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HOLDING STEADY? US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN A CHANGING WORLD

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SUMMARY POINTS

- Democracy promotion has long been a key component of US foreign policy, based on the belief that democratization abroad contributes to achieving American security and economic objectives. However, the United States government has periodically neglected it when other, more direct security or economic objectives were deemed more important.
- Different administrations have prioritized different regions, countries or issues over time, while a growing NGO community has consistently been an active and comprehensive advocacy voice and programmatic power behind democracy promotion.
- Over the last 30 years American democracy promotion has played a clear – albeit varying – role in supporting democratization in many countries, although it cannot be seen as the primary cause in any one case.
- A wide variety of internal factors in countries where democracy promotion has been attempted, including domestic capacity, history, development of democratic institutions and civil society, contributes to the environment in which US efforts take place and thus their impact. Likewise, factors on the US side such as long-term commitment, links between rhetoric and action, consistency with other policies, and creative adaptation of tools have contributed to the success of democracy promotion efforts. While there is no exact recipe for democracy promotion, the combination of these factors defines its efficacy.
- US democracy promotion capacity has improved over the last 30 years, but US actors now face an increasingly difficult global environment. As many of the remaining non-democratic countries have entrenched regimes or are failing or failed states, supporting democratization has become extremely challenging. In the light of this improved capacity and more difficult environment, the impact of US democracy promotion is holding steady – neither increasing nor declining.
- The US commitment to democracy promotion is not likely to change, although implementation will vary depending on the administration and political climate. Developments in the Middle East, as well as the economic situation and the role of rising global powers, will affect the degree to which the United States prioritizes democracy promotion within its foreign policy.
- Long-term, comprehensive and consistent engagement across time and policy sectors and between rhetoric and action are vital to more effective democracy promotion strategies. Additional potential could be realized through greater coordination among actors, both between and within the various sectors (public, private and non-profit).
- The United States needs to ensure that its bureaucratic structures are solidly oriented towards integrating democracy promotion into its broader international efforts. It needs to regularly assess which tools and actors are most effective under which circumstances, taking domestic factors into account, and to look strategically at optimizing its economic and financial aid, multilateral partnerships, social media, and engagement of the private sector to achieve its objectives.

INTRODUCTION

In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama reiterated that ‘In the Middle East, we will stand with citizens as they demand their universal rights, and support stable transitions to democracy’.¹ As his second term unfolds, developments around the world, particularly in Egypt, Syria and the rest of the Middle East, but also in Ukraine, keep raising the relevance of democracy, and the issue of US priorities and policies continues to be discussed in the democracy promotion community. While Obama has stated his commitment to standing for and advancing democratic values, his use of US power to promote democratic change, according to some, has been ‘uneven’² or marked by ‘inconsistency’.³ His reluctance to support Iranian democracy activists and hesitation to respond in the early days of the Arab Spring indicated uncertainty in his administration as to how this commitment to promote democracy fitted among other competing and important policies. This impression has been reinforced by the confused US reaction to the overthrow of Egypt’s elected government by the military. This inconsistency and policy competition, in conjunction with an increasingly complex policy landscape, highlight some of the principal and enduring challenges to American democracy promotion.

Historically, the United States has had a strong commitment to make democratization abroad one of its principal national-interest goals. How this has manifested itself has evolved considerably over time.⁴ The long-standing rationale given for this focus is that democratization is intrinsically right (i.e. a ‘good thing’, which protects and promotes American and universal values, and which democracies have a duty to promote) and at the same time that it is instrumentally useful (i.e. it produces security and economic benefits for the United States). This dual motivation for democracy promotion has remained one of the underlying constants, with policy variations between administrations, in American engagement abroad since the end of the Cold War.

This paper reviews the history and capacity of the United States to promote democratization abroad, as well as the extent and impact of its efforts, and prospects for future engagement. It takes a broad view of American democracy promotion capacity by looking at the range of state and non-state actors. It explores where different American actors have played differing roles, how the efficacy of their respective tools varies depending on context, and how impact can change depending on the relationship between the United States and the target country.

The paper also considers the crucial role of changes in the international context that affect America’s capacity to act in this sphere. It raises the question of whether the practice and effectiveness of democracy promotion are above all a product of the pre-eminence of American power, and whether this will be affected by international power shifts. And it ends by considering how the United States can continue to pursue this goal, including the challenges it will face, the opportunity for a mix of different actors and other related issues.

While definitions of democracy promotion can differ, it is defined here as *the widest range of actions that one country with all its actors can take to influence the political development of another towards greater democratization*, a definition that reflects a broad consensus among academics and practitioners.⁵ These actions can differ considerably in terms of the degree of engagement, the tools used and the motivation of the actor. Traditionally, democracy promotion has ranged from

1 Barack Obama, ‘State of the Union address’, Washington, DC, 12 February 2013.

2 David J. Kramer and Arch Puddington, ‘A second-term democracy agenda’, *Washington Post*, 1 December 2012.

3 Thomas Carothers, *Democracy Policy Under Obama: Revitalization or Retreat?* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

4 See, for example, Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch and Nicolas Bouchet (eds), *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (London: Routledge, 2013); Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America’s Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); and Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 2012).

5 See, for example, Peter Burnell (ed.), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008). This paper uses the term ‘democracy promotion’ as it is still the most widely used term and best describes US policy over the last 30 years, although we recognize that different terms such as democracy support or assistance reflect genuine differences in analysis and practice, and are intentionally used by groups or administrations to highlight different approaches to this issue.

diplomatic engagement, public diplomacy, assistance and capacity-building programmes, conditionality of diplomatic and economic relationships and membership of international institutions, economic and other sanctions, and direct support to local democracy actors. These actions are primarily taken by governments, state agencies and NGOs that have an explicit democracy objective. However, it should also be noted that democratization can be supported directly or indirectly by non-state and private actors as a distinct objective or a side-effect of other core goals (e.g. through corporate social responsibility programmes, adherence to international norms overseas and anti-corruption practices). Although American leaders have often used democracy rhetoric in conjunction with military intervention, leading to criticism that the United States uses force to promote democracy, this paper takes the position that when the US government has used force against regimes that posed security threats, it has, in fact, pursued democracy promotion policies *after* force was used in order to fill the power vacuum following their collapse. (See below on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.)

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Historically, American leaders have displayed a strong and enduring tendency to consider that:

- the United States has a 'mission' to spread democratic values and a liberal political model abroad;
- non-democratic regimes are a potential national security threat;
- democracies are more stable international actors, better trade and security partners, and more responsible members within international organizations; and
- democracy facilitates human rights, economic growth and development.

In this worldview, democratization helps produce international peace and stability, which are important to American national security, as well as market liberalization, openness to US investment and trade, and the support of other countries for international norms that benefit the United States.

Although democracy promotion has long been a core component of American foreign policy and political philosophy, it has periodically been seen to be in competition with national security and economic goals and thus accorded lower priority in terms of implementation, particularly in the short term when security issues are more acute. It is only in the last 30 years or so that democratization has grown into one of the more prominent stated goals of US foreign policy, as policy-makers have increasingly argued that it also supports the country's other goals. But while the government's commitment to implementing these objectives has fluctuated, American non-governmental organizations have been consistently active on democracy and human rights, including criticizing the government when it has neglected them.

Competition between democratization and other goals was stark during the Cold War when there was strong rhetorical support for democracy but in practice democracy promotion was often (though not always) overlooked when it came into conflict with strategic interests and alliance-building. While democratic states were said to be desirable in the long term, it was more important in the short term that other countries were anti-communist, anti-Soviet and reliable allies.

The fact that democratization remained an element of foreign policy – however inconsistently – during the Cold War allowed the United States to make it a more central and consistent part of its foreign policy afterwards. Since that time the non-governmental community has also played a pivotal role in keeping the issue on the agenda.

Efforts to better integrate democracy promotion with other foreign policy goals, and to institutionalize and operationalize it better began before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The emergence of democracy promotion as a policy field is rooted partly in the rise of a human rights agenda in 1970s and before that in the emergence of US development aid. It was also a reaction to the Third Wave of democratization in the 1970s and 1980s in southern Europe and Latin America. That the fall of right-wing dictatorships in Greece, Portugal, Spain or Brazil did not lead to communist takeovers or anti-American governments made the work of pro-democracy promotion advocates easier. The experience of the Third Wave also challenged Western pessimism that many countries lacked the conditions for democratization and that outsiders could do little to help, since outside factors and actors did play a role in many Third-Wave transitions.⁶

Ronald Reagan adopted strong democracy rhetoric, mostly towards communist countries in terms of a moral dichotomy between free and non-free societies. His presidency saw the first stages of targeted democracy assistance (e.g. towards Poland) and pro-democracy diplomacy during the transitions that removed close US allies from power in the Philippines, Chile and South Korea. The creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its related institutions in 1983 was also a major step in the operationalization of democracy promotion and the growth of a civil-society democracy promotion community in the United States. The NED and other non-governmental

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

organizations provided consistent support to civil society actors in non-democratic states and formed the basis for a democracy promotion advocacy community at home.

American efforts increased significantly in the 1990s as a reaction to the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which fuelled 'late' Third-Wave transitions in Europe, Eurasia and Africa (less so in Asia). The administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton increased considerably the state infrastructure and funding for democracy promotion.⁷ Activity increased but with considerable fluctuation between countries and regions, with engagement focused especially on the transitions in post-communist Europe and in post-Soviet Russia. There was more opportunity for American influence and democracy promotion globally as many autocratic regimes lost their external (Western or Soviet) sources of support.

In the 1990s, America's development aid was also increasingly conceptualized in political terms and began to target democratization goals, usually under the label of 'good governance'. This was related to the spread of globalization and of the Washington Consensus, with democracy seen as contributing to and resulting from market liberalization, free trade and open economies. The increase in American democracy promotion was also related to the ongoing and growing attention to post-conflict state-building and humanitarian intervention. Non-state engagement on democracy issues grew in parallel, with a wider focus on civil society, human rights, rule of law and governance issues. During this time, democracy NGOs grew in size and scope. While much of their focus was on the countries that had been under communist rule or were emerging from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, their programmatic efforts elsewhere grew as well. They regularly advocated with the government and Congress for more active and effective democracy promotion policies.

