

**9/11 RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION ACT
OVERSIGHT, PART I:
OPPRESSORS VERSUS REFORMERS IN THE MIDDLE
EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND CENTRAL ASIA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2005

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND CENTRAL ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 3:05 p.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Chair of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The Subcommittee will come to order. I first would like to recognize some wonderful students of my alma mater, Southwest Miami High School. Stand up, guys. The Eagles. Welcome. Good to have you here. Thank you very much. Welcome to all of you for this hearing. Thank you to Mr. Berman and Gary Ackerman as well.

In his 2005 Inaugural address, President Bush stated that:

“The policy of the United States is to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and in every culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you.”

It is in our own vital interest to support democratic rule. Ballots must substitute for bullets as the means of expressing frustrations and voicing demands.

Since the brutal terrorist attacks of September 11th, the United States has responded to this challenge with policies that offer a pragmatic approach to the challenges that face the region today. The United States reflected upon the freedom deficit and other deficiencies with respect to education, women’s participation, economic development; all of these were identified in the Arab Human Development Report. We sought to develop partnerships with the reformers in the region in both the public and private sector and encompassing civil society.

This evolved into the Middle East Partnership Initiative—MEPI—the Broader Middle East Initiative, and endeavors aimed at expanding bilateral trade relations toward the creation of the U.S.-Middle East Free Trade Area.

Title VII of the 9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act further focused on the need to expand our efforts in support of freedom, democracy, and economic growth in the region as a means of addressing the root causes of Islamist extremism and terrorism in the region.

I would ask our witnesses to address the status of implementation of these provisions and how we are engaging “the struggle of ideas” in the Arab and Muslim world. What has been the success rate of our programs? What benchmarks have we developed to measure our success? What are the future priorities for the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the Broader Middle East Initiative, and how have these priorities translated in programmatic and budgeting requests?

We would also like you to address initiatives being pursued through the Human Rights and Democracy Fund and other democracy and human rights promotion efforts.

The Middle East Working Group at the Community of Democracies focused on the need to strengthen and integrate civil society into the process of democracy; on fighting corruption; on providing for an independent judiciary; and on equality under law.

The participants referred to the need to educate the populations about human rights and democracy in order for everyone to understand that they have got to take part in the process in order to have true political and economic liberalization.

They committed to such initiatives as the Center for Democratic Transition in Hungary and expressed support for the concept of developing election standards and assessment mechanisms for the Community of Democracies.

Most importantly, Yemen proposed, and participant countries such as Bahrain and Jordan expressed support for, the Inter-Arab Democratic Charter, similar to the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

What steps does the Department envision to follow up on these commitments and proposals? How will the Community of Democracies process be integrated into our strategy toward the Arab and Muslim world? In turn, how will our programs be modified to build upon the commitments at the Community of Democracies?

Conversely, we look forward to hearing from you on the U.S. approach to these governments that fail to heed the calls for reform from their own people and repeatedly fail to meet the conditions for receiving bilateral assistance from the U.S.

Assisting the peoples of the Middle East in their efforts to create a democratic political and social order will not be easy, but it is possible. There are increasing signs that the wave of democracy is engulfing the Arab and Muslim world.

This past January, the Iraqi people demonstrated to the terrorists and to the world the power of the human spirit. They risked their lives to exercise their inalienable rights as human beings and citizens by participating in the first free election in Iraq. In October of last year the Afghan people, once oppressed by the Taliban’s terrorist regime, cast their ballots in the country’s first-ever elections. There are vivid examples in Kyrgyzstan.

Some leaders in the region have already heeded the calls and have taken tangible steps toward political, social, and economic re-

form, particularly King Abdullah in Jordan and fellow reformist leaders in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Morocco.

In February of this year, the Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak announced a proposal to amend his country's Constitution to allow competitive Presidential elections. If carried out, it would be the first multiparty Presidential vote in the most populous Arab country and a major victory for President Bush's vision of Egypt, which, he said, "showed the way toward peace in the Middle East and can now show the way toward democracy in the Middle East."

However, much remains to be done. The near total lack of the most fundamental political, civil, and human rights in Saudi Arabia has troubled many of us for years, as has the lack of religious freedom for visitors, for Saudi citizens who follow non-official strands of Islam, and for adherents of other faiths.

In Iran we are confronted with a regime that represents a clear threat to United States efforts to advance democracy and economic liberalization throughout the region.

Similarly, in Syria we face a regime that continues to deny both the Lebanese and the Syrian people the most fundamental freedoms. With respect to Syria's impact on Lebanese politics, I am compelled to highlight the request by Lebanon's Head of Delegation at the Community of Democracies meeting. He said:

"We would receive with great pleasure international observers to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections."

However, these concerns go beyond election day. They extend to the election law and the possible isolation of certain sectors of Lebanese society. We have been receiving disturbing reports about Syrian intelligence activities to manipulate the upcoming elections in Lebanon, such as the widespread naturalization of Syrian agents as Lebanese to swell the pro-Syrian electorate.

The United States must maintain the pressure and work with the international community to ensure that the Lebanese people are able to exercise their rights and make their votes count.

In keeping with the United States' commitment to support reformers and prodemocracy advocates in the Arab and Muslim countries, I am working on legislation entitled "Fomenting Reform in Education, the Economy, and Democracy Over the Middle East—the FREEDOM Act."

I look forward to receiving recommendations from our witnesses on how to achieve this overarching goal with respect to this critical region.

As President Ronald Reagan said, "We cannot stop at the foothills when Everest lies ahead." We can conquer Everest only by helping to create an environment where freedom and prosperity can flourish. Only then will the United States be able to guarantee the success of our efforts in the war against terror and oppression.

I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today, and with great pride I turn to my good friend, the Ranking Member of our Subcommittee, the Co-Chair, Mr. Ackerman, for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ros-Lehtinen follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA, AND CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

In his 2005 Inaugural address, President Bush stated that: "The policy of the United States is 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. . . . When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you."

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Since the brutal terrorist of September 11th, the United States has responded to this challenge with policies that offer a pragmatic approach to the challenges that face the region today.

The United States reflected upon the "freedom deficit" and other deficiencies with respect to education, women's participation, and economic development, identified in the Arab Human Development Report. We sought to develop partnership's with the reformers in the region in both the public and private sector and encompassing civil society.

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They committed to such initiatives as the Center for Democratic Transition in Hungary and expressed support for the concept of developing election standards and assessment mechanisms for the Community of Democracies.

Most importantly, Yemen proposed, and participant countries such as Bahrain and Jordan expressed support for, an Inter-Arab Democratic Charter, similar to the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

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With respect to Syria's pernicious impact on Lebanese politics, I am compelled to highlight the request by Lebanon's Head of Delegation at the Community of Democracies meeting. He said: "We would receive with great pleasure international observers to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections."

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Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank you very much, Madam Chair; or, should I say, Dr. Chair? And congratulations again on your doctorate.

Thank you for calling today's hearing. The 9-11 Commission did the Nation a great service by examining the horrific attack against our country, identifying failures in our efforts to protect ourselves, and prescribing a number of changes to prevent future attacks and to better prosecute the war on terror.

Among the foreign policy observations made by the Commission was that,

"Too often, short-term gains in cooperating with the most repressive and brutal regimes were too often outweighed by long-term setbacks to America's stature and interest."

This was not a new observation, but it speaks to a still unresolved policy dilemma and how we support and advance reform in the Middle East.

To his credit, former Secretary of State Powell attempted to address this issue when, in December 2002, he announced the creation of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The intent of the initiative was, according to Secretary Powell, to place the United States "firmly on the side of change, on the side of reform, and on the side of a modern future for the Middle East. On the side of hope," said the Secretary.

Unfortunately, no one in the region believed him. Even after President Bush's speech to the National Endowment of Democracy, calling for what the President said was a forward strategy of freedom, and the establishment with the G-8 nations of the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, reformers in the Muslim world doubt our sincerity on the question.

For too many years and in too many instances, when the difficult decisions come, political and economic reforms get jettisoned for whatever priority has just become more urgent. Maybe this is simply our fate as a nation-state with interests to protect and advance. Or maybe what we do and what we say are actually two different things.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative was supposed to be different. It was supposed to be a departure from the old way of pursuing political and economic reform objectives. It was supposed to be a movement away from the government-to-government model of reform where we funded projects approved by the very governments that we were trying to reform. By their nature, these projects would, of course, pose no threat to the regime that approved them.

According to the Brookings Institution, over 70 percent of MEPI's first \$103 million in grants was distributed to programs that either directly benefited Arab government agencies or provided training programs and seminars for Arab government officials. What are the reformers in the Arab world supposed to make of that? I think they would conclude that the rhetoric is nice, but the policy remains the same.

Two years ago, the Subcommittee held a hearing on MEPI where I suggested that the idea seemed sound, but it was lacking new substance; that what was being produced was a collection of programs that already existed. Two years later, I think the Congress as a whole has now reached a similar conclusion. Congress has yet to fund MEPI at levels requested by the Administration. And I think that it is because we find the program to be amorphous, diffuse and lacking significant support from senior policymakers. In short, what we see is simply more of the same, a collection of small-grant programs that individually serve a small but meaningful purpose, but as a whole don't add up to much.

We still haven't resolved the basic policy problem of how to balance our short-term interests against our long-term interests, and we haven't convinced the Arab world that we mean what we say about democracy and reform.

I would be interested to hear our witnesses' reaction to Thomas Carruthers' proposal that MEPI should be relaunched as a government-funded, privately run foundation. And I know how much the Administration likes privatization. That would at least give these programs an arms-length from the U.S. Government and might make Arab reformers more willing to accept assistance and demonstrate that we are at last serious about democratic reform.

At the very least, I think the Subcommittee should look seriously at authorizing the Middle East Partnership Initiative beyond the cursory language contained in the 9/11 legislation.

In my judgment, there are issues of scope and direction of the program that need to be resolved, not to mention overlap with

other agencies that are already doing democracy and governance work. In that regard, it is too bad that USAID is not on the Administration panel today, since they do a great deal of the work in the region administering many of the grants authorized under MEPI and the Bureau of Democracy, Labor and Human Rights.

I thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. Berman.

Mr. BERMAN. I don't have an opening statement, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Okay, thank you. Mr. Crowley.

Mr. CROWLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank you for holding this hearing today, this important hearing, as well as my colleague for being here today for this hearing. We are here today to listen, to learn and to comment about an important issue that I believe we need to put all of our attention towards.

After the 9/11 attacks upon our country, our country had to take a step back and start to look at the changes we can make or help to make, and provide for our friends abroad to create a more tolerant world to live in. The President, I believe, has rightly taken the necessary step of focusing on the Middle East where we see the greatest uproar against freedom and democracy today.

It ought to be clear that we cannot just limit ourselves to Middle East and Central Asia, but continue to be involved in other areas of the world as well.

I was in Southeast Asia a few months ago, and during some of my briefings the issue of recruiting efforts by extremist groups, fundamentalist groups, was brought to my attention. We must be sure to look at all areas of the world instead of just focusing on the trouble spots of today. Today's struggling democracies could be tomorrow's new trouble spots, and the United States has to have the forward-thinking to remain ahead of the curve.

I am very interested to hear the testimony of the panelists before us today. And with that, Madam Chair, I will yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Mr. Cardoza, thank you. Mr. Schiff.

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Chair, in the interest of getting to the witnesses I will pass also.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

And I would now then like to introduce our panel, the State Department panel:

Ambassador Michael Kozak, a dear friend, a true freedom fighter. He was appointed to the position of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, DRL in September 2003. From August 2004 to the present, Ambassador Kozak has been Acting Assistant Secretary for DRL. A career civil servant, Michael was named U.S. Ambassador to Belarus in 2000. He served as Chief of the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Cuba from 1996 to 1999, and Special Negotiator for Haiti from 1993 to 1996.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth Cheney was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances, so speaking in her stead and well represented is Scott Carpenter, a Deputy Assistant Secretary for the

Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State. Scott joined the Near East Affairs Bureau in August 2004 and is responsible for overseeing the Middle East Partnership Initiative. Prior to joining the Bureau, Scott served as the Director of Governance Group for the Coalition Provisional Authority. And prior to deploying to Iraq, Mr. Carpenter served as DAS for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and has worked at the International Republicans Institute and the International Trade Agency.

Welcome, good friends of our Subcommittee from previous incarnations. We will put your statements in the record, and feel free to briefly summarize. Thank you.

Ambassador Kozak.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL G. KOZAK, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you, Madam Chair, Mr. Ackerman, other Members of the Committee. I have kind of lost a good deal of my voice today, so I think I will take you up on your offer to put the full statement in the record and maybe just make a couple of quick points.

I mean, I think you and Mr. Ackerman actually very well summarized the dilemma you face in an area like the Middle East. There has been a long history. You have ended up with, in many places, governments that are very repressive.

You mentioned Saudi Arabia and behavior on religious freedom and lack of political freedom. And at the same time, you have, for those historical reasons, ended up with opposition groups that are no better, or perhaps worse, than the government in power. But if we feel ourselves being given a choice between those two bad alternatives, then we are making the wrong kind of policy decision.

I think what the Administration has been trying to do, as President Bush outlined in that speech at National Endowment for Democracy's 20th anniversary, is to overcome those past mistakes, try to find the right balance between long term/short term, and find some way to support pro-democratic elements in these countries that are—whether they are in government circles or whether they are outside government circles, people who are trying to move their country into the modern civilized democratic world, rather than leaving us with a choice between two authoritarian or worse forms of government that could come into power.

It is not an easy thing to do, as we have seen in other parts of the world before, because when you are pushing to change the regime in power, you also don't want to be strengthening the opposition in the short term. You don't want to be strengthening the opposition that is extremist and anti-democratic. You need to find a way to strengthen the democratic elements and not the other.

Just quickly, on program, we do a—DRL has, of course, our Human Rights and Democracy Fund, which Congress has generously kept increasing over the last few years. Our programming is almost exclusively with private recipients. We work through NGOs. We receive proposals from them, and so we are not making grants to governments. We also have increasingly been handling non-HRDF monies.

For example, in Iraq in the run-up to the election, the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau actually transferred—I think we got \$85 million out of the Iraq reconstruction and relief funds, 60 million of which was devoted directly toward the election, political party-building, observation, out-of-country voting, the whole panoply of measures there.

And in that connection, you were mentioning, Madam Chair, the Yemeni Election Commission. We ended up with a very interesting endeavor. Because the U.N. was setting up the elections in Iraq, they said to us, “We can’t really be the ones to monitor or assess the quality of the elections because we would be assessing ourselves. It is a conflict of interest.” And there is no regional organization in the Middle East at this point, as we would have in this hemisphere with OAS or with OSCE in Europe. So we started checking around, and Canada and Yemen took on the job of organizing a group of other countries, election officials from other countries, and you had countries like Indonesia, Panama, the United Kingdom that got involved. And they put together what turned out to be quite a successful mission to assess the quality of those elections.

I raise this because it is really the foundation for what you mentioned from Community of Democracies. We saw the possibility of extending that throughout the parts of the world that don’t have these mechanisms in place already.

I think we have made a good step forward. But to me it is an interesting feature that some of the leadership—and this is actually coming from the Middle East. I think that gives promise for things like a Middle Eastern Democratic Charter. But I think overall, we have to keep working together.

Sometimes, I think, as Mr. Ackerman indicated, the feeling of kind of a scatter-shot approach to programs in these areas, it sometimes looks that way if you just stand back and look at programs. But when you look at all the things that are being done by USAID, by MEPI, by DRL, HRDF funds, the intent anyway is that they be integrated into a coherent strategy. And what we are trying to do, I think, in almost any one of these countries, is build a credible alternative to the kind of regime that is in power or the kind of anti-democratic regime that is presenting itself as the alternative. In other words, help build democratic political parties, organizations, their ability to reach out to constituents to learn what their constituents’ true cares are, and develop programs in that direction.

It is building independent media so that people can be informed about what the alternatives are. It is building electoral process, and this works sometimes with governments and sometimes with groups outside of government. Obviously, when you are trying to help an electoral tribunal to run an efficient election, you are working with an arm of the government.

At the same time, though, we inevitably are funding through one mechanism or another the growth of election observation mechanisms to keep an eye on the people that we were just funding to set up the election. And then a lot of get-out-the-vote and voter education activities, which often draw upon what seems sometimes like scatter-shot efforts with small grants to civil society.

When you are building groups that are interested in women's issues, groups that are interested in legal issues, labor unions and so on, we are working with all of those. But where they come together is when it comes time for an election or something; those are the people you go to to find your domestic poll-watchers and observers and so on.

So these are the kinds of—it is a combination of all those things that I think we have seen work in places like Georgia, like Kyrgyzstan, like Ukraine most recently, and it is a proven formulation. It can work, again, even in some of the tough environments in the Middle East.

So with that, I would say that is my summary, and thank you. [The prepared statement of Mr. Kozak follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL G. KOZAK, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing to focus on the status of democracy and human rights in the Middle East and Central Asia. This hearing provides an excellent opportunity for us to affirm our conviction that the people of these regions stand ready to benefit from democracy and liberty, and to acknowledge our support to those who aspire to build democratic institutions of their own. It is not only our moral obligation to promote democracy and respect for human rights around the world, it is a national security imperative. The National Security Strategy of the United States lists eight demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the absolute power of the state, freedom of speech and freedom of worship, equal justice, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance and respect for private property. We know that regimes that violate the human rights of their own citizens are more likely to disrupt peace and security in their region and to create a reservoir of ill will that can accrue to the detriment of the United States. The best guarantor of security and prosperity at home and abroad is respect for individual liberty and protection of human rights through democratic governance and the rule of law.

The past year has seen a dramatic shift in the world's landscape. Elections in Afghanistan, Palestinian Authority and Iraq, and the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine have brought the dramatic first steps of democracy to populations that have lived under tyranny and oppression for too long.

Today, more than fifty million people who lived under brutal regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq are on the road to democracy, and Iraq has taken the first steps in becoming a modern democratic nation in the Arab Middle East.

As Secretary Rice said, "We recognize that each country has a unique history and traditions that will shape its quest for freedom. Whatever the path or pace, however, the U.S. is prepared to stand with those who seek freedom for themselves and their fellow citizens."

In two critical but very distinct regions—Central Asia and the greater Middle East—we see a slow but rising tide of democracy. The democratic reformer in these lands no longer struggles in isolation to bring freedom and respect for human rights to his homeland. Faced with the broken promises of repressive regimes, seeing and hearing uncensored news for the first time through satellite television and Internet access, many have joined that call for freedom. There is a growing demand for open, fair and competitive elections, for the representative government and impartial justice ordinary citizens in these countries deserve but have long been denied. Some governments in these regions—responding both to internal pressures for change and the links between representative democracy and sustained economic resilience and prosperity—have taken early steps toward reforms to develop and strengthen key institutions and to develop a culture of democracy and rule of law. Regrettably, other governments fail to understand that democracy is a necessary component for both long-term stability and prosperity. Those governments resist change, demonstrating that substantial challenges remain before us.

Democratization in Eurasia faces many challenges. Progress continues to be measured largely in terms of civil society development; political reform remains stalled—and some states are in fact backsliding. Across Central Asia, more and more NGOs, opposition parties and citizens are willing to organize and advocate for government accountability. Unfortunately, the response by most governments has not been to be

more accountable and transparent; some governments have instead increased repression of civil society groups.

