening of democracy within member states and for increasing economic and political cooperation among those states, later culminating in the creation of the European Union. This regional community in turn helped inspire Eastern European dissidents to demand recognition of their human rights as outlined in Basket Three of the Helsinki Final Act. NATO expansion after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact offered Western multilateral connectivity to the new democracies in East Central Europe and served as a bridge as they prepared bids to join the European Union. The gravitational pull of the European Union may be the most powerful tool of democratic consolidation in the world today. The US security umbrella in Asia provided a similar facilitating condition for democratic development first in Japan, then South Korea, and eventually Taiwan. More intermittently, the United States has also used its leadership within the Organization of American States to encourage democratic development in Latin America.

Given the success of these multilateral institutions in promoting democracy, it is striking how little effort President Bush has devoted to creating new multilateral institutions or reforming existing ones to advance freedom. Since September 11, 2001, not one new major international organization has been formed to promote democratic reform. Nor has the Bush

administration devoted serious effort toward boosting existing international organizations' focus on democracy promotion. This neglect of multilateral institutions must end.

More than any other region in the world, the greater Middle East is devoid of multilateral security institutions. The United States, Canada, the European Union, and other consolidated democracies should partner with their Middle Eastern counterparts to establish regional norms, confidence-building measures, and other forms of dialogue and political reassurance. The goal should be to establish a regional architecture that will affirm human rights and promote regional security based on the model of the Helsinki process in Eastern Europe, which gave rise to the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe and extensive human rights monitoring within and across borders.

The impetus for creating regional structures must come from within the region, but the initiative should also be supported from the outside. Such efforts can draw inspiration and lessons from past experiences in Europe and elsewhere. At the heart of the Helsinki process was the recognition that true security depended not only on relations between states but also on the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Many Middle Eastern governments have signed statements committing themselves to democratic reform, yet the Middle East lacks a regime that can help empower citizens to hold their rulers accountable to such pledges at home and in their relations with their neighbors.

Beyond the Middle East, an expanded NATO could be an important, stabilizing force in uniting democracies around the globe. ASEAN is a regional organization that seems ready to adopt more rigorous norms about democratic government and human rights. The recently created Community of Democracies got off to a bad start by extending membership to nondemocracies. But the idea of a new multilateral organization committed to advancing democratic practices, be it a revamped Community of Democracies or a new "League of Democracies," is needed.[16] More boldly, American leaders must embrace new modalities of strengthening ties within the community of democratic states, be it through a new treaty or a new alliance.[17]

Even the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other trade agreements must be viewed as levers that help open up economies, which in turn fosters democratic development. Excluding countries such as Iran from the WTO only hurts the democratic forces inside Iran who favor more, not less, integration of their country into the world system. In some rare circumstances such as South Africa under apartheid, economic sanctions have effectively pressured autocratic regimes to liberalize. The list of failures—including decades-long sanctions against Cuba and Iran—is equally striking. As a rule of thumb, the world democratic community should take its cues about sanctions from the democratic opposition in the target country.

Strengthening International Norms

The collapse of communism ushered in a giddy era for democracy promotion. Because so many autocratic regimes disappeared at the same time, new post-Communist regimes welcomed Western democracy promoters into their countries with few restrictions. Today the atmosphere for democracy promotion is markedly different. The allegedly easy cases of democratic transition in East Central Europe have consolidated and require no further assistance from democracy promoters. Autocratic regimes, at first weak after communism's collapse, have themselves consolidated and now have the means to push back. Finally, the war in Iraq has greatly tainted the idea of external regime change and put under suspicion all foreigners working to promote democratic change.

This new context requires a new strategy for bolstering the legitimacy of democracy promotion and the defense of human rights. Governments must come together and draft a code of conduct for democratic interventions in the same way that governments and the international human rights community have specified conditions in which external actors have the "responsibility to protect" threatened populations. A "right to help" doctrine is needed. A starting point for this

new normative regime would be the "right" to free and fair elections, which in turn would legitimize international election monitors and international assistance targeted at electoral transparency. At the other extreme, a new international code of conduct could include strict prohibitions on direct financial assistance to political parties, yet affirm the legality of foreign assistance to nonpartisan NGOs. Once these rules of the road are codified, signatories to such a covenant would be obligated to respect them. And if they did not, then the violation would serve as a license for further intrusive behavior from external actors.

An internationally agreed-upon code of conduct for democracy assistance will constrain the activities of some US actors. But it will also enable other kinds of activities and interventions. But in the long run, the United States and other democracies will only be effective in promoting freedom abroad if we develop international institutions that enhance mutually beneficial cooperation, and then abide by the rules of these institutions in the conduct of our foreign policy.

In highlighting the moral and strategic imperatives for promoting democracy abroad, President Bush has continued a longstanding tradition in US foreign policy that has deep roots in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Declaration of any important objective, however, must be accompanied by a realistic and comprehensive strategy for achieving it. Simply trumpeting the importance of the objective over and over again is not a substitute for a strategy. The tragic result of the gap between objectives and strategies is that many Americans are starting to view this goal as no longer desirable or attainable. The next American president must do better. A more effective strategy for promoting democracy and human rights is both needed and available.

Endnotes

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