With the overriding concern about the Soviet threat gone, US policy-makers and analysts increasingly claimed that democratization and other goals were not in competition but mutually supportive to a high degree.⁸ This has been expressed repeatedly, with varying emphases, by the Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama administrations.⁹ It was particularly prominent during the Bush administration among neo-conservatives who prioritized democracy promotion as central to foreign policy. The competition between democracy promotion and the need to maintain relationships with non-democratic allies did not disappear, however (e.g. Clinton and Indonesia, George W. Bush and Egypt and Pakistan, Obama and Saudi Arabia and Bahrain). The record supports Thomas Carothers' description of American democracy promotion as 'semi-realist' – pursued on a case-by-case basis when consistent with major American interests, but taking a back seat when it is not.¹⁰ Interaction between governmental and non-governmental efforts continued, with democracy NGOs strengthening their advocacy voice, the government providing funds to them to implement programmes, and activists serving in both sectors as administrations alternated. The voice of non-governmental activists was particularly important in drawing attention – through grassroots, congressional and executive-branch interaction – to key non-democratic developments and ensuring not only that democracy promotion was a rhetorical priority of these administrations, but that they provided significant policy and programmatic support as well.

After 9/11, the Bush administration saw democracy promotion as a key tool to bolster national security by countering radical-extremist ideologies deemed responsible for terrorism and other global problems. One result was attention to countries that had up to then been excluded from American democracy promotion for strategic reasons (especially in the Middle East), or that had been relatively neglected (e.g. Georgia). Now, for strategic reasons, democracy promotion funding became increasingly focused on Iraq, Afghanistan and the broader Middle East and North Africa, and a few other countries central to the 'Global War on Terror'. There were also some new policy approaches targeting more explicitly the link between democracy and other goals, including poverty alleviation and national security.¹¹ This period also saw the further strengthening of the role of

⁷ Thomas Carothers, *The Clinton Record on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); Smith, *America's Mission*.

⁸ Such arguments had begun to be made earlier in the 1980s.

⁹ For example, see their successive National Security Strategy documents.

¹⁰ Carothers, *The Clinton Record*, p. 3.

¹¹ Thomas Carothers, *US Democracy Promotion During and After Bush* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).

democracy NGOs. They generally praised the increased focus on democracy and many were key implementers of major efforts in this area, even as they sometimes criticized tactics and decisions that were seen to compromise democratic values. Their budgets grew especially as a result of the government's higher prioritization of Afghanistan and Iraq. Many democracy NGO activists also served in the Bush administration, increasing the links and understanding between the two sectors. Likewise, the administration turned to NGOs for advice and counsel, as was seen with the inclusion of rankings by Freedom House and Transparency International in the official rating system of the new Millennium Challenge Account.

In the context of anti-terrorism policy, however, the commitment to democracy promotion was again challenged by short-term American interest in obtaining the collaboration of non-democratic governments on immediate security concerns. This revived questions about the United States' consistency and commitment to democracy and human rights, and led to renewed accusations of double standards.

Despite the Bush administration's post hoc rhetoric about the importance of building democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, American military interventions there were in pursuit of security goals, not to promote democracy. However, in accordance with a mindset in which democratization is seen as necessary in post-intervention nation-building to ensure the most favourable, lasting solution, one of the consequences of the occupation of these two countries was an attempt to rebuild their political infrastructure along democratic lines acceptable to the United States.¹²

In great part as a reaction to what it saw as the excessive rhetoric and tactical democracy promotion mistakes of the Bush years, the Obama administration instituted a clear shift in rhetoric about, and support for, democratization. It shifted its democracy policy and programming towards a broader rights-based, developmental and civil-society approach, beyond the focus on electoral assistance, party development and institutional capacity-building that had been more prominent in previous administrations.¹³ It has neither added to the democracy promotion infrastructure in major ways, nor sought to cut this part of the international affairs budget. Meanwhile, democracy NGOs continue to be a consistent nucleus of American democracy promotion efforts, and frequently criticize the Obama administration's restrained position on the issue. In recent years, furthermore, they have also been increasingly targeted by many authoritarian governments, as has been seen recently in Russia, Egypt and elsewhere.

Before proceeding to a closer examination of the range and impact of US democracy promotion actors, it should be noted that reviewing the evolution of American democracy promotion as above is not intended to overlook that there have been many cases where the United States attempted no or very little democracy promotion. This was notably the case in China throughout the period outlined above, in Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf, in the Middle East up to the early 2000s and intermittently since, in post-Soviet countries and especially Central Asia, and in a number of resource-rich and/or allied African countries.

12 James Dobbins et al., *After the War: Nation-Building from FDR to George W. Bush* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008); Jeremy Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-building from the Founders to Obama* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

13 Nicolas Bouchet, 'The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency', *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (January 2013); Carothers, *Democracy Policy Under Obama*.

US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION ACTORS

A growing variety of actors populates the field of US democracy promotion. A selection of the major ones is reviewed here. They include the various arms of the US government, non-governmental organizations – both funded by and independent of the government – and private organizations.

State actors

The legislative framework for governmental activities and funding has been gradually established under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (through subsequent amendments, e.g. in 1975 for conditioning aid to respect for human rights and civil liberties), which provides for the Development Assistance Account of the Foreign Operations budget, the National Endowment for Democracy Act of 1983, the Support Eastern European Democracy Act of 1989, the Freedom Support Act of 1991 (mandating assistance to the Soviet Union successor states) and the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 (mandating stronger democracy and governance criteria for eligibility in economic development programmes).

The American government, primarily through the Department of State, has pursued democracy promotion through diplomatic pressure and support. This has included public and private rhetoric to encourage transitions to democracy or end undemocratic practices, as well as recognition of and meeting with foreign democracy activists. Since the early 1990s, the Agency for International Development (USAID) has been the most prominent among state programmatic actors, particularly after 'Democracy and Governance' was set as one of the core goals of foreign assistance. USAID has pursued this objective principally through its Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (previously known as the Office of Democracy and Governance) and its Office of Transition Initiatives, both created in 1994. The Department of State has also become more active in democracy promotion programming, especially through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (since 1993, initially created in the Carter administration as the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs) and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (2002). The department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund was also created in 1998. Democracy-related issues are included in the mandate of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), launched in 2004, which has staked out a role in this field. It should also be noted that Congress can be extremely influential on democracy promotion policy through budget appropriations and earmarks, committee activity, legislative initiatives, congressional delegations and issue-advocacy by certain members.

The American government also works to pursue democracy-related goals through multilateral bodies, such as the United Nations (especially the UN Development Programme), the World Bank, NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization of American States (OAS). The United States drove the creation in 1999 of the Community of Democracies, an organization of democratic states committed to jointly promoting democracy and related issues. It was also foundational in the creation of the UN Democracy Fund in 2005 and in pushing for a greater focus on democracy and good governance in UN democracy promotion and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Although the United States backs multilateral bodies supporting democracy, the majority of its efforts in this field are not pursued through such channels, and this paper focuses on the US actors.

Democracy NGOs

There is also a plethora of democracy NGOs that operate with and without state funding. They provide a wide array of support for democracy promotion efforts: training of democratic activists and governmental leaders, support for political party formation and electoral processes, technical and financial assistance to democratic institutions and organizations, and support for civil society actors, including but not limited to trade unions, NGOs and the media. Many of them also provide policy advice and research that influence US policy-making and public-sector programmatic decisions.

Among those focused on such operational programming, the major players include the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), created in 1983, and its affiliated institutions, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the Solidarity Center. There are also numerous key organizations that have preceded or followed the NED family, and that are central to the programmatic and policy work on democracy promotion. Freedom House, launched in 1941, is one of the most prominent American democracy and human rights NGOs, and has a long history of bipartisan advocacy and strong programmatic work. The Carter Center, launched by former president Jimmy Carter in 1982, quickly gained a reputation in election observation and introduced a dedicated democracy programme in 1997. Other organizations that have also made an impact on this field include IFES–Democracy at Large (1987), the Open Society Foundation (1993)¹⁴ and the Democracy Coalition Project (2001).

Philanthropic bodies such as the Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Asia and Eurasia Foundations also play a notable role in American democracy promotion through their funding strategies. Also important are American think-tanks and advocacy groups that have developed expertise on democracy issues. These include the long-established institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Council on Foreign Relations as well as more recent ones such as the NED International Forum for Democratic Studies (1994), the Project on Middle East Democracy (2006) and the Foreign Policy Initiative (2009). American academic institutions conducting research in democracy issues include UC Irvine’s Center for the Study of Democracy (1990), Georgetown University’s Center for Democracy and Civil Society (2002), Harvard University’s Ash Institute for Democratic Governance (2003) and Stanford University’s Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law (2004).¹⁵

The relationship between state actors and democracy NGOs

These state and non-state actors form an American democracy promotion ‘community’ and their members, who frequently go through their ‘revolving doors’, somewhat of a profession. Relationships among these actors are generally cooperative, with areas of coordination ranging from policy formulation to project implementation and strategic divisions of labour. While they can disagree vehemently, there is usually considerable dialogue and exchange between them, which has often resulted in improved policies and activities. State institutions frequently solicit policy input from the wider democracy promotion community, not least because it provides a unique, broader perspective as a result of its grassroots and non-governmental contacts abroad, as well as the sub-field expertise these contacts have developed. Since these state institutions do not have the operational capacity to implement all or even most of the democracy promotion goals set by the government and Congress and that they fund, they rely heavily on NGOs to do so. However, funding also comes from non-state actors, such as the MacArthur and Ford Foundations.