Opposition political parties across the region remain stymied in their attempts to fulfill the role of an alternative voice to government, so necessary for political pluralism. All political parties are banned in Turkmenistan, except for the party of the self-declared President-for-Life. In Uzbekistan, opposition parties courageously continue to meet despite government harassment. They have repeatedly submitted their applications for registration, only to be denied each time. In December's parliamentary elections, no opposition candidates were permitted to run. The regime continues its attempts to restrict training in democratic political skills to the government-approved parties alone. In last year's Country Report on Human Rights Practices we noted positive steps to improve political participation taken by the Government of Kazakhstan in registering the opposition party Democratic Choice. Unfortunately that progress was negated this year when a court ruling banned the party, raising questions about due process. In another mixed signal, the Government of Kazakhstan did transfer a leading opposition leader—convicted in a trial that also lacked due process—to minimum security facilities as part of the first step toward parole. However, authorities reportedly tried to convince him to discontinue his political activities in exchange for release, and threatened to impose new criminal charges. In Tajikistan, the Government continued to deny the registration of two opposition political parties amid allegations that authorities made politically motivated arrests. February's parliamentary elections failed to meet international standards and serious irregularities were observed by the OSCE.

Independent media, another key component for a democratic society, remains equally challenged. While on paper, the constitution of every Central Asian republic provides for freedom of speech and of the press, governments in the region used a variety of means, including criminal and administrative charges, physical attacks, and vandalism to control the media. Judicial actions against journalists and media outlets, including civil and criminal libel suits filed by government officials, contributed to self-censorship and an otherwise chilling environment.

But these efforts to deny people their freedom have not always succeeded. Our hopes are high for Kyrgyzstan: the democratic breakthrough that occurred after February's flawed parliamentary elections has given the people of Kyrgyzstan a new opportunity to join the community of democratic societies. U.S. programming in Kyrgyzstan, including support for the region's only independent printing press, enabled the people of Kyrgyzstan to make their voices be heard and contributed to a vibrant civil society that demanded accountability for flawed election races. Zamira Sydykova, a leading opposition journalist, recently testified to that fact before the Helsinki Commission. In her words, U.S. support and programs "spurred on ordinary citizens to realize their role in the elections" and "imparted confidence to the [Kyrgyz] independent mass media." Now, the United States is working closely with the OSCE, the new Government of Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz civil society to ensure that the July presidential election is open and transparent and to urge that democratic reform be enshrined in Kyrgyz institutions such as the constitution, parliament, and judiciary. Likewise, the events last year in Ukraine show that media intimidation, attacks on opposition leaders, and outright vote fraud do not assure the continuity of the regime in power.

Not surprisingly, the recent striking examples of successful and peaceful democratic change have given rise to one of the greatest challenges we currently face in the region. Some government officials in Central Asia and elsewhere are drawing the wrong lessons from Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Instead of recognizing that governments can be threatened because of bad elections and lack of accountability to the people, these officials are seeing some USG-supported NGOs as working to undermine their governments rather than working to strengthen civil society—and a result, strengthening these nations. We are concerned whenever we hear reports of harassment of local NGOs, including our own implementing partners, who are being harassed through bureaucratic obstacles and specious legal means. U.S.-funded NGOs have been threatened with expulsion; denied visas; and confronted by hostile prosecutorial investigations. In all of these cases, we have objected strenuously to this kind of treatment for NGOs.

We must not, however, allow these tactics to dampen our support for indigenous and peaceful reform; indeed, we must redouble our efforts and support for organizations receiving U.S. funding. These NGOs are at the frontline of implementing our committed policy to promote democracy and human rights. We will continue to fund programs designed to strengthen political parties, independent media, advocacy civil society groups, human rights defenders and rule of law. The success of the peaceful revolts against efforts to deprive people of their democratic rights in Georgia,

Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate the power of ordinary people armed with knowledge of their basic democratic rights.

Increased Sunni-Shi'a dialogue and inclusion of marginalized religious and ethnic groups in a national political process are critical to ensuring long term stability in the Middle East. Governments in the Middle East must provide more than lip service to the principle of religious tolerance, discarding tired excuses for repression in the name of stability or security. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular must end the export of religious literature that promotes extremist views and violence, move to rapidly reform curricula that now promote bigotry and intolerance, and allow greater latitude for non-Muslims to practice their faith.

Growing regional access to independent and balanced media, whether through satellite television or the expanding Internet, can and does play a vital role in bringing democracy to these lands. Citizens once blinded by censorship now watch the brilliant cedar flags of Lebanon wave amid cheering crowds, marvel at the courage and determination of Iraqi men and women willing to lay down their lives for a chance at deciding their own future, see peaceful elections in Palestinian territories long hostage to violence and hatred. After decades in which their leaders dismissed freedom as a luxury Western import—somehow incompatible with Muslim culture or the Arab character—they see democracy rising. They see and wonder, why not here? Why not us?

But even progressive governments, those publicly committed to democratization such as Bahrain or Jordan or Yemen, are reluctant to fully relinquish their old barriers to freedom of expression, to tolerate open dissent or criticism of leaders or open their books to public scrutiny. Too many regimes cling to antiquated press and defamation laws that stifle the growth of a free and balanced press, protect institutionalized corruption, and allow the intimidation and arrest of journalists such as Yemeni editor Al-Khawani or the Kuwaiti columnist Ahmed Al-Baghdadi. Egypt's long-standing Emergency Law and laws governing NGOs, political parties, and libel penalties severely limit the freedom of expression and assembly that opposition parties, civil society and the press need to play their proper role in a democracy. Moreover, criminal cases against people such as opposition politician Ayman Nour have appeared designed to intimidate independent voices. We are pressing Egypt to make good on President Mubarak's recent pledge to hold open, transparent, and competitive presidential elections, and to take its natural role as a leader in regional democratization.

The greatest internal commitment to democratization can be daunted by the immensity of the task of building a firm foundation for a democratic society. This foundation, a framework for consolidated democracy, must include a fair and efficient judicial system; security forces that protect both the State and its citizens; an active civil society that builds and sustains oversight and accountability of its governmental institutions; democratic political parties that represent the long-term interests of an engaged citizenry and foster broad participation and dialogue; and the keystone of a free press and freedom of expression. Like the United States, these governments must balance the demands of security in an increasingly dangerous world without eroding or ignoring institutional protections for human rights and civil liberties. We have especially reminded our strategic partners in Central Asia of this need if they are to ensure long-term stability and prosperity.

It is the people of these nations—both in the Middle East and in Central Asia—who will raise their own flags of peaceful revolution in the years to come, who will slowly and carefully build their own distinct democracies. It is their governments that must respond to legitimate demands for change while preserving security and providing a stable environment for economic growth and opportunity. The United States can help our friends meet these challenges. In some cases, it may be through continued diplomatic dialogue or through quiet outreach that promotes full democratic inclusion and enhanced treatment of marginalized populations. Targeted U.S. assistance and exchange programs already work to strengthen judicial systems in Bahrain, to mobilize women in Jordan and the Occupied Territories, to provide information and professional training to journalists and politicians and entrepreneurs and jurists, to promote increased religious tolerance and understanding. In Central Asia, U.S. assistance has led to some positive steps to address torture and other law enforcement abuse in Uzbekistan; the U.S. is providing Kazakhstan with technical assistance to support the implementation of jury trials; and across the region, governments are now actively combating trafficking in persons.

The United States also works with multilateral organizations such as the OSCE and the United Nations and other donor nations to recognize and support legitimate internal demands for inclusion of women and marginalized populations and their full political and economic participation, to help heal long-standing religious and tribal divisions that foster religious hatreds and sectarian strife, to promote peaceful

and positive reforms respecting religion and universal human rights and amplifying the voices of politically moderate religious and community leaders, and to help reformist governments build a better future for their citizens.

I would like to close with the remarks that President Bush gave recently when he welcomed to the White House the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly. "It is the policy of the United State 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. Today, people in a long-troubled part of the world are standing up for their freedom. . . . The trend is clear: Freedom is on the march. Freedom is the birthright and deep desire of every human soul, and spreading freedom's blessings is the calling of our time. And when freedom and democracy take root in the Middle East, America and the world will be safer and more peaceful." Madame Chairwoman, I'd be happy to take your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. We look forward to hearing more about that Community of Democracies and how the meetings went.

Mr. Carpenter.

STATEMENT OF MR. J. SCOTT CARPENTER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. CARPENTER. Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a great privilege for me to be here. This is probably a little-known fact, but this is my first opportunity to testify, period, on the Hill.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Oh, then we are going to—okay. All right. Get all the hostile questions. We have got another one for you.

Mr. CARPENTER. I would like to also enter my extended remarks into the record and speak just for a few minutes on the Middle East Partnership Initiative and what it has accomplished and what the Administration has accomplished in the couple of years that it has been in place.

Madam Chair, as you referenced in your opening remarks, the President's speech at the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003, his follow-up on that very important speech in his Inaugural address, his second Inaugural address in 2004, made clear the direction that we in the Administration want to head. We want to support the people of the Middle East and North Africa in their fight for freedom. As he said in his 2004 Inaugural address:

"We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom which is eternally right."

The Middle East Partnership Initiative has been a very important element of that forward strategy of freedom. We have to keep in mind that it has been only 2 years, 2 full years since the program has been in place, and already we are seeing tremendous change in the region. The Middle East Partnership Initiative was not to be only or exclusively about program. It was to be about a meshing of foreign policy that was oriented toward reform and programs. The programs were designed to create political space within the countries so that civil society and others could operate freely to begin to advocate for change, while at the same time the bilateral political engagement with the countries of the region were to engineer top-down efforts, avenues of reform.

Since the time that the President has made the comments that you referenced, we have seen an incredible amount of dynamism in the region. And dynamism is not a word typically associated with

the region. A new word, “change,” has crept into public discourse. We have seen it everywhere, as you have mentioned in your opening remarks as well. The stories are breathtaking: People standing in line to vote in free and fair and competitive elections in Afghanistan.

The most recent elections in West Bank Gaza and the purple fingers of Iraq, where people lined up for hours to vote despite the violence that they were threatened with. The people of Lebanon gathering in Martyr’s Square to demand democracy, who are now preparing to cast votes in upcoming elections despite the myriad challenges there. For the first time in decades, people of Egypt are preparing to participate in competitive elections.