The division of labour between state agencies and NGOs is often based on their relative ability to carry out programmes and related activities in specific contexts. The former recognize that NGOs are often best positioned to do specific types of work or to operate in particular countries because they do not carry the historical or current baggage of the US government, are seen as more independent, often have better relations with local actors, and/or are more nimble and skilled in addressing specific on-the-ground realities. They can also often react faster than the government. For example, the NED and its affiliates are usually seen as better suited for operating in autocratic countries with which the United States has difficult official relations.

However, there are still bureaucratic and other obstacles to coordination and information-sharing between state institutions and democracy NGOs, including where the latter receive state funding.¹⁶ For example, a 2009 report by the Government Accountability Office concluded that ‘USAID and

¹⁴ Called the Open Society Institute until 2011.

¹⁵ This list is indicative, not comprehensive.

¹⁶ For a detailed view of the challenges of coordinating activities between the Department of State, USAID and the NED, see, for example, US Government Accountability Office, ‘Democracy Assistance: U.S. Agencies Take Steps to Coordinate International Programs but Lack Information on Some U.S.-funded Activities’ (2009).

State DRL [Democracy, Human Rights and Labor] coordinate to help ensure complementary assistance but are often not aware of NED grants.¹⁷ As a result, there can be either significant synergy or periodic duplication between state democracy promotion institutions and democracy NGOs.

Democracy NGOs have their own agendas and value their operational independence, but the more they rely on state funding, the more they are influenced by trends in government policy, and have to follow government (regional and sectoral) priorities and operational rules and guidelines. This does not stop them from recognizing, and often criticizing, the government's neglect of democracy promotion for security or economic interests. Nor does it preclude cases in which the government is concerned that an NGO's freedom of action may compromise other national goals in some cases. This tension fluctuates depending on circumstances but it is an inherent and accepted part of the relationship. It generally does not harm America's democracy promotion efforts overall but could diminish its effectiveness. Cooperation between the two sides and the state-funding of NGOs does create doubts, however, about the motives and independence of democracy NGOs in countries suspicious of the American declared or hidden foreign-policy agenda. In some cases, the work of democracy NGOs has been hampered by allegations that they are used by US intelligence or other agencies (e.g. recently USAID in Russia or NDI, IRI and Freedom House in Egypt).

There is a generally high level of collegiality among democracy NGOs as they form a relatively close-knit policy and advocacy community. For example, the relationship between IRI and NDI is normally very good. This also extends to and includes non-partisan Freedom House. They often lobby Congress or the executive branch together and exchange information about grassroots developments. While there is some overlap in activity areas, they have distinct priorities, emphases and areas of expertise (e.g. IRI in political party-building and NDI in civil society and governance). Although the differing levels of coordination may affect the efficacy or impact of NGOs, organizations do not work against each other's interests. In the field, cooperation is very contingent on the local actors, field staff and circumstances, and therefore ranges from extremely collegial to occasionally competitive. At a central level, however, there is often an element of competition as the NGOs target similar funding sources.

Private actors

One must also consider the potential impact on democratization of actors that are entirely unrelated to, or financially independent from, the US government, including those for whom democratization is not an institutional goal. Over time many private companies have realized the importance of democracy-related issues, such as the rule of law, anti-corruption efforts, institutional development and good governance, to their ability to conduct business abroad easily, transparently and profitably.¹⁸ Some have invested in supporting change at a local level in these areas in the countries in which they operate. Likewise, several American corporations have joined other non-US companies in the World Economic Forum's Partnering Against Corruption Initiative and the UN's Global Compact. Partly as a result of growing public pressure in the United States and abroad, including political pressure from NGOs and media, American businesses have tried to bring their foreign practices up to the standards found in democratic societies, e.g. regarding labour rights, transparency, corruption and governance. Some have independently pursued fair business practices abroad as part of their company policies. Others have sought out organizations, such as Business for Social Responsibility, that help corporations integrate human rights and good governance practices into their overseas operations. This has, in many cases, benefited both the reputation and bottom line of the corporation, as well as promoting democratic principles in the countries in which they operate. Increased corporate social responsibility efforts have had an indirect but palpable impact on local practices and processes in some countries. For example, Levi Strauss has committed to advancing workers rights globally and participates in multi-stakeholder efforts such as the International Labour Organization's 'Better Factories Cambodia' programme

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁸ For a brief overview of the issues, see Community of Democracies Working Group on Poverty, Development and Democracy, 'The Role of the Private Sector in Support of Democracy', 2011, www.ccd21.org/pdf/PDD_Final_Report.pdf.

and the ILO/International Finance Corporation 'Better Work' programmes in countries such as Haiti, Indonesia, Lesotho and Vietnam.¹⁹ Its work earned the company an award from Freedom House in 2012.

While state democracy promotion agencies and democracy NGOs can encourage private-sector behaviour in directions that favour democratization, they ultimately have limited influence over it. They have engaged in dialogue with the business community, most notably through initiatives such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, the Business for Human Rights and the UN Global Compact, which have helped magnify the impact of such cooperation and share best practices. But there is no comprehensive, systematic and synchronized coordination between these sectors because of the independence of the private sector and the fact that companies engage in this work voluntarily and when they see it as in their interest. Most businesses are also extremely wary of being involved in any initiative that could be seen as political. The relationship is ad hoc, therefore, ranging from contentious to mutually beneficial, and is evolving.

One area where US private actors have had a growing impact on democratization – intentionally and unintentionally – has been in information and communication technologies. The combination and falling cost of new and old media have helped citizens around the world increase pressure on their governments for greater accountability and have helped them spread the example of successful popular movements for democratization across borders. It has also helped publicize instances of democracy deficits and human rights abuses, which in some cases have led to public pressure on governments and international organizations to take action (e.g. in India, the use of websites to name and shame officials who take bribes). The internet and social media platforms, where US actors such as Google, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are hugely influential, have helped empower citizens in repressive and closed societies, giving them access to uncensored information and the ability to network and organize nationally and internationally, and to coordinate actions. The lack of international regulation of the internet has further enabled these major organizations and others to create international standards on information flow, access to information and freedom of expression. The impact of these private corporations – positive and negative – on democratization remains significantly under-researched.

19 Levi Strauss & Co., 'Worker Rights', <http://www.levistrauss.com/about/public-policy/worker-rights>.

THE EXTENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Since the 1980s, the extent of democracy promotion by US actors has increased. Three main elements are examined here: official democracy rhetoric by the government, diplomatic actions towards other countries and democracy funding.

Official democracy rhetoric

The public statements and positions taken by presidents and members of their administrations, especially senior ones, have been an important element of the development and implementation of US democracy policy over the years. As well as being used to apply pressure on autocratic regimes and providing encouragement to democracy forces in other countries, they have provided important political support and leverage to democracy promotion advocates and lower-level officials working to raise the profile of democracy in policy-making and to increase its operationalization. Those within administrations charged with promoting democracy have been consistent in their rhetoric, but the degree to which this has been matched by concrete support at the highest levels has changed over time.

In the period under consideration, democracy rhetoric by America's leaders has been generally consistent at the global level but has shown variations and inconsistencies at regional and country levels. As noted above, Ronald Reagan placed great emphasis on freedom and democracy as a central part of his Cold War anti-communism, especially towards Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This is best exemplified by his landmark Westminster speech of 1982, in which he declared: 'Let us now begin a major effort to secure the best – a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation. For the sake of peace and justice, let us move toward a world in which all people are at last free to determine their own destiny.'²⁰

The George H.W. Bush administration, while toning down the rhetoric, still presented democracy as key to managing the end of the Cold War, especially with regard to the transitions in Eastern Europe, and building a 'new world order'. This was summed up by Secretary of State James Baker in the phrase '(b)eyond containment lies democracy'. Bill Clinton's foreign policy was underpinned by the ambition for the United States to lead the enlargement of the community of free-market democracies, with particular attention to Eastern Europe and Russia. Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, George W. Bush was an outspoken advocate for freedom as part of the fight against terrorism and extremism, with an unprecedented focus on the Middle East. Bush expressed this most forcefully in a speech at the NED in 2003 and at his second inaugural in 2005, when he declared that 'it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.'²¹ Finally, while Barack Obama deliberately moved away from the type of language used by his predecessor, he has rhetorically supported democracy on the international stage (e.g. in his Cairo speech in 2009, at the UN General Assembly in 2010 and at the Department of State in 2011 in reaction to the Arab Spring). In Cairo, he articulated his support for 'government that reflects the will of its people', noting that 'governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful, and secure'.²²

Over the last 30 years, only towards Eastern Europe has there been consistently strong US democracy rhetoric. Towards the Soviet Union, and then Russia and the other successor states, there has been considerable fluctuation. Reagan took a consistent public stance towards the Soviet Union but Clinton, after its dissolution, spoke almost exclusively about Russia and neglected the Newly Independent States. G.W. Bush devoted some attention to supporting democracy in Georgia and Ukraine but less to the remainder of the former Soviet states. This trend has continued under Obama. Towards Latin America, a shift from prioritizing anti-communism to endorsing democracy did not gather steam until the 1990s, but since then the approach has been relatively consistent, especially expressed through the OAS with support for the 1991 Santiago Declaration and the

20 Ronald Reagan, 'Address to Members of the British Parliament', London, 8 June 1982.

21 George W. Bush, 'Inaugural Address', Washington, DC, 20 January 2005.

22 Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on a New Beginning', Cairo University, 4 June 2009.

2001 Inter American Democratic Charter. In Africa, there was little or no criticism of friendly autocrats (e.g. in Nigeria and Zaire) and apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. American democracy talk in Africa has increased since the 1990s but unevenly, and has been mixed with a reluctance to criticize backsliding in some allied countries (e.g. Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda). In Asia, the United States has not taken a very strong or consistent democracy stance, with exceptions only after domestic forces pushed for democratization breakthroughs (e.g. South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia). With regard to China, democracy has been mostly off the US agenda, though individual human rights issues have played a role in bilateral discussions. This omission has been even more glaring in the Middle East, towards which democracy rhetoric was a virtual taboo until the G.W. Bush administration's strong focus.

Democracy diplomacy

The competing interests noted earlier that make US democracy promotion 'semi-realist' have constrained diplomatic actions more than they have rhetoric.

While the Reagan administration talked about encouraging reforms in the Soviet Union, there were severe limits on how the United States could affect the situation on the ground. This made assistance to dissidents and reform groups, radio broadcasts and assistance programmes through the NED and other non-state channels the most effective means. It should also be noted that Mikhail Gorbachev did not push ahead with bold political reforms until the late Reagan years and that openings for US engagement only increased after that. In Eastern Europe, Poland was the focus of attention under Reagan; Washington tried to help Solidarity and other democracy groups through non-state channels, and imposed sanctions on the regime. Although the administration took little or no action against autocratic allies around the world (e.g. Egypt, Indonesia), it did intervene diplomatically to help transitions that removed key allies from power in the Philippines in 1986, South Korea in 1987 and Chile in 1988 once they began facing serious domestic democratization pressures.²³

The G.H.W. Bush administration extended the trends begun under Reagan. The thaw in relations with the Soviet Union allowed non-state actors, especially the NED, NDI and IRI, to operate there more extensively and provide help to the democratic opposition. Bush reacted to the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe with a number of diplomatic initiatives, assistance programmes and economic incentives. In Latin America, he continued the shift from an anti-communist to a pro-democracy stance, even if engagement remained uneven (Haiti, Peru, Nicaragua and Guatemala being the more notable cases). In Asia and Africa, there were a few cases of democracy engagement too (e.g. Cambodia, Kenya).²⁴

The Clinton administration pursued further the existing democracy engagement in Eastern Europe, which it saw as an important complementary goal to NATO enlargement. It also made an effort in Russia, at least initially, and to a much lesser extent in Ukraine. Elsewhere, it worked to reinstall the elected president of Haiti who had been ousted in a military coup and made diplomatic moves in support of democratizing processes in several Latin American and African countries (e.g. the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia). Again, the United States was not necessarily ahead of the curve and in some important cases (e.g. Indonesia and Nigeria) it engaged transitions only late in the day.²⁵

George W. Bush did not set out to focus on democracy issues but he pivoted significantly after 9/11. Paradoxically, the nature of the 'Global War on Terror' meant that it was his administration that made the most efforts to incorporate democracy in its Middle East diplomacy (e.g. in relation to Egypt, Lebanon and West Bank/Gaza). It also supported the 'electoral revolutions' in Ukraine and

23 For diplomatic initiatives during the Reagan administration, see Michael McFaul, 'Engaging Autocrats (and Democrats) to Facilitate Democratic Transitions', in Alexander T.J. Lennon (ed.), *Democracy in US Security Strategy: From Promotion to Support* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

24 For diplomatic initiatives during the G.H.W. Bush administration, see McFaul, 'Engaging Autocrats' and Thomas Carothers, 'Democracy Promotion Under Clinton', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1995).

25 For diplomatic initiatives during the Clinton administration, see Nicolas Bouchet, 'Bill Clinton', in Cox, Lynch and Bouchet (eds), *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion*; and Carothers, *The Clinton Record*.

Georgia, and democratic consolidation in Indonesia, and took some diplomatic initiatives relating to Belarus, Burma, Liberia, Nepal and Zimbabwe, among other countries.²⁶

Unlike those of his predecessors, Obama's administration has not prioritized one particular region in terms of democracy promotion, or indeed the issue as such. Attention in this area to Russia (and the former Soviet states) has been at best intermittent or low-key. The administration's reaction to alleged fraud in the Russian elections in 2011 and 2012 was muted, as it was to the expulsion of USAID from the country in 2012 and to the crackdown on civil society groups and opposition figures in recent months. Reaction to the Green Revolution in Iran was minimal, drawing criticism from democracy activists who had hoped to see this event bring about a major change in this regionally powerful player. The Arab Spring drew the administration to engage with the Middle East more than it probably wished; when it did eventually react diplomatically in support of democratization it was tentatively and selectively (e.g. in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, but not in security allies such as Bahrain). The subsequent military coup in Egypt and the debate in Washington as to how to react to it indicate a swing back towards reluctance to prioritize democracy issues in the region. Elsewhere, like previous administrations, it has been reactive (e.g. in Belarus, Burma, Côte d'Ivoire). The Obama administration has also shown signs of shifting toward a more multilateral approach, for instance by trying to revitalize the Community of Democracies and driving the launch of the Open Government Partnership in 2011.²⁷

Democracy funding

Each administration has devoted financial resources to supporting democratization abroad, channelled primarily via democracy NGOs. Producing an overall figure for this financial commitment is notoriously hard, if not impossible. This is because of the different budget accounts involved across government departments and agencies, and different funding streams to NGOs, as well as the difficulty of defining exactly which programmes to count. It is even more problematic to include non-state and private actors in the calculation. There is a regrettable lack of easily accessible comparable data on spending by democracy NGOs over the longer term, which greatly hampers a systematic analysis of their role. However, a review of existing research and publicly available data gives an indication of how funding in the governmental and non-governmental sectors has increased over time.

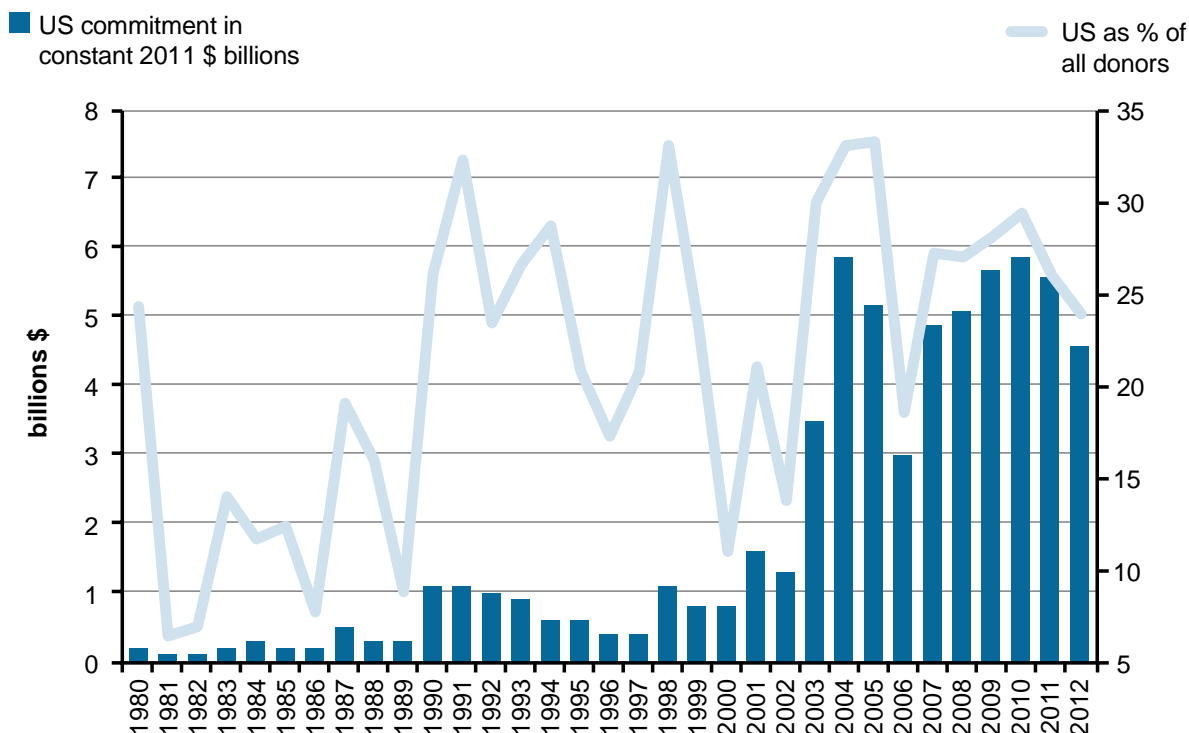
Official democracy spending by the United States has increased substantially over the last three decades. The best available data on this are supplied by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.²⁸ As shown in Figure 1, after remaining relatively low in the 1980s, the US financial commitment to democracy experienced a first rise with the end of the Cold War, breaching the threshold of \$1 billion per year between 1990 and 1993 (measured in constant 2011 dollars). After a few years of regression, spending began rising again in the late 1990s and then took off sharply from 2003, peaking at \$5.9 billion in 2004 and 2010. The 2000s, at least until the financial crisis, were a period of strong spending expansion, although much of this was accounted for by engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan (see below). Over the whole period, the US share of global democracy spending by all donors fluctuated considerably, between 6.4% (1981) and 33.4% (2005).

26 For diplomatic initiatives during the G.W. Bush administration, see Carothers, *US Democracy Promotion During and After Bush*; and Smith, *America's Mission*.

27 For diplomatic initiatives during the Obama administration, see Bouchet, 'The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency'; and Carothers, *Democracy Policy Under Obama*.

28 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee, Creditor Reporting System (CRS) Aid Activities database, <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>. Data cover Overseas Development Assistance Flows (Commitment), All Recipients, Constant Prices (2011 USD millions), CRS Purpose Code150 'Government & Civil Society, Total'.