A revolution in attitudes and expectations is slowly taking place and civil society organizations are mobilizing to play a role in the burgeoning reform movement. And whatever was the case in the past, it is clear that there is very high-level support, both within the Administration and within the State Department at the highest levels: Secretary Rice; Deputy Secretary Zoellick; Assistant Secretary David Welch; our new Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Liz Cheney; myself. We are taking the agenda to the region, discussing in very serious terms with the countries of the region to identify country strategies that we can use to build reform.

These efforts will have two components. They must have two components. One must be programmatic and the other must be political. Those two things have to engage and be integrated. We are working with the Bureau of Democracy and Human Rights—where I come from, as you mentioned—very, very closely. We are working with the U.S. Agency for International Development where they have missions, which they don’t in many countries of the region. We are working with them very closely on both program design and project implementation.

The 130 projects that we have initiated in the past couple of years with the funding that Congress has appropriated for us is beginning to have an impact. Two years is not a long time, but these programs are contributing to a rising wave, and that rising wave is for reform. And the people are taking ownership of this program and project themselves. The CAFIA movement in Egypt is not an American creation, but we did help create the space for it to breathe. And that is an important element of what we are trying to do.

I look forward, Madam Chair, to answering some of the questions that Congressman Ackerman raised in his opening statement, but I will conclude there.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Carpenter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. J. SCOTT CARPENTER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

I am honored to be here today to discuss the critical nature of our engagement in the “the struggle of ideas” in the broader Middle East and North Africa, and how we are working together to actively support reformers throughout the region.

Not even a full two years ago, in November 2003 at the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush outlined a new policy, a forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East. He said that “sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe—because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.” In his 2004 Inaugural Address, the President reiterated America’s support for the

people of the Middle East and North Africa in their fight for freedom. “We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler in every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right.”

In the time since the President made his comments, there has been tremendous momentum in the region. Momentum not witnessed in this region in nearly 50 years. A new word—“change”—has crept into the public discourse throughout the region, and there is a new generation of activists willing to bravely work to bring about a democratic transformation in their home countries. The stories are breathtaking. People standing in line to vote in free, fair, and competitive elections in Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq. The people of Lebanon gathering in Martyr’ Square to demand democracy, and now preparing to cast their ballots in upcoming elections. For the first time in decades, the people of Egypt are preparing to participate in competitive elections. A revolution in attitudes and expectations is slowly taking place, and civil society organizations are mobilizing to play a role in the burgeoning reform movement. The region is responding to the tide of freedom.

We are doing our part. Our work to support reformers includes both multilateral and bilateral efforts. At the Sea Island summit last year, we and our G–8 allies introduced a new multilateral initiative, the “Partnership for Progress and a Common Future” with the governments and peoples of the Broader Middle East and North Africa. We are working around a common agenda for reform and moving in the same direction. These political, economic, and education initiatives will make it possible for us to work together with our European allies and other partners in a coordinated effort to support those working for positive change in this region.

The engine for this G–8 initiative is the annual “Forum for the Future,” which brings together regional and G–8 Foreign, Economic, and other Ministers in an ongoing dialogue on democracy, rule of law, human rights, open market economy, and education reforms. Business and civil society leaders participate in parallel dialogues. The next Forum will be held in November in Bahrain. The centerpiece of our discussion will be the political reform taking place in the region.

Even as we carry our multilateral partnership forward, the Middle East Partnership Initiative is a critical bilateral tool to expand the political space for civil society and others to operate. Announced by the Bush Administration in 2002, and funded with bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, the Middle East Partnership Initiative has sought to bring the resources, experience, and determination of the United States to bear in an effort to bolster the reform movement in the Middle East. During the first three years of its existence, with the \$254 million appropriated by Congress, the Middle East Partnership Initiative set in motion more than 130 programs in 14 countries of the Middle East. Some of these programs are small and limited to one country, while others are large, ongoing efforts that involve several different countries. Together they represent a rising wave of people and organizations calling for change, and as well as interpreting the President’s Freedom Agenda in their own language and culture.

MEPI works with partners in the region to develop programs that help put in place the building blocks for democratic change. Our partners include non-governmental organizations, businesses, universities, international institutions, and in some limited cases, Middle Eastern governments themselves. However, MEPI was never meant to be solely a programmatic initiative, but a critical policy tool driving reform and ensuring that policy reinforced the objectives of our programs. For example, just before he left Cairo, then U.S. Ambassador to Egypt David Welch, now Assistant Secretary of State for NEA, personally awarded MEPI small grants to a number of democracy-focused non-governmental organizations. His high-level public announcement of these grants made a powerful political statement about where we as the United States would like to see the direction of political reform in Egypt go, and complemented the work that the Egyptian organizations seek to undertake. This integration of policy and programs is something we are striving to support and replicate across all MEPI programs.

Let me also provide a snapshot of some of the work MEPI is undertaking in each of its four pillars, as reform must take place in all sectors if it is to be sustainable. In the political reform pillar, MEPI seeks to develop the democratic habits and institutions that are essential to active citizenries and accountable, representative government. Through MEPI, and in close coordination with USAID, the United States Government was able to quickly put in place a program in Lebanon to support the upcoming May elections. With our help, within weeks of the protests in Martyr’s Square, a consortium of indigenous democracy organizations put up a website explaining how to participate in the movement and elections. We are also working with organizations undertake polling, and engaging with Lebanese journalists and others from the region on how to cover elections.

In the economic reform pillar, MEPI pursues a reform agenda that promotes economic growth through the development of the private sector and trade liberalization. A major piece of this economic pillar is funding and launching trade technical assistance in support of the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA). MEPI, working with USTR and USAID, helps countries prepare for TIFAs, FTAs, and WTO accession. Our programs were instrumental in helping Morocco meet its FTA obligations and in helping Bahrain to close negotiations in less than 6 months.

In the educational reform pillar, MEPI seeks to improve access to—and the quality and relevance of—education for young people, particularly girls. Through “My Arabic Library” we are putting translated children’s books into schools and training teachers how to use them in Jordan, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

In the women’s empowerment pillar, MEPI’s goal is to help remove the barriers—legal, regulatory, political, and cultural—to the full participation of women in Middle Eastern society. Just next week in Tunis, over 200 women business leaders from across the Middle East are meeting to not only receive leadership training, but also to develop a global business network that will hopefully help to grow their own enterprises back at home. I am proud that over a dozen senior American business women will be joining us for this program.

We also work closely with USAID on its bilateral programming. USAID began implementing democracy and governance programs in the 1990s in Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon. As part of the President’s commitment and support for political reform in the Middle East, USAID bilateral programming has expanded to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen.

The United States understands that the evolution of true democracy is necessarily a home-grown, “generational” phenomenon. But the U.S. government, through both our multilateral and bilateral efforts, is doing its part to nurture, encourage, and assist this historic process of reform in the Middle East. We appreciate Congress’s willingness to provide the resources necessary for the U.S. to do its part. We look forward to working with Congress to support reform throughout the Broader Middle East and North Africa.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Carpenter and Ambassador Kozak.

We have a vote, a 15-minute vote on final passage and then one 5-minute vote after. So we are going to recess.

And right now we are asking Mr. Fortenberry, in a public way, if he would be sweet enough to Chair the Subcommittee for me because I have some pending appointments.

And I want to apologize to Lorne Craner. Where are you, my good friend? But I will hear your scintillating testimony on tape.

And Kenneth Wollack, where are you sir? Kenneth, thank you. We had said hello previously.

And Ron Johnson, thank you. So I will hear all about it. Thank you very much.

So the Subcommittee is temporarily in recess and we will come back as soon as the votes are done. Thank you, Ambassador Kozak, and thank you, Scott. I am going to ask you the tough questions next time.

Mr. CARPENTER. I look forward to them.

[Recess.]

Mr. FORTENBERRY [presiding]. The Subcommittee will come to order. Excuse us for the interruption. We appreciate your deference to our unusual schedule today. Thank you for your earlier testimony. I think now we will continue with some questions.

And I had one for you, Ambassador Kozak. I think we will have several from the other Members who are present. You alluded to, in your earlier testimony, your work with the Community of Democracies. Can you elaborate on any plans or follow-up commitments that were made to the group and how we integrate that process into our programs in this country?

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the Chairwoman did lay out some of the issues. The way the Community of Democracies event that we just attended in Santiago went, there were a number of general commitments that all members of the Community of Democracies made, and these have to do with maintaining and furthering democratic process in their countries. But I think the ones that were particularly interesting came out of a new innovation, which was to have regional groups meet and undertake commitments within that regional group. So they are not commitments of the whole organization, but of the members that are in that particular region.

And on that front we had, in the Middle East Region, a number of countries who said we ought to have a Middle East Democratic Charter that is something analogous to the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which, as you know is a charter whereby it is kind of a mutual protection society for democracies that they will work together to promote it, and if democracy is threatened or being rolled back, that they will cooperate for it. So I think that was a great advance.

The overall organization committed to support this—it was a Hungarian proposal for a democracy center in Hungary, where there will be basically assets available to countries that want to democratize. It is largely to share the experience of countries that have had recent successful transitions to democracy.

Elections Initiative was something that actually the United States raised. And as I was alluding to, the notion is that in parts of the world you have regional institutions that are able to go in and add credibility to an election by looking at how it goes. It is not just the observation on voting day, but the lead-up to it; what do your election laws look like, are they being applied fairly? Is the registration process going smoothly or is it being used to exclude legitimate candidates? Is media access working out in practice? And so on.

What we proposed is, we said we already have in the Warsaw Declaration of Community of Democracies a pretty good list of standards for democratic practice. Let's see if we can beef those up drawing from the experience of organizations like OSCE and come up with a universal set of standards that would apply to everybody in the Community of Democracies, and then some kind of mechanism, maybe modeled on this thing I was describing from Iraq, where we could have, in effect, a peer review where other governments go in and they assess your elections and give a bit of a report card on it.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Was there a timetable discussed for that, for the development of that?