Figure 1: Official democracy spending in US overseas development assistance, 1980–2012



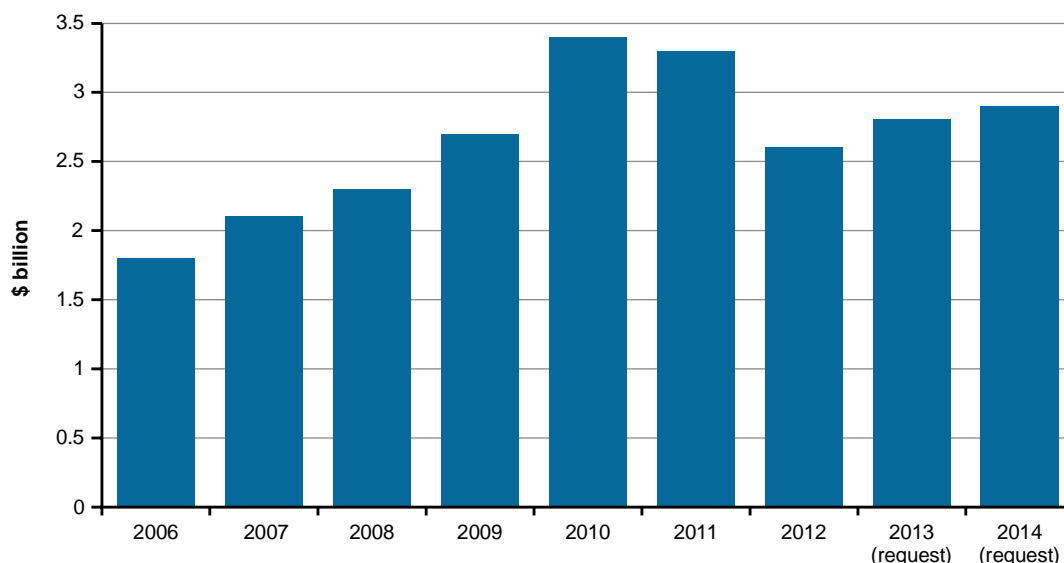
Data from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee, Creditor Reporting System (CRS) Aid Activities database, <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>.

The increased spending noted above has not been followed by a major retrenchment in the last two or three years, despite the economic and fiscal constraints faced by the US government. As Figure 2 shows, when Obama took office in 2009, the ‘Governing Justly and Democratically’ (GJ&D) objective of the foreign aid budget had reached \$2.7 billion. The following year it rose to \$3.4 billion (although it has subsequently decreased to \$2.9 billion in the government’s 2014 request).²⁹ While data over time for other democracy-related parts of the US government budget are incomplete, what is clear is that budgets have increased significantly from the end of the Cold War to the late 2010s.³⁰ The 2008 financial crisis and ensuing economic recession may not have led to a retreat from democracy promotion but they have prevented bolder initiatives, especially in the form of economic support, as has been seen in the US reaction to the Arab revolutions. The work of democracy NGOs has also been made more difficult by the financial situation and budgetary pressures.

29 Of this, 45% was for the ‘Good Governance’ category, 27% for ‘Rule of Law and Human Rights’, 19% for ‘Civil Society’ and 9% for ‘Political Competition and Consensus-Building’. Freedom House, ‘Investing in Freedom: Analyzing the FY2012 International Affairs Budget Request’, May 2011, pp. 3–4, 7–8.

30 For example, USAID’s ‘Democracy and Governance’ funding increased from \$128 million in 1990 to \$1.1 billion in 2004. (Measured in constant 2000 dollars – see Dinorah Azpuru, Steven E. Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán and Mitchell A. Seligson, ‘Trends in Democracy Assistance: What Has the United States Been Doing?’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2008).) Funding for the Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor grew from \$7.8 million in 1998 to \$207 million in 2010. (US Department of State, ‘DRL Programs’, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/p/index.htm>.) Funding for the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is focused on economic development but includes democratic indicators as criteria for aid allocation, has averaged just over \$1.2 billion annually since its launch in 2004. By early 2012, the MCC had approved 28 country compacts. Curt Tarnoff, ‘Millennium Challenge Corporation’ (Congressional Research Service, January 2014).

Figure 2: Governing Justly and Democratically (GJ&D) objective of the foreign aid budget



Data from Freedom House.

These trends are paralleled in the funding of the principal democracy NGOs, whose growth over the years reflects the increasing commitment to democracy promotion. The congressional appropriation for the operationally independent NED rose from \$18 million in its first year (1984) to \$31 million in 1999 and to \$118 million in 2010.³¹ In 2002, the budget for the Carter Center’s democracy programme stood at \$2.9 million but by 2011 this had grown to \$13.8 million.³² As for Freedom House, its total expenses grew from \$10.1 million in 2001 to \$14.9 million in 2007, and at the more recently established Open Society Foundations, total expenditure had risen from \$494.1 million in 2000 to \$819.8 million in 2010.³³

It is important to keep these numbers in perspective however. Foreign aid accounts for only about one per cent of the federal budget, and democracy is a small part of that percentage. For instance, Obama’s latest budget (for 2014) asks for \$47.8 billion for international affairs, of which \$2.9 billion is for GJ&D (only 6% of the total).³⁴ It is equally important to note that the GJ&D increases in the last decade were accounted for (in some years almost entirely) by assistance to Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, as well as to a small group of other countries in relation to the two wars and counter-terrorism efforts.³⁵ In the last two years, there was a shifting of focus as a result of the Arab Spring. For example, in his 2013 budget Obama asked for \$770 million for a new Middle East and North Africa Incentives Fund on top of the G&JD request. This ran into opposition in Congress and the administration tried a smaller request of \$580 million for the fund in the 2014 budget. However, it now appears that democracy spending for the Middle East and North Africa is being cut back.³⁶ Last month Congress declined to authorize money for the fund though it allocated \$130 million to a Democracy Fund for the State Department and USAID activities.³⁷

31 Susan B. Epstein, ‘National Endowment for Democracy: Policy and Funding Issues’ (Congressional Research Service, August 1999), Freedom House, ‘Investing in Freedom’, 2011, pp. 3–4.

32 Carter Center annual reports, http://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/annual_reports.html; and personal communications with the authors.

33 Freedom House annual reports, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/content/freedom-house-annual-reports>. Open Society Foundations annual reports.

34 Freedom House, ‘Investing in Freedom: Democracy Support in the U.S. Budget’, July 2013, pp. 1–2.

35 In the 2012 presidential budget, the share of GJ&D was: Afghanistan 37%, Iraq 10% and Pakistan 5%. The disparity across regions was equally stark: South and Central Asia 44%, Near East 18%, Western Hemisphere 15%, Africa 13%, Europe and Eurasia 7%, and East Asia and Pacific 3%. Freedom House, ‘Investing in Freedom’, 2011, pp. 7–8.

36 Jamie Dettmer, ‘Obama To Cut Middle East Democracy Programs’, *The Daily Beast*, 2 January 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/01/02/obama-administration-plans-decrease-in-funding-for-middle-east-democracy-promotion.html>.

37 Daniel Wiser, ‘Obama Giving Up on Promoting Democracy in Middle East, North Africa’ *The Washington Free Beacon*, 17 January 2014, <http://freebeacon.com/obama-giving-up-on-promoting-democracy-in-middle-east-north-africa/>.

THE IMPACT OF US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION: LESSONS LEARNED

A survey of independent quantitative and qualitative research into American democracy promotion over the last 30 years, supported by a review of anecdotal evidence, leads to the broad conclusion that American democracy promotion has played a clear and sometimes pivotal role in supporting democratization in many countries where it has been pursued, over time and at critical moments, although it has not been the primary or singular cause of democratization in any one country.

For example, one survey of USAID democracy assistance in 165 countries for 1990–2004 shows a small positive effect on democratization above the normal predicted rate of progress.³⁸ This impact may depend in part on assistance to a country being constant over the long term. The survey also finds an impact especially in poorer, socially divided countries, or those suffering state failure, but less impact in countries also receiving considerable US military assistance.

Another survey of USAID democracy assistance to 108 developing countries outside Europe and the former Soviet Union for 1988–2001 similarly finds a small positive impact.³⁹ A different survey on the efforts of the NED for 1990–99 finds mixed results, though this could be partly because NED funding often goes to the most serious cases of autocracy and democratic breakdown, where progress is often not immediately seen.⁴⁰

While these and other studies reinforce anecdotal evidence of the impact of US democracy promotion assistance, measuring the impact of democracy promotion is far from a precise science. A number of factors make it particularly difficult:

- *Causality*: It is almost impossible to determine the precise causes of democratization itself and isolate the impact of individual factors.
- *Measurement*: Not all democracy promotion actions lend themselves to quantitative analysis, and even for those that do, assessments and evaluations are often unsatisfactory.
- *Scale*: There is a lack of large-scale quantitative studies and a reliance on qualitative assessments, which tend to be narrow country or regional case studies over limited periods.
- *Breadth*: There is a surprising dearth of independent research into the impact of democracy promotion efforts across the full range of American actors and countries over time.

Despite these factors and the imperfect nature of measuring democracy, however, key lessons can be drawn as to how the United States can and should pursue democracy promotion in the future.

These key lessons fall into two categories: those that are related to domestic conditions in the target countries and those that are part of the United States' strategy and tactics. Just as with its measurement, the 'how to' of democracy promotion is not a hard science, so there is no hard-and-fast recipe for it. Likewise, given that some of the factors are domestic and thus beyond the control of the United States, it is impossible to draw a perfect scenario for how to 'do' democracy promotion or even to determine a best set of actions – either universally or in particular cases.

A review of US democracy promotion efforts in Eastern Europe, a key region where they have had a clear impact, shows what can be achieved when there is an 'ideal' combination of internal and external factors.⁴¹ Especially in the decade after 1989, US efforts in Eastern Europe had a notably

38 Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell E. Seligson and C. Neal Tate, 'Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building' (USAID, Vanderbilt University, University of Pittsburgh, Latin American Public Opinion Project, 2008). See also Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Pérez-Liñán and Mitchell A. Seligson, 'The Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990–2003', *World Politics*, Vol. 59, April 2007.

39 James M. Scott and Carrie A. Steele, 'Sponsoring Democracy: The United States and Democracy Aid to the Developing World, 1988–2001', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 55 (2011).

40 James M. Scott and Carrie A. Steele, 'The Nature and Impact of Democracy Support by the United States National Endowment for Democracy, 1990–99', *Democratization*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2005).

41 Based on the findings in the different studies cited above and also on, among others, Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, 'Bringing Down Dictators: American Democracy Promotion and Electoral Revolutions in Postcommunist Eurasia', Mario

positive role in supporting democratic transitions through democracy assistance programmes and diplomacy. This included support for an 'electoral model' or 'electoral revolution model' such as in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia in the late 1990s (i.e. efforts at 'transforming elections in authoritarian settings into genuinely competitive and fair processes with substantial popular involvement'⁴²). Some US impact was also achieved through supporting the electoral model in the 2000s in Georgia and Ukraine.

Internal contextual factors

A number of internal factors have helped to create an enabling environment allowing US democracy promotion efforts to be most effective, including:

- some level of development of democratic knowledge and practice among civil society and governmental institutions;
- a previous historical experience or tradition of democratic institutions, movements, civil society activism and independent institutions;
- the impetus for democracy reform emerging from democratic forces opposed to an authoritarian force, rather than attempts to fill a vacuum left by civil conflict; and
- a strong societal demand for democracy.

The absence of some or all of these factors did not necessarily preclude the efficacy of democracy promotion efforts. Rather, it signifies that American efforts in those situations faced additional challenges and needed to be tailored accordingly, with more concentrated efforts on civil education and institutional development, for example, than in other situations. Where most or all of these factors have been present, the democratization process was often already beginning or under way, thus adding to the likelihood of the success of US efforts to bolster that process.

It is worth highlighting the particular challenge faced in promoting democracy in a post-conflict setting, particularly when the United States itself intervened militarily in the conflict. Over the last 30 years, the United States has tried to incorporate democracy promotion in the context of post-intervention nation-building in several countries, notably Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Here its record is very mixed. While there has been democratization progress in Bosnia and Kosovo, other cases show little improvement, especially considering the amount of effort and resources expended. This is not surprising as these countries are among the toughest candidates for democratization, with little or no history of democracy, post-conflict devastation, and unfavourable socio-economic conditions.⁴³

The US democracy promotion community should continue to take special note of the extremely challenging environment that post-conflict situations present, particularly in view of the scale of the country's military engagement overseas. In post-conflict situations, regardless of whether there has been US military intervention, the democratization process is usually challenged by coming in the wake of much destruction and bloodshed and by requiring a major state-rebuilding process. This is compounded by the fact that the democratization efforts often began because of the end of war and outside pressures, rather than arising organically from domestic calls. An additional difficulty facing the United States in pursuing post-conflict democratization in countries in which it has intervened militarily is that in the minds of many, security and democracy goals become conflated.

Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University, Working Paper No. 5, 2007; Stephen D. Collins, 'Can America Finance Freedom? Assessing U.S. Democracy Promotion via Economic Statecraft', *Foreign Policy Analysis* (2009); David P. Forsythe and Barbara Ann J. Rieffer, 'US Foreign Policy and Enlarging the Democratic Community', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2000); Barbara Ann J. Rieffer and Kristan Mercer, 'US Democracy Promotion: The Clinton and Bush Administrations', *Global Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2005).

⁴² Bunce and Wolchik, 'Bringing Down Dictators', p. 9.

⁴³ See, for example, Christopher J. Coyne, *After War: The Political Economy of Exporting Democracy* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Dobbins et al., *After the War*; and Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny, 'Forging Democracy at Gunpoint', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (2006).

US actions and tools

Whereas domestic factors create an environment that enables or limits the efficacy of US democracy promotion efforts, there are numerous factors within American control that have contributed to their success. These include:

- long-term engagement in democracy promotion globally or specifically;
- integration of democracy promotion across policy issues and consistent application;
- strong coordination and commitment to both rhetorical and programmatic support for democracy; and
- creative programming tailored to domestic need, opportunity and US capacity.

Long-term commitment in rhetoric and programming, as seen in Eastern Europe, has proved important to the success of US efforts. Just as democracies do not develop overnight, democracy promotion does not bear fruit instantly. This long-term effort provides consistency and support while democratic institutions have time to develop and take hold.

Long-term commitment is closely related to the integration of democracy promotion with other policy issues. Where the United States has pursued democracy promotion in isolation from broader foreign-policy goals, or in a manner that is inconsistent with them, its efforts have been less successful. This integration into broader foreign policy goals is not only applicable to single country cases, but is also relevant to foreign policy as a whole across regions. When democracy promotion has been given a lower priority as a policy goal in specific regions or countries, overall there has been a negative impact on it. If one arm of the US government strongly supports democratization in one country, while another arm provides support to non-democratic elements there, this inconsistent message is heard and felt. The United States has made great strides in ensuring that the US military and other arms are providing training and partnership consistent with American democratic ideals. This shows important progress and harmonization but there is still room for significant progress.

Also important is the use of high-level rhetorical support for democracy in conjunction with democracy programming. When countries have seen the commitment as consistent at all levels and that words have been matched by a willingness to provide financial or programmatic support, US efforts have paid off. Where high-level rhetoric has been weak or compromising on democracy promotion, or where there has been little programming to support rhetoric, overall democracy promotion has been hurt. This is also important across sectors. Where there has been strong coordination or consistency between the official rhetoric and programming and that of NGOs and the private sector, democracy promotion has been more effective.

Throughout the period considered here, some of the major criticism directed at the United States has been warranted. It has at times been inconsistent in its pro-democracy rhetoric, and there has been a gap between the public US position on democracy towards different countries with the shortcomings of its less-than-democratic allies downplayed. US actions have been vigorous in some countries but less so, or absent, in others. Instances of reprioritization of democracy in relation to other goals remain an issue.

This will naturally be a major challenge given the change of president every four or eight years. A deeper understanding is required throughout American society not just of the importance of democracy generally but of its importance within the country's foreign policy, such that there is a greater demand for consistency from one administration to another.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the leverage its economic power provides, the United States historically has not made great use of conditionality in its economic, financial and trade relationships with other countries in order to encourage democratization.⁴⁴ This began to change in recent years, however,

⁴⁴ Collins, 'Can America Finance Freedom?'

when the Bush administration launched the Millennium Challenge Corporation in 2004. This new approach targets countries with a commitment to good governance, and makes democratic practice and principles central to the selection of aid beneficiaries and the implementation of the projects. The strengthening of democracy indicators within the MCC process in 2011 has further enshrined democratic values and practices as a cornerstone of this development approach.

Finally, the United States has a wide range of tools at its disposal, and has increasingly sought to utilize these in different situations. This has proved effective, and shows that more work can be done to understand the impact of these various approaches. Much of the variation can be explained by the interplay between the specific tools and actors and the domestic factors in the particular country targeted. Different state actors, democracy NGOs and non-state actors play varying roles in this pursuit and their respective approaches work better in different situations depending on the conditions on the ground, on the relationship between the United States and the targeted country, and on the efforts of other democracy-promoting countries and international organizations.

Democracy NGOs have helped sustain and train democracy activists in many countries who have been able to bring about democratic transitions, and they have supported the institutions that are the basis for democratic consolidation. Because their work ranges significantly in scope, from small individual interventions to larger projects supporting major transitions, its impact is seen in different ways. Measuring the impact of training activists who come to power 20 years later is difficult. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that the democracy NGOs have contributed strongly – albeit sometimes incrementally – to the positive trajectory of democratization in many countries over time.⁴⁵

The impact of the private sector on democratization, governance or the rule of law has not been quantified or widely tracked, in large part because it is a residual by-product of its operations overseas or else a side concern rather than principal one.

It is important for the US democracy promotion community to take stock of which actors are best positioned in differing situations. Experience suggests the following points.

- In highly repressive and closed societies, NGOs often have the ability to reach individuals better than official US state actors, while official rhetoric has been important in showing governmental support for activists.
- In countries that rely heavily on US assistance, a more effective and extensive conditioning of military or economic aid may prove very useful in promoting democratization.
- In poorly governed countries in which the US business community has a strong foothold, a coalition of private actors could be well placed to promote progress on the rule of law and governance.
- In countries that show a commitment to democratization but have a low capacity, a combination of US government incentives through assistance, NGO technical capabilities and private-sector encouragement could effectively build capacity while bolstering political will.

While the above are not panaceas or guarantees of success, they indicate how different actors and tools can be brought to bear to support domestic democratic forces.

While these internal and US-driven factors have differed in each situation where the United States has sought to promote democracy, what is clear is that knowledge and capacity in this area have increased, leading to more diverse and adaptable strategies. At times the United States has been

⁴⁵ For example, the prominent European analyst and NGO leader Pavol Demeš argues that ‘the United States of America has played a decisive role in the emergence and development of modern civil society in Slovakia. US assistance took the form of various volunteer, foundation, non-governmental and government-sponsored programs. That assistance left an unmistakable stamp on Slovakia’s third sector, and many partnerships it helped establish continue until the present day.’ Pavol Demeš, *A Collective Portrait: The US Contribution to the Development of Civil Society in Slovakia* (Connections & Dialogues Series, 2012), p. 10.

overly optimistic about what democracy promotion efforts can achieve, and too short-termist and too reactive to events. Different US actors have also sometimes made tactical errors, such as partnering in other countries with groups that proved uncommitted to or incapable of pushing democratic progress. Nevertheless, experience has led to growing expertise and there has been a noticeable process of 'learning by doing', albeit with a time-lag, especially in the early period when there was a steep learning curve. In fact, one of the most important lessons learned is the need to factor learning and feedback into activities, particularly given the complexity of the situations involved. This indicates that improving the efficacy of democracy promotion will depend on a continuing commitment to it as a US policy priority.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Over the past few decades variation in the international environment for democracy promotion has had an impact – both enabling and constraining – on the efficacy of American (or any other) activities in this sphere, which are often largely determined by external factors. Furthermore, the presence of conditions that favour democratization also affects the impact of external efforts on any given country, and determines the ongoing search for the right mix of effective actions and actors in each case.

From the late 1980s into the 1990s, there was an unusually favourable context for democracy promotion that was shaped by the end of the Cold War and the closely related culmination of the Third Wave of democratization. These developments created substantial opportunity and ‘demand’ around the world for established democracies such as the United States, which no longer faced major ideological ‘opposition’ or counter-power.