Mr. KOZAK. There was no timetable but there was a lot of positive reaction. And the way it came down is that we ended up raising this, or discussing it, at Working Group on Regional and Inter-regional Cooperation for Democratic Governance. Under the final communique of the group, the working groups are supposed to work on these projects and then report back to the convening group which is the 10 countries that, you know, call the meetings of the Community of Democracies. So although there is no timeframe specified, my sense is that what everybody has in mind is that over

the next few months we will be working this up, with the idea of getting a proposal that could then go to the convening group. And if it meets with their approval, circulated to the broader membership.

So this is really where we wanted to come out. We knew we couldn't get an agreement of the details of something like this in a 3-day meeting, but we did get endorsement for going forward with that. So a lot of exciting ideas came out of the Community of Democracies. Obviously, we will be looking for ways for both our policy and program support to help these go forward.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. McCotter, did you have any questions?

Mr. MCCOTTER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Forgive me. I am late to the party. So if I ask this question and it has already been answered, just tell me and we can move on. It has basically got two parts.

Constantly stressed, especially in the Middle East and in other areas, is that the transformational change a society experiences on its way to democracy must be accompanied by a transactional benefit to the people; because, absent that stake in the new system, it becomes simply like the weather. It is something you can't control. Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad, and in extreme instances it can kill you. And I think that you need that type of economic grassroots underneath to perform that. And so I would just be curious as to what you are doing. But again—if you have already stressed that.

Secondarily, just as a curiosity, I suppose for the time being, we know that if you combine the transformational change with the transactional, that gives an infant—the nascent democracy its greatest survivability. You can also have an instance where the transformational change may be able to be brought in through the back door of transactional benefit and then still keep pace and still keep that new society on the path of democracy. But have we ever seen an instance where a society has had a transactional benefit, followed by a transformational change to democracy, whereby you have political opportunity which then brought in the democratic opportunity and human rights behind it?

Mr. CARPENTER. Let me take a crack at the first question you raised. I will leave it to Mike to answer the second part.

In the Middle East Partnership Initiative, we look at reform through the prism of four pillars, and recognizing they all have to work together if you are going to have to have sustainable change, sustainable transformation. And so we do focus quite a bit of our attention on the economic sphere, recognizing that unless the economies grow and are able to absorb the demographic timeline, particularly in the region, then discussion about democracy is ephemeral in some ways.

Yes, there has to be political change, but it has to be accompanied by economic change. So the President's Middle East Free Trade Area is one area where we are negotiating free trade agreements with countries of the region who are willing to do it, to open their countries to trade; which has, as part and parcel of that, those negotiations, real opening up of the economy. They have to begin to do things that change the society.

Countries like Jordan have seen immense benefits from the free trade agreements, others less so, but the changes are coming. Where we are not negotiating free trade agreements right now, we are working with countries in TFA talks. But in addition to those types of changes, we are also looking at, you know, financial sector reform, working with governments to make central banks more independent, working on transparency.

So we are funding, for instance, through a grant to the Financial Services Volunteer Corps, that is led by former Federal Chairman Paul Volcker, to any in-countries like Egypt, Algeria, others, to get in and talk to countries about this type of change.

Mr. MCCOTTER. Very heartening news. How far down to the grassroots, to the street level, does your charge take you?

Mr. CARPENTER. Well, one—so that is working with the governments on those types of programs. The other type of things we are doing is working with entrepreneurs. So individuals—whether women or small businesses—helping them to develop through FSDC and other organizations that we cooperate, bankable business plans so that they can actually begin to do something; because it is going to be the private sector and the middle class that is going to have to be the engine to drive these economies. The public sector is bloated and needs to be changed. The governments themselves recognize this. So they are beginning to make the type of environmental changes that will allow these other type of programs to succeed.

Mr. KOZAK. On your second question, Congressman, this is one of the long-running debates of development doctrine of which comes first, the economic chicken or the political egg; or however you want to put it.

I started out in this business in the Latin American area, and, at the time, we had the Alliance for Progress, and the whole thesis of it was we had to build the economies of the country to create middle classes before you could have political reform and democracy. And after about 20 years of that, a lot of us started to say, “This isn’t working.” Because as long as you have governments that are highly dictatorial, they never are going to make the kind of economic reforms that really create a class that could oppose them.

So we came at it from the other direction, saying, “Let’s push hard for political reform.” And when you open that up—it works if you do not—if it is not a political reform that is limited to the elite. If it is just an elitist reform, people say it is like the weather; “I can’t do anything about it, I suffer from it.” But if it is a political reform where you have not only top-down but bottom-up, where people are engaged and they can say, “Ah, now I have an opportunity to pick representatives who will adopt economic policies that are maybe more favorable to me,” one thing, you buy a little time. People have hope, then, and they also open up the space for changes in economic policy.

So I think the way we have gone at it is where you can find people, even if a fairly closed government, that are willing to make the reforms, “Sure, we ought to do it because it has got to be done.” But that is not a substitute for doing the political reform. You have got to move forward, trying to force open that political space and give people a real stake in determining their own future.

Mr. FORTENBERRY [presiding]. Thank you. Thank you, gentlemen, very much today for your generosity in being with us. We appreciate your insights and comments and your important work in this arena. There will be additional questions submitted to you for the record. So thank you very much.

We will proceed now to our second panel. Gentlemen, thank you for joining us today. Permit me to introduce you.

First we have Ambassador Lorne Craner, current President of the International Republican Institute. Previously Mr. Craner served as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and he previously served as Director of Asian Affairs at the National Security Council and as John McCain's policy adviser from 1986 to 1999. Welcome, sir.

Mr. CRANER. Thank you, sir.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Kenneth Wollack is President of the National Democratic Institute. He has been actively involved in foreign affairs, journalism, and politics since 1972. Before joining NDI in 1986, Mr. Wollack co-edited the Middle East Policy Survey and wrote regularly on foreign affairs for the *Los Angeles Times*. From 1973 to 1980, he served as Legislative Director of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. Welcome, sir.

And Dr. Ronald Johnson is currently the Senior Vice President of International Development at RTI International where he oversees the development of over 200 projects in various parts of the world. Mr. Johnson has also been the Vice President of Education and International Development at RTI, Director of the Center for Population and Urban Rural Studies, and Associate Professor of Political Science at Penn State University. Again, welcome.

Mr. Craner, I think we will start with you, and you are welcomed to submit your testimony. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LORNE CRANER,
PRESIDENT, THE INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE**

Mr. CRANER. Thank you, sir. I will ask if I can submit my testimony. I do want to commend you very much for holding these hearings on a very important subject at a very important time. For both IRI and NDI, increasing attention to the issue of democracy in the Middle East amplifies programs undertaken before 9/11 in the Middle East. What has changed since 9/11 is the level of sustained attention and resources being devoted to this subject.

This support is important at this time because local reformers truly believe, now, that things can change and that meaningful political reforms can take hold. That was not the case just 4 years ago.

And we have seen now that with events referred to earlier in testimony—the elections in Iraq, the Palestinian elections, even the elections further afield in Ukraine—have helped embolden reformers across the region. I do believe the Bush Administration is on the right track with respect to supporting political, economic, and social reform in the Middle East. President Bush has removed the taboo of talking and pressing for democratic reform in the region. I think it is too early to describe what is happening as an “Arab Spring,” but one cannot help but be optimistic.

I think on some tracks, reform will move quickly, including the economic and social sphere, because there are immediate material benefits that are expected from those reforms. Political reform is going to be more difficult. Advocates of political reform in the region are dealing with decades of undemocratic practices and deeply entrenched personalities and interests threatened by reform.

There is a potential for things to change overnight, but I think the more likely scenario is that governing systems will change over time if we continue to press.

I say this because of some comments that were made earlier. When you talk about initiatives like the Middle East Partnership Initiative, there is inevitably a tendency to want immediate results. In thinking about this, I would advise everyone to look back to Serbia or Ukraine, countries where IRI and NDI and others were engaged for 7 to 10 years before the “overnight victory” of the people against corrupt government. Democracy support is a long-term investment, but we do know that, almost without exception, such support combined with diplomatic commitment can work.

Thanks to the State Department’s MEPI, IRI is able to provide democratic support to the region in ways that we could not in the 1990s. And essentially, IRI, NDI, Freedom House, Internews, ABA and others are implementing on a daily basis, in ways that diplomats cannot, the President’s policy of backing democrats in the Middle East. This policy is also, remember, about changing hearts and minds in the Middle East. And it is therefore critically important that MEPI continue to be a U.S. Government program and not, as some have suggested, an effort outside of the Government. Democrats in the Middle East who for many years felt ignored by the U.S. Government now must see our Government, including through U.S. NGOs, coming to their aid.

On Central Asia, it is no exaggeration to say that the region had by the late 1990s become a backwater for U.S. diplomacy. When it became apparent that any U.S. invasion of Afghanistan would have to go through the region, its importance was greatly magnified. There was a debate within the Administration after 9/11 about democracy and human rights policy. That debate was settled by early 2002, and so the region’s practices on democracy and human rights became a focus for the Administration.

As Colin Powell put it at the time, American troops come with values. U.S. diplomacy on behalf of and funding for democracy programs in the region also dramatically increased in the years after 9/11. In some countries, our funding for human rights and democracy doubled. In other countries they quadrupled. More importantly, the focus of new and existing programs was greatly sharpened.

For example, the programs most frequently mentioned, the American programs, as helping Kyrgyzstan’s recent transition and those where Freedom House’s printing press, NDI’s Information Center, and IRI’s political party programs, were all begun after 9/11 with funding from the State Department’s Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

The outlook for other Central Asian countries varies. I was in the country—in the region during the weekend of the Rose Revolution in Georgia. I met a number of leaders of those countries that week-

end, and I can testify that there is a common belief by authoritarians in the region that allowing democratic practices, particularly free elections, would result in a mob-led revolution. This belief has intensified following events in Ukraine and, of course, in Kyrgyzstan. The remaining autocrats in the region have failed to understand that in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia, it was not elections, but stolen elections, that led to the sitting governments's ouster.

In Kazakhstan—today's half-page ad in the *Washington Post* notwithstanding—the OSCE recently denounced parliamentary elections as falling short of international standards of being free, fair, and transparent. We are now facing the revival of a very restrictive law on Kazakh NGOs. IRI and other U.S. NGOs in Kazakhstan, including NDI, are also feeling intense government scrutiny and harassment which is hindering programming and does not bode well for the future. This scrutiny, which increased after the Ukraine election, is likely to intensify given last month's uprising in Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan remains one of the most difficult of the more than four dozen countries in which IRI works. We have also faced increasing harassment there. The government has effectively restricted international NGOs like IRI in ways that are contrary to the United States-Uzbek bilateral agreement. My written testimony includes a number of specific suggestions to help advance democracy and human rights in Central Asia.

The Bush Administration in a unified manner needs to continue to engage key members of the government with the message that our relationship cannot be based on security concerns alone. We also need to engage with civil society with the message that we are backing democratic groups in the region. But in essence, American policy in Central Asia would benefit from the kind of comprehensive approach undertaken toward the Middle East. Just 4 years ago, we were continuing a half-century of ignoring democracy and human rights in the Middle East, believing such an approach guaranteed our security. Today, just a few short years later, our policy has already begun to have effect in terms of political openings and to pay dividends in terms of perceptions of America in the region.

Our policy toward Central Asia, and, I would also say, the rest of the Muslim world from Nigeria to Indonesia, would benefit from a similarly top-down unambiguously enunciated policy. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Craner follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LORNE CRANER, PRESIDENT, THE
INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I want to especially commend the Chair for convening these hearings. You have for many years brought tremendous U.S. leadership on issues of foreign policy, and your stewardship is greatly appreciated.

Like many other organizations, IRI has been giving more and more attention to the issue of democracy in the Middle East and Central Asia since the events of September 11, 2001. This effort amplifies programs undertaken for over a decade before 9/11; IRI's first involvement in the region came immediately after the first Gulf War, in Kuwait. Throughout the 1990s, IRI undertook democracy work in Kuwait, Oman, Morocco, and the West Bank.

What has changed since 9/11 is the level of sustained attention being given to the topic and the level of resources being devoted to Middle Eastern and Central Asian democracy. The reason democracy support in the Middle East and Central Asia is

so important at this time, however, is that local reformers truly believe things can change and that meaningful political reforms can take hold, whereas four years ago few probably did.

The recent election in Iraq—an expression of Iraqis' popular will and desire for democratic and accountable government against what remain very difficult circumstances—has helped embolden reformers across the region and given them reason to believe democracy is also possible in their countries. I believe Palestinian Authority presidential elections and those in Ukraine have played a critical role strengthening democratic reform efforts in the Middle East and Central Asia—largely by way of giving local reformers hope and courage.

I also believe that that the Bush Administration is on the right track with respect to supporting political, economic and social reform in the Middle East. Increased attention to reform, democracy and human rights in both words and deeds is helping those in the Middle East committed to democratic change, and it is helping IRI support them. The road is an uphill one, and I believe it will remain so for the foreseeable future. But President Bush has removed the taboo of talking and pressing for democratic reform in the Middle East. While it may be too early to describe what is happening as an “Arab Spring,” as some are, one cannot help but be optimistic about the changes that have continued in Qatar, Bahrain, and Morocco, changes under way in Lebanon, Iraq, and Algeria, and the first movements forward in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

On some tracks I think reforms will move forward quickly. In the economic and social spheres you are seeing this with bilateral free trade agreements being signed between the U.S. and Morocco and the U.S. and Bahrain, or with the overhaul of education curriculum, as has been done in Qatar. In these cases there is widespread acceptance by decision makers in the region of the failures of the past and a willingness to enact change quickly both because it is not that difficult to do and because there are immediate material benefits that are expected from reforms.

Political reform is more difficult. Advocates of political reform in the region are dealing with decades of undemocratic practices and deeply entrenched personalities and interests that feel threatened by reform. While there exists the potential for things to change overnight, I think the more likely scenario is that governing systems will change over time—if there is a continued commitment by the U.S. Government to place democracy and human rights high on the list of issues in speaking with governments in the region. I say this because when you talk about innovative initiatives like the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) or the Broader Middle East Initiative and look for “success stories” and impact, there inevitably is a tendency to want immediate results. In thinking about this, I would advise everyone to look back to Serbia or Ukraine, countries where IRI among others was engaged for 7–10 years before the “overnight” victories of the people against corrupt government. Democracy support is a long-term investment but we know that, almost without exception, such support combined with diplomatic commitment works. History shows that, whether you are talking about this year in Iraq, or last December in Ukraine, a decade ago in South America, South Korea or South Africa, when people are given a genuine choice about how they want to be governed, they will choose democracy. I believe the people of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the republics of Central Asia are also interested in accountable and representative governance.

Thanks to the State Department's MEPI, IRI is able to provide that democratic support in the region in ways we could not in the 1990s. Essentially, IRI, NDI, Freedom House, Internews, ABA and others are implementing, on a daily basis, in ways diplomats cannot, the President's policy of backing democrats in the Middle East. The additional funding provided through MEPI is critical because it enables IRI to do a lot more in the places where we are using funds—funding far beyond that which can be provided by our traditional, core source of support the NED. At present, MEPI funding supports country specific IRI programs in Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Qatar, as well as a women's regional program. At the most basic level though, I would say MEPI is having a direct positive benefit on IRI's democracy support mission because it is enabling us to think much more strategically about where and how we want to support democratic reform in the Middle East. In a country like Morocco, for instance, a place where IRI has been active since the late 1990s, our program has gone from being a limited pilot project with a local council in Casablanca to a program that is targeting many communities in the Casablanca region to produce a citizen initiated development plan for use by elected local councils and associations. With a fully functional office in Casablanca, we are also able to train political party activists and working with party leaders to help them improve platforms and strategies, largely through use of public opinion polling. Jordan is another place where IRI's work has benefited from the MEPI initiative. The Institute

has a history of working in Jordan but in the past, resources and programs were largely driven by a specific event like an election. This made it extremely difficult for the Institute to plan and implement a comprehensive strategy of democracy support. With MEPI funds, we have been able to open an in-country office, enabling us to engage on a daily basis political activists and elected officials at the local and national levels. In doing so we are helping to put democracy policy rhetoric into practice by reaching out to reformers and supporting their endeavors in a comprehensive, meaningful way.

IRI's work in Morocco, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, and elsewhere in the region goes to the heart of MEPI's importance, because the "battle for hearts and minds" in the Middle East really is also about changing public attitudes about America, and demonstrating that we do in fact care about people in the region; that we care about the way their governments treat them, about whether their economies are growing at a pace fast enough to generate sufficient jobs, and about whether such opportunities are available to all members of society. It is critically important therefore that MEPI continue to be a U.S. Government program, and not, as some have suggested, an effort outside the government. Democrats in the Middle East who for many years felt ignored by the U.S. Government now must see the U.S. Government, including through U.S. NGOs, coming to their aid.

It is also important to understand that while U.S. policy in the region has changed to place greater emphasis on democracy and human rights promotion, the bureaucracy within the State Department, U.S.AID and elsewhere is still catching up with the Administration's direction in implementing this policy shift. All elements of our foreign policy apparatus, including Embassies overseas and within the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau at the State Department need to be constructively engaged to ensure that democracy remains a priority and that both governments and citizens in the Middle East are given a consistent message about the need to implement reforms. In closed societies such as Saudi Arabia and Syria, involvement at a diplomatic level is critical. The task of groups like IRI in an authoritarian country is rendered infinitely more difficult if it must be undertaken without the support of the U.S. Embassy. U.S. policymakers must take the lead in pressing for the greater political space in which IRI and other NGOs can operate.

Finally, it is important that you in Congress continue to travel to the region, continue to give praise where praise is due for moving forward on democracy, and continue to condemn bad practices as warranted.

CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia offers a not dissimilar set of democratization issues as the Middle East. As in the Middle East, governing practices range from the somewhat liberal to some of the most repressive on earth. U.S. efforts to advance democracy and human rights in the region accelerated greatly after 9/11—and have already had a dramatic effect—but the region has not received the same amount of attention as the Middle East. There is also less unity within the Bush Administration regarding the priority placed upon democratization and human rights. MEPI has served the Middle East well; what is needed now is a Muslim World Partnership Initiative that will do the same for other areas from Nigeria to Indonesia, with an emphasis on Central Asia.

With the exception of Kazakhstan, the region offers little trade and investment opportunity due to high levels of corruption, geography, Soviet-era trade laws and lack of contract law. All Central Asian countries have a unitary form of government under which the president has the powers of decree, the power to appoint regional leaders, and with the exception of Kyrgyz Republic, the power to appoint some portion of the national legislature. In addition, Russia continues to wield significant influence in these countries. Russian is still widely spoken, Russian T.V. and media are major sources of information, and many Central Asians migrate to Russia to find employment. In a poll IRI conducted in Kazakhstan in July 2004, 91 percent of respondents cited Russia as the country's most important partner. This would not be an issue, except that the example of Russia's diminishing democratic practices is looked to by most governments in the region.

It is no exaggeration to say that Central Asia had, by the late 1990s, become a backwater for U.S. diplomacy. Other than a visit by Secretary Madeline Albright in 2000 and an interest in Kazakhstan's oil, the region received little attention from U.S. policymakers until just after 9/11. When it became apparent that any U.S. invasion of Afghanistan would have to go through the region, its importance was greatly magnified.

With the debate inside the Administration over post-9/11 U.S. democracy and human rights policy settled by early 2002, the region's practices on democracy and

human rights also became a focus for the Administration. As Secretary Colin Powell put it at the time, “American troops come with values.” All of the U.S. Ambassadors in the region began more active diplomacy on democracy (here particular credit is due to John O’Keefe in Kyrgyzstan, John Herbst in Uzbekistan and Larry Napper in Kazakhstan and Laura Kennedy in Turkmenistan). U.S. funding for democracy programs in the region dramatically increased in the years after 9/11, doubling in some countries and quadrupling in others. More importantly, the focus of new and existing programs was greatly sharpened; for example, the programs most frequently mentioned as helping Kyrgyzstan’s recent transition (Freedom House’s printing press, NDI’s information centers and IRI’s political party program) were all begun soon after 9/11 with funding by the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

The outlook for other Central Asian countries varies. Having been in the region during the Rose Revolution, however, there is a common element—a belief by the authoritarians in the region that allowing democratic practices, particularly free elections, would result in a mob-led revolution. Obviously, this belief has intensified following events in Ukraine, and, closer to home, the downfall of the Kyrgyz government. The remaining autocrats in the region have failed to understand that in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, it was not elections, but stolen elections that led to the sitting government’s ouster.

In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbaev recently announced a “national program of political reforms” that will gradually introduce the election of regional governors and city mayors. However, this program deflects attention from other deficiencies such as recent parliamentary elections that the OSCE described as falling short of international standards of free, fair and transparent. IRI’s assistance has focused on political party strengthening and candidate training for local and parliamentary elections. Percentages of candidates with party affiliation increased greatly during the last three years, and IRI has been optimistic that steady progress was being made. In truth, regressive tendencies and administrative interference with some of the parties have become more common in the past year. IRI and other U.S. NGOs in Kazakhstan are presently facing intense government scrutiny and harassment, which is hindering programming and does not bode well for the future. This scrutiny, which increased after the controversial Ukraine presidential election, is likely to intensify given last month’s popular uprising against President Akaev in neighboring Kyrgyz Republic.

Uzbekistan remains one of the most difficult of the more than four dozen countries in which IRI works. President Karimov controls the country through a law enforcement structure and arbitrary application of the law. The President tolerates no political dissent. In general, Uzbekistan operates on a Soviet-era model of centralized power and administrative command, but with no social ideology to buffet the system. This has created fertile ground for the appeal of radical Islam, which sees opportunity in the ideological and economic poverty that prevails in the country’s regions. The Karimov administration has effectively restricted the party building and democracy education programming of international NGOs like IRI in ways that are contrary to the U.S.-Uzbekistan Bilateral Agreement.

Turkmenistan is the most repressive government in the region. The cult of personality surrounding the President, and attitudes towards any form of pluralism, is reminiscent of Stalinist Russia or early Maoist China. Engaging dissidents with democratic ambitions in Turkmenistan is all but impossible.

Throughout the region, the Bush Administration—in a unified manner—needs to continue to engage key members of the governments with the message that our relationship cannot be based on security concerns alone. There is a genuine demand for IRI’s technical support throughout the country, but without continued backing from the U.S. Embassy and the State and Defense Departments here in Washington, IRI will not be able to work with democratic-oriented reformers in the future. In order to meet Central Asia’s demand for democracy assistance, the U.S. must encourage the region’s leaders to adhere to the letter and spirit of bilateral agreements. The U.S. must through public diplomacy explain U.S. support for political and economic reform in the region. It is imperative that civil society activists understand that the United States is currently backing democratically-oriented group that encourages citizen participation. This fact is sometimes lost on pro-democracy groups who have little access to accurate news and information and who are encouraged to feel isolated by their government. If this perception persists, radical Islamists are ready to feel the void, and U.S. foreign policy will face yet another far-flung and dangerous front in the war on terrorism.

In essence, American policy in Central Asia would benefit from the kind of comprehensive approach undertaken towards the Middle East. Just four years ago, we were continuing a half century of ignoring democracy and human rights in the Near

East, believing that such an approach would guarantee our security. With some notable exceptions, few in the U.S. government had any interest in advancing American principles in the region. Today, just a few short years later, our policy has already begun to have an effect in terms of political openings, and to pay dividends in terms of perceptions of America in the region. Our policy towards Central Asia—and the rest of the Muslim world, from Nigeria to Indonesia—would benefit from a similarly top down, unambiguously enunciated policy, a Muslim World Partnership Initiative.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Wollack.

STATEMENT OF MR. KENNETH WOLLACK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Mr. WOLLACK. Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to present our views on the Middle East and Central Asia. I guess at the outset I would say that democracy assistance programs carried out by NDI and other organizations like IRI, are successful only when we are seen to be supporting indigenous forces for democratic change. In other words, U.S. interests are best served when we are seen as standing behind people, not in front of them; when we follow, not lead; and when there are self-motivated and dedicated people on the ground pursuing home-grown initiatives for democratic reform or consolidation.

Mr. Chair, Madeleine Albright remarked last March at a meeting of the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic world, and I quote:

“It is not true that we intend or desire to impose anything upon anybody. Even if we did, we could not succeed, because democracy is defined by the right of people to express freely their own views about who should lead their societies. The truth is that, in any place at any time, it is dictatorship that is an imposition. Democracy is a choice. At the core of democracy is the premise that governments have an obligation to respect the rights and dignity of their citizens.”

NGOs like NDI have greatly appreciated the expansion of democracy initiatives undertaken by the U.S. Government. U.S. Government support for democracy programs comes from a variety of sources and through a variety of mechanisms. While communication can always be improved and certain reforms should be considered, pluralism in democracy assistance has served the United States well. It has allowed for diverse yet complementary programming that over the long term could not be sustained by a highly static and centralized system.

Understandably, much attention is currently being paid to lack of democratic institutions in the greater Middle East, and President Bush has made addressing this problem a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. Two watershed electoral exercises earlier this year in Iraq and the Palestinian territories have inspired democrats across the region and beyond. The upcoming Palestinian legislative elections, Lebanese polls scheduled for late May, and the Egyptian Presidential contest in October could prove to be a testing ground for the future of political contestation in the region and will have an impact on democratic reform and elections throughout the region.

The frequent justification for slow pace of reform in the Arab world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, poverty, and/or the existence of internal Islamic terrorist groups won't stand up to the demonstration effect of millions of Iraqi embattled citizens going to the polls to cast a vote. Arab activists are in a demanding mood to push for more freedom and more accountability from their leaders. The recent successful elections in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, both characterized by large voter turnout under extremely challenging conditions, are a testament to this new spirit. Democrats are active in newly-elected legislatures within reform-oriented political parties, in women's organizations, and among the plethora of nongovernmental organizations.

A successful Middle East strategy should assume that the majority of Arab and Middle Eastern peoples believe in democratic values. Their current state of political affairs in the Arab world is the result of the mutually reinforcing nature of authoritarian rulers on the one hand and religious extremists on the other, rather than any religious or cultural bias against democracy. Drawing strength and legitimacy from each other, these two extremes are in a destabilizing slow dance that has been destroying the fabric of many Arab and Muslim nations. The destructive circle can only be broken by a democratic middle alternative, the emergence of which will disrupt the political monopoly of the extremes in much the same way as the emergence of the democratic middle led to a renewal of democratic politics in the Philippines, Chile, and much of Latin American in the 1980s.

To the extent that indigenous and independent democratic forces do exist throughout the Middle East and that over time extremism cannot prosper in an environment of greater freedom where political speech is encouraged and rulers are held accountable, a democratization strategy for the regime emerges. Such a strategy is based on identifying and strengthening the moderate middle, professionals, academics women, students, shopkeepers who, if given a chance, could play a central role in a democratic system. It should be recognized that democratic institutions in the Middle East may not fully resemble their Western counterparts. Traditional tribal and consultative mechanisms, for example, may exist alongside formal parliaments in certain countries, and political parties may cultivate a more narrow geographical or ethnic base. A comprehensive strategy should also incorporate a realistic time-frame.

In Central Asia, efforts aimed at promoting the growth of civil society, freedom, and democracy appear at this point to be bearing fruit. Parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan that both international and domestic observers criticized as seriously flawed brought citizens into the streets to demand their political rights, as they did in Ukraine and Georgia, and eventually led to the dissolution of President Akaev's Government. The situation remains fluid as various factions jockey for position; but for now, an interim government has restored calm and is working to set the dates for new Presidential elections in the coming months.

I hope the lesson drawn from the events in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Georgia for other countries in the region is the need to embark on meaningful political reform and organize truly democratic elec-

tions. Governments should not react by restricting political space or curtailing the work of local and international organizations. In the meantime, the international community should continue its efforts to support the development of political parties, civic groups, and legislatures.

Thank you very much. Mr. Chair.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, sir, for your testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wollack follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. KENNETH WOLLACK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) appreciates this opportunity to present its views on political reform in the Arab and Muslim world. The Institute is pleased to have been working to strengthen and promote democracy in the Middle East and Central Asia for more than 15 years.

The question before us is how the United States and other democratic nations can best support the development of indigenous forms of democracy throughout the Arab and Muslim world and, by so doing, establish a foundation for cooperation in pursuit of peace, prosperity and freedom from terror.

NDI believes that the United States should attach the highest priority to democratic development as an essential element of its foreign assistance programs. Autocracy, corruption and lack of accountability create instability and foster political extremism. Establishing a democratic political process provides the best possibilities for developing governmental policies that address economic, social and other issues that are essential for advancing human dignity

BUILDING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

The appropriate role of NDI and similar organizations is to provide support for those forces in non-democratic societies that are seeking to promote peaceful political change, often against seemingly insurmountable odds, or at great personal risk to themselves. In new democracies, governments, political parties and civil society are finding ways to work cooperatively to construct and consolidate their nascent democratic institutions.

Democracy assistance programs are only successful when we are seen to be supporting indigenous forces for democratic change. In other words, US interests are best served when we are seen as standing behind people, not in front of them; when we follow, not lead; and when there are self-motivated and dedicated people on the ground pursuing homegrown initiatives for democratic reform or consolidation.

NDI Chairman Madeleine Albright remarked last March at the meeting of the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World in Istanbul: "It is not true that we intend or desire to impose anything upon anybody. Even if we did, we could not succeed. Because democracy is defined by the right of people to express freely their own views about who should lead their own societies. The truth is that, in any place at any time, it is dictatorship that is an imposition; democracy is a choice. At the core of democracy is the premise that governments have an obligation to respect the rights and dignity of their citizens."

In some cases, democracy assistance has played a critical and transformative role at a certain moment in a country's democratic transition. In other situations, longer-term assistance has allowed for the growth and development of stable, democratic institutions and processes grounded in the principles of inclusion, transparency and accountability. And in those places where democratic change has not occurred or has stalled, assistance has provided protection to, and solidarity with, courageous democrats seeking peaceful reform.

PLURALISM IN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

NGOs such as NDI have greatly appreciated the expansion of democracy initiatives undertaken by the U.S. government. U.S. government support for democracy programs comes from a variety of sources and through various mechanisms. In the early 1980s, these programs were funded primarily through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED and its core institutes—NDI, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Solidarity Center and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)—give concrete expression to America's democratic values while serving our country's national interest by promoting political environments that are inhospitable to political extremism.

Since the 1980s, support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has allowed for a significant increase in democracy promotion activities, as has the Department of State's application of Economic Support Funds for these purposes. Increased resources within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) have allowed even greater opportunities for much-needed assistance.

Pluralism in democracy assistance has served the United States well. It has allowed for diverse yet complementary programming that, over the long term, could not be sustained by a highly static and centralized system. Funding by the NED, for example, has allowed NDI and the core institutes of the Endowment to respond quickly and flexibly to emerging opportunities and sudden problems in rapidly shifting political environments. Also, the NED has been able to operate effectively in closed societies where direct government engagement is more difficult. USAID funds have provided the basis for a longer-term commitment in helping to develop a country's democratic institutions; and funding from DRL and other programs within the State Department, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), have given the U.S. government the capacity to support, without cumbersome regulations, cutting-edge and highly focused democracy programs in individual countries, and for regional and global initiatives. . NDI programs in the Middle East and Central Asia have relied on support from USAID, NED, DRL and MEPI.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Understandably, much attention is currently being paid to the lack of democratic institutions in the greater Middle East, and President Bush has made addressing this problem a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

Two watershed electoral exercises earlier this year in Iraq and the Palestinian territories have inspired democrats across the region and beyond. The upcoming Palestinian legislative elections, Lebanese polls scheduled for late May and the Egyptian presidential contest in October, could prove to be a testing ground for the future of political contestation in the region, and will have an impact on democratic reform and elections throughout the region.

The frequent justifications for the slow pace of reform in the Arab world—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, poverty and/or the existence of internal Islamic terrorist groups—won't stand up to the demonstration effect of millions of Iraq's embattled citizens going to the polls to cast a free vote. In dictatorships like Syria, and in unreformed hereditary monarchies like Saudi Arabia, citizens are likely to ask "if them, why not us?", even though further movement towards democracy may well be blocked. The demonstration effect will also be felt by political and economic liberalizers like Jordan, Qatar and Bahrain, by semi-authoritarian Egypt, and by countries like Morocco and Yemen that have already embarked on a political reform path.

In the past, diplomatic efforts and foreign aid in the Middle East, while sometimes having a component described as "democracy and governance," appeared to be designed largely to show tangible results from the pursuit of regional peace, and contained few programs that challenged entrenched political authorities or that encouraged a more vigorous legislative branch.

Much of the aid for political and democratic reform was channeled through official conduits, using formal and informal bilateral agreements. This reliance on official sanction for democracy aid programs virtually guaranteed that political reform efforts would fail to achieve the desired result—genuine, albeit gradual, change. International aid donors seemed to operate under an unwritten pact not to "make waves" by supporting political and democratic reform in the Arab and Muslim world. A seeming international reluctance to push political reform in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan helped lead to a perception that international donors only demanded reform of their adversaries or of the powerless.

However, the events of September 11 and the Iraq war brought with them an entirely new set of political and policy dynamics. There is a growing consensus that repression and lack of political freedom in much of the Middle East and larger Islamic world helped breed a group of violent malcontents willing to abuse religion to help export their version of a new political order. Radical political Islam is seen as an avenue of political participation open to the disenfranchised and disaffected.

At the same time, Arab activists are in a demanding mood, taking advantage of every opportunity to push for more freedom and more accountability from their leaders. The recent successful elections in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, both characterized by large voter turnout under extremely challenging conditions, are testament to this new spirit. Democrats are active in newly elected legislatures, within reform-oriented political parties, in women's organizations and among the plethora of non-governmental organizations.

These indigenous democratizers declared the debate about the compatibility of democracy and Islam dead long ago, and welcome practical assistance from the United States and other countries. While the men and women who form this nascent indigenous democracy network may have serious misgivings about certain U.S. policies in the region, they are committed to the struggle for democracy in the Middle East and they welcome and deserve outside validation of their quest. Responding to these changes, there has been a discernible shift in U.S. policy, with a ramping up of initiatives designed to support greater citizen demand for democracy.

A STRATEGY FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

A successful Middle East democracy strategy should assume that the majority of Arab and Middle Eastern peoples believe in democratic values. The current state of political affairs in the Arab world is a result of the mutually reinforcing nature of authoritarian rulers on the one hand and religious extremists on the other, rather than any religious or cultural bias against democracy. Drawing strength and legitimacy from each other, these two extremes are in a destabilizing slow dance that has been destroying the fabric of many Arab and Muslim nations.

This destructive circle can only be broken by a democratic or middle alternative, the emergence of which will disrupt the political monopoly of the extremes, in much the same way as the emergence of a democratic middle led to a renewal of democratic politics in the Philippines, Chile and much of Latin America in the late 1980s. The democratic middle exists within the non-governmental organizations that agitate for better policy, better governance and more respect for human rights. Democrats are found within the ranks of political parties, even in certain Islamist groupings, where many share fundamental democratic values and desire that elections be held under transparent and consistent rules. The democratic middle is also present within officialdom, where many toil anonymously to improve the state of public affairs.

Moderate elements within Arab states, whose liberalizing messages are often feared by repressive regimes, find themselves squeezed between the State and the religious extremists; both sides fearing that their power base is threatened by a more open political system.

U.S.-sponsored programs to assist democracy in the Middle East, including MEPI and the Broader Middle East Initiative have been working to straddle the various impractical, and ultimately destructive, policy debates by putting forward a support mechanism for indigenous, as opposed to the perception of imposed, democracy in the Arab and Islamic world.

To the extent that indigenous and independent democratic forces do exist throughout the Middle East, and that, over time, extremism cannot prosper in an environment of greater freedom where political speech is encouraged and rulers are held accountable, a democratization strategy for the region emerges.

Such a strategy is based on identifying and strengthening the moderate middle-professionals, academics, women, students, shopkeepers, who, if given a chance, could play a central role in a democratic system. Working with these and other indigenous democrats, including civil society leaders, human rights activists, reform-minded politicians and modernists within the Islamic movement, the international community can help provide the skills and linkages they need to counter the entrenched extremes.

It should also be recognized that democratic institutions in the Middle East may not fully resemble their western counterparts. Traditional tribal and consultative mechanisms, for example, may exist alongside formal parliaments in certain countries, and political parties may cultivate a more narrow geographical or ethnic base. A comprehensive strategy should also incorporate a realistic time frame for the development of true democracy, years in many cases, although progress will vary.

Following are some key principles and programs that could form part of a strategy to promote indigenous democracy in the Arab and Islamic worlds:

Assessing the countries where the openings are the greatest and where democracy is most likely to take hold.

When considering democratic development, there are three broad groupings of countries in the Middle East. The first group could be considered "breakthrough countries" where circumstances, including a weak state and/or military occupation, have created a climate where elections and democracy are seen as an attractive option for creating new institutions and joining the mainstream international community. Countries/territories in this category include Iraq, Lebanon, and the West Bank and Gaza (Palestine).

The second group, sometimes called "liberalizers" and "reformers", can also be considered "emerging democracies" by virtue of having both a governmental commit-

ment to reform and significant citizen demand for change. Following a “managed” process of change, these countries seek to allow political openings, and are generally hospitable to outside support and engagement. Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen all fall into this category.

The third group of countries, some authoritarian, some “semi” authoritarian, actively resist change or seek to manage any process of change to the advantage of the existing leadership. These countries, which tend to be the most critical of outside democracy efforts, insist that change must be completely locally driven but then actively close political space, and hinder political debate and participation. Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia are in this category.

Designing democracy assistance programs to capitalize on the openings available.

Within the group of liberalizers where assistance is more welcomed, training and support can be provided in a cooperative manner to government, opposition and civil society. Political parties and parliamentarians can be exposed to successful models, and non-governmental organizations, often the vanguard of the democratic middle, seek support on advocacy techniques. Focus groups and scientific opinion research can be used to help politicians understand the demands of voters.

In countries like Egypt, programs should be designed to reinforce constructive and existing citizen demand for change. Programs could include training for women and young people trying to break the monopoly on political power, training on professional standards for journalists, development of democracy web sites, the inclusion of country activists in regional networking, and training of domestic election monitors.

Using the opportunities created by elections, political leadership changes and other discontinuities to promote contestation of political power.

Ultimately democracy will only take hold in semi-authoritarian states when a political event occurs that creates an opportunity for an alternation of power. In the meantime, democracy promotion efforts should be aimed at increasing the competitiveness of elections through political party training programs, international and domestic election monitoring efforts and through conflict resolution and coalition building advice to parties and political leaders.

Supporting women’s political empowerment.

Women, by virtue of being largely excluded from power, have a vested interest in the dispersion of power, one of the fundamental principles of democracy. Women’s leadership training, political party internal democracy, and material support and training for female political candidacies can help women break political barriers.

Building democratic networks.

There are surprisingly few links among democrats in the Arab and Islamic world. For example, there are few regional Arab voices to speak out against human rights violations or other abuses of freedom and there is no equivalent of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or Organization of American States (OAS) to develop region-wide elections and political standards. Support for networks of democrats of the Islamic world should be actively encouraged; this would help counter, or balance, the devastating use that extremists make of international networks.

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

While elections are not a sufficient pre-condition to establish democracy, they are the vehicle through which the people of a country freely express their will, on a basis established by law, as to who shall have the legitimacy to govern in their name and in their interests. Genuine elections provide the means for the people of a country to express their political will, which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and every other major international human rights instrument recognize as the basis for the authority of government. They are