In the 2000s, US actors consolidated and, in some cases, increased their democracy promotion capacity and expertise. However, this was not matched by a noticeable increase in their overall impact and effectiveness, in great part because the international context became less favourable. To an extent there was less demand since the democratization ‘low-hanging fruit’ had been picked, and the remaining autocratic regimes were more resilient or entrenched. In many countries, transitions ran into trouble, either stagnating or backsliding, while semi- or pseudo-democratic ‘hybrid’ regimes endured. All of this sparked talk of a global democracy recession. There was a growing backlash against democracy promotion in many countries, with Russia perhaps the most prominent example, as well as some evidence of autocratic and illiberal regimes supporting and protecting one another against outside efforts to support democratizing processes. These trends were closely related to the opposition to US policies resulting from the Iraq War and the ‘Global War on Terror’.

The current international climate for democracy promotion is difficult. Entrenched authoritarians show no sign of ceding ground in the face of any democratization demands, while many weak democracies are failing to deliver on citizens’ expectations and to govern democratically and well. More than a decade’s emphasis on terrorism and security, led by the United States, has also distracted the international community from a focus on governance and democratic transitions. What is more, the Obama administration’s ambivalent commitment to democracy promotion has left the international community without a state willing to be its leading advocate. Despite these challenges, however, the persistence of brutal dictatorships and weak states has allowed the democracy promotion community to continue to argue for the importance of democratization as well as of long-term commitment and political leadership on this issue.

Future challenges

Despite the increasing difficulty of the international context, constant engagement since the 1980s and the gradual build-up of capacity, as well as efforts to learn lessons from past mistakes, have helped the impact of American democracy promotion generally hold steady at the same level throughout the past 30 years. Since the favourable context in which the United States operated in the 1990s is unlikely to return, this has serious implications for American aspirations and efforts to promote democracy abroad. What is more, international trends will likely further challenge American efforts to promote democracy globally.

Geopolitical trends and emerging powers

If current trends persist, the power shift to Asia, and in particular the rise of China economically and geopolitically, could well create a strong counter-power to the United States. This may make it harder to promote democracy, at least in the region as well as in some parts of Africa and Latin America, even if not globally, in the short term. As China but also Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states gain in power, US influence is already being challenged in their neighbourhoods. Concerns that they may be providing an attractive alternative model of political order to the post-Cold War consensus on liberal democracy, especially where backed with substantial financial

resources,⁴⁶ may be overdone, but at the very least they can represent for autocratic regimes alternative forms of diplomatic, security and economic support against outside efforts to encourage democratization processes.

Meanwhile, in recent years, emerging democratic powers such as Brazil, India and Indonesia have shown some signs of moving very gradually towards the community of democracy-promoting states. If this continues, they could help build a more global coalition and consensus behind the democracy promotion norm. These countries could also have an important diffusion or demonstration effect in their regions by virtue of being non-Western success stories in democratization, which could facilitate US democracy promotion indirectly. But it is far from given that emerging democratic powers, even where they are willing to include democracy promotion in their foreign policy, will simply sign on to the US agenda. The United States cannot rely on common democratic systems as the key determinant in how far states will cooperate to balance the rise of non-democratic rising powers and to mitigate any relative decline in its own ability to promote democracy. Furthermore, where the emerging democratic powers are willing to pursue such issues, it remains to be seen whether they will follow the policy approaches that the United States has taken or develop their own, with potential repercussions for US actors. And while they may not carry the same historical 'baggage' as the United States and other Western countries, any hopes that this will make any democracy promotion actions on their part more palatable should be tempered by the fact that they carry their own baggage in relations with neighbours. Further complicating the US relationship with emerging powers is the fact that they too are experiencing or will eventually face economic challenges, which may shift their focus inwards.

The Arab revolutions

The Arab revolutions have been another important change in the international context, with the potential to turn eventually into the next (regional) wave of democratization. They have also pushed many questions about democracy back into mainstream foreign-policy discussions, with scholars and practitioners questioning previous positions about democratization in Arab or Muslim-majority countries. The conflict in Egypt between the former democratically elected but not democratically ruling Muslim Brotherhood and the military which claims to be protecting democracy and stability through highly undemocratic and inflammatory tactics has left the international community, including the democracy community, questioning the direction the country will take and what impact this will have across the region. Two issues have resurfaced as a result: how the international community should handle democratically elected governments that govern undemocratically; and the extent to which local populations prioritize democratic freedoms that may be messy or ineffective in the short term over effective but non-democratic governance that delivers on basic human services.

It is still not clear how the changes the Arab revolutions have brought will unfold. The outcomes in the countries concerned are still uncertain and difficult to predict, as seen by the ongoing political turmoil in Egypt, the war in Syria, and the uncertainty in Tunisia and Libya. Unlike the end of communism in Eastern Europe, which opened up relatively clear democratization paths for countries and created both demand and opportunity for democracy promotion, the direction that democratization will take in the Middle East – particularly with the rise of illiberal political parties, the infiltration or rise of illiberal violent actors, and the tight grip of the remaining authoritarians – is far less certain. Perhaps a more relevant comparison is with the countries of the former Soviet Union where, for a number of historical and social reasons, initial openings did not lead to real democratic transitions. While the Arab revolutions removed some barriers to democracy promotion in the region, it has also empowered some forces opposed to the United States, allowed for the infiltration of radical non-democratic elements, and increased the engagement by regional actors with varying levels of commitment to democracy. Views in the Arab world on democracy promotion by the United States and in general remain very mixed, ranging from support and appreciation to strong opposition. The Arab revolutions have also empowered forces that may use democratic processes to gain power but have no intention to govern democratically.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, the debate about the impact of Chinese economic activities on the political development of African countries, or of Venezuela in Latin America.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

American attitudes towards democracy promotion are deeply entrenched and therefore unlikely to change radically. While different administrations have emphasized its importance to varying degrees and will continue to do so, a total jettisoning of commitment to the issue is extremely unlikely. Major domestic and international developments that might conceivably force a comprehensive American retreat from democracy promotion are not very likely. Developments in the Middle East in particular may call into question the *extent* to which Americans will support democracy promotion in that region, but that will not amount to abandonment of the approach. Economic problems and budget constraints as a result of the recession have had limited impact in this area and such constraints as there have been are likely to ease as the economy recovers. Shifts in economic and political power around the world are far from guaranteed to produce a global power and ideological competitor similar to the Soviet Union. The continued presence of illiberal non-state actors, weak states and authoritarian regimes has underscored the importance of defending the international standing of democracy as the most desirable political system, and it has also challenged the democracy promotion community to think more strategically. Despite concerns about challenges to democracy, there is unlikely to be a major reversal in global commitment to democracy, a major decline in the global landscape of democracies, or a rise in the number of autocracies. In the case of the biggest remaining non-democracy, China, the weakening or collapse of Communist Party rule could be an event on par with the demise of Soviet communism and open up new avenues for American democracy promotion; but China-watchers do not appear to entertain this as a prospect for the foreseeable future (although it should be remembered that not many foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Arab revolutions either). It is also still uncertain how the latter will unfold. Whatever the outcome, questions will arise about whether democracy is the 'right fit' across regions, whether it is preferable where radicalism exists, and how democracy can be promoted in this particular region.

As democratization remains one of the objectives of US foreign policy, the challenge is how to maintain or even improve American effectiveness in promoting it. As argued above, over the last 30 years the United States has been increasingly active in democracy promotion and enhanced its capacity to pursue it, and as a result it has been able to play a relatively consistent supporting role in many countries, sometimes even a crucial one at specific junctures. At a time when the international conditions it faces are becoming tougher, however, the United States faces the prospect of either having to increase its democracy promotion efforts or having to improve their efficiency just to maintain its level of impact.

Until current fiscal constraints are eased, and the international context turns more favourable again, the former is the less likely option. Thus there may need to be greater selectivity and innovation in order to help countries entrench the progress they have made and to encourage those undergoing more recent transitions to stay the course and avoid backsliding – and eventually to make breakthroughs possible in the most intractable cases. The United States, through its various actors, needs to improve existing approaches and find new ones, expanding partnerships on the ground and in the international community. This will require different combinations of actors and policies in each particular case.

Recommendations

Ensure consistent commitment, rhetoric and action

Future administrations will need to learn the lesson from past ones about the importance of consistent public rhetorical support for democracy as a tenet of American foreign policy. Not only must this rhetoric be consistent over time and across regions, but it must also be paired with strong policy support, the lack of which has often undermined what the United States has sought to achieve. Speeches by presidents and senior officials to clarify US policy that shore up democracy activists and put regimes on notice need to be followed up by commensurate actions, while at the same time any short-term trade-offs between democracy and other objectives need to be clearly addressed.

One important area of focus will be ensuring that the reasons for US commitment to democracy promotion are consistently articulated to other donor countries, global and regional organizations, and the American public, particularly about the role of democracy in countries where there are strong parties with illiberal tendencies. Developments in the Middle East, particularly the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and reports of Al-Qaeda infiltration into Syria, have raised questions among some donors and segments of the American population about how democracy promotion might help undemocratic parties to come to power. Without this strong public outreach – at home and abroad – the state and non-state democracy promotion community will possibly suffer a decrease or withdrawal of political and financial support for global efforts.

A greater and more thoughtful integration of democracy with economic and security issues will pay off far more in all three areas than an approach that puts them at odds with each other. This means making clear to partners and adversaries alike that democratic values are central to US foreign policy and that the United States believes democratic values underpin economic growth and security, and therefore must be part of its bilateral economic and security relationship with countries. Making democratic values a regular part of multilateral discussions will reinforce this message. This will also signal to autocrats, illiberal non-state actors and others that the United States will address this issue consistently and regularly. Until those links are made, autocratic regimes will believe that America will not back its rhetoric with action. The president, in particular, plays a crucial role in defining the framework through which these issues are defined by both the American people and other governments and non-state actors.

Build a strong governmental democracy promotion infrastructure

There is much that can be done within the government from an administrative and bureaucratic standpoint to ensure that democracy promotion remains a central part of foreign policy and thinking about international affairs.

Key positions – particularly those of assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor; under secretary for justice and civilian security; and key democracy posts at USAID – are best filled by officials who are not only strong supporters of democracy promotion, but also effective in navigating the bureaucracy and the interagency process to advance this agenda. Likewise, it would be wise to place officials with strong democracy credentials in posts that are not specifically related to democracy promotion but that are still pivotal to the issue, e.g. dealing with military training or key regions and countries such as China or the Middle East.

The Foreign Service has not consistently prioritized democracy promotion as a key component of foreign policy. Its inclusion in bilateral and multilateral interactions has been extremely variable, and diplomats' promotions have not often been tied to their ability to promote democracy alongside other goals, such as trade or economic development. Should the leadership of the Foreign Service, combined with political leadership of the Department of State, choose to prioritize democracy more consistently – and reinforce this through training, promotions and institutional culture – democracy promotion would clearly benefit.

Additionally, the secretary of state and USAID administrator play a crucial role in setting the priorities and tone of the institutions they head. When these leaders have prioritized and rewarded democracy promotion efforts, these have been pursued by a greater portion of their bureaucracies. Where democracy has not been a priority of the leadership, efforts have been made only by those in specific democracy promotion positions, with the result that the issue was not well integrated with economic and security concerns.

The national security advisor and National Security Council also have an important role to play in convening regular senior-level interagency meetings to look at how the government is promoting democracy and how it is integrated with other policy priorities. They can also help ensure that it is central to National Security Strategies, as has been done in some – but not all – recent administrations.

Ambassadors and USAID mission directors, for their part, have significant leeway to prioritize issues within their bilateral engagement with other countries through programmes, public diplomacy and other channels. These tools at their disposal can be utilized very effectively in

support of democracy where they choose to, or where the president, Congress or State/USAID leadership ask for such engagement.

Finally, by convening regular hearings on democracy promotion, members of Congress can ensure that senior administration officials are required to develop and present publicly overarching strategies in this field. They can also ensure that a focus on democracy is part of the confirmation process for key positions, and that the issue is raised in the many hearings in which the leadership of the regional and functional bureaus of the Department of State and USAID are called.

Develop creative approaches to tools and actors

As the issue has been mainstreamed in foreign policy, the different US actors who have engaged in democracy promotion over the last 30 years have improved their practices. But there remains room to increase their effectiveness through greater cooperation. Collaboration between state institutions and democracy NGOs, as well as more active engagement by the private sector, will allow for a more nuanced, targeted approach to each country and situation. Such cooperation can be led by any one of these actors. Within the current fiscal environment, the United States needs to improve its analysis of its sources of power and leverage, and see how they can be utilized to promote democracy more effectively.

Actions for state actors

Democracy assistance to individual countries should be consistent over longer periods, and should focus on shoring up both civil society and governmental institutions. Congress and future administrations should focus on improving the ability to provide steady, long-term institutional engagement, alongside the ability to offer targeted quick-response assistance in major developments abroad, as an effective two-pronged approach. There is also considerable scope for increasing linkages between economic issues, aid and democratization. Building on and improving the MCC model, and expanding its coverage to more countries, offers one obvious avenue to do so.

Likewise, engagement with other countries through development aid, security arrangements and military aid should be linked more closely to reinforcing democratic values and promoting democratic principles abroad. Where the United States has sought to utilize its military and economic leverage to promote democratic practices, it has often been effective. Military and economic support must be contingent on – not divorced from – democratic progress in the countries in question. Where the United States has ignored non-democratic practices to provide such support, autocratic leaders have clearly received the message it does not matter what they do. Presidents should direct cabinet members who are responsible for foreign policy, defence and economic or trade issues to prioritize democracy. High-level leadership – from the president and from cabinet members within their agencies – is essential to prioritizing this issue.

If democracy promotion efforts by the United States encounter greater resistance in the coming years, this could be countered, at least in part, by doing more to engage like-minded partners and multilateral institutions. The United States could compensate for greater international constraints by building stronger coalitions for democracy promotion with traditional partners (e.g. the EU, Canada and Japan) and new ones (e.g. India, Brazil and Indonesia), on an ad hoc basis but also with an eye to regularizing cooperation based on democratic ties. American think-tanks, in partnership with non-American ones, can contribute to this effort by highlighting how important it is for more countries, particularly non-Western or developing democracies, to express their commitment to democracy.

The practice of forming partnerships based on shared democratic values will contribute significantly to demonstrating the linkages between democracy promotion and other foreign policy issues, as well as strengthening partnerships with other democracies, with the greater intent of jointly promoting democracy internationally. However, the evidence from early attempts at this shows it will not be straightforward but will require considerable negotiation and accommodation, especially with new partners, as well as significant American political will.

More activity in the multilateral arena would be an important complement to US bilateral efforts. Multilateral bodies, by nature, constrain the freedom of action of their members and involve compromises, as well as the risk of lowest-common-denominator outcomes. The United States should therefore not expect these channels to be radically effective in democracy promotion, even those for which it is their *raison d'être*, such as the Community of Democracies. Nevertheless they may prove useful in continuing to mainstream the issue, as well as dealing with autocratic regimes where there is limited scope for unilateral US action and overcoming resistance to democracy promotion itself, deriving from its close association with the United States. One pitfall of the multilateral approach, however, is that a rebalancing of power among different countries also affects America's ability to achieve its priorities in these multilateral settings.

Actions for NGOs

Given the track record of democracy NGOs in promoting grassroots democratic development, supporting them will remain a crucial vehicle for making targeted progress. The US government – as well as foundations and the private sector – should provide significant resources to the NGO sector, which is growing in sophistication and capacity in its efforts to shore up democracy activists and networks.

With the fast growth of technological connectivity and its potential as a channel for spreading ideas and values, democracy NGOs should collaborate with governmental organizations and the private sector to more systematically assess the use of social networking, the internet and other new media to promote democracy. Their impact in Arab Spring countries should provide some interesting possibilities for research in this area.

Another avenue for increasing the impact of democracy NGOs is the development of more partnerships with organizations promoting issues related to democracy – such as religious freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Significant work has already been undertaken on the linkages between transparency and governance but more can be done. This can deepen the efficacy and reach of these NGOs' democracy promotion efforts. So can engagement with the private sector: creative new ways to cooperate with the business community will be important to this effort.

American NGOs also have an important role in pushing international and regional bodies to take a more active political and programmatic role in promoting democracy. Where these bodies can be more vocal on opposing non-democratic forces and supporting democratic activists, engagement will become more unified and effective.

Actions for the private sector

In countries where the United States has a strong business presence, private-sector actors have the opportunity – either individually or in partnership with international or local NGOs and donor governments – to promote the rule of law and hence democratic practices. This can be done through partnering with NGOs to provide direct training to government or civil society leaders, integrating democratic teaching into company staff trainings, and insisting on transparent, non-corrupt practices in all business dealings with local partners.

Raising awareness among communities whose focus is not democracy, but that can have an impact in this area, is central to their effective engagement and partnership with government and NGOs. The private sector should engage in a dialogue to raise awareness among businesses of their impact (actual and potential) on democratization overseas, and of developing best practices to become part of the democracy promotion effort. While such a dialogue has already started in some places, this can be developed among the American actors and the overseas partners who will take note of this important part of US engagement overseas. The government will naturally not be able to direct the private sector's efforts, but this increased exchange of information will provide more informed options for businesses engaging overseas, as well as raising awareness among American consumers about the impact that American businesses – and ultimately the consumer's dollar – can have on democratization abroad.

Democracy activity by purely non-state US actors is still very much in the early stage of development but has the potential to be an 'influence and impact multiplier' for American

democracy promotion, partly because these actors can potentially reach and interact with democratization forces in other countries in ways that state actors and even state-funded democracy NGOs cannot.

The ideas for US democracy promotion outlined above are not radical or new; rather they have not been consistently and comprehensively pursued by the different US actors considered in this paper, nor adapted fully to the new international context. Many have been and continue to be tried to different extents, but not always consistently over time. The limited amount of research to date on the impact of democracy promotion efforts suggests that greater attention is warranted. Regular examination of American democracy promotion policies and programmes is an important first step in ensuring that they remain as effective as they have been over the past 30 years, and may help to identify new ways to improve them.

The United States has shown commitment to democracy promotion; it has had an impact in many countries and shows no signs of stepping back from it, despite the many challenges it faces. But it is difficult and long-term work that rarely produces quick or clear-cut results: comprehensive and principled policies, steady engagement and creative approaches will be essential if the United States is to have a continuing impact in an arena that will remain central to its national interest.

APPENDIX: SELECTED US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION ACTORS

Actor type	Name	Founded
State	Dept of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor	1993
	USAID (Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance & Office of Transition Initiatives)	1994
	Dept of State, Human Rights and Democracy Fund	1998
	Middle East Partnership Initiative	2002
	Millennium Challenge Corporation	2004
	Congress	
Non-state	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	1910
	Rockefeller Foundation	1913
	Council on Foreign Relations	1921
	Ford Foundation	1936
	Freedom House	1941
	The Asia Foundation	1954
	MacArthur Foundation	1970
	The Carter Center (Democracy Programme)	1982 (1997)
	National Endowment for Democracy*	1983
	National Democratic Institute	1983
	International Republican Institute	1983
	Center for International Private Enterprise	1983
	IFES-Democracy at Large	1987
	UC Irvine, Center for the Study of Democracy	1990
	The Eurasia Foundation	1992
	Open Society Foundations	1993
	NED International Forum for Democratic Studies	1994
	Solidarity Center	1997
	Democracy Coalition Project	2001
	Georgetown University, Center for Democracy and Civil Society	2002
	Harvard University, Ash Institute for Democratic Governance	2003
	Stanford University, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law	2004
	Project on Middle East Democracy	2006
Foreign Policy Initiative	2009	

For a more comprehensive overview of US democracy actors, see Thomas O. Melia, 'The Democracy Bureaucracy: The Infrastructure of American Democracy Promotion' (Princeton Project on National Security, 2005), from which this is partly derived.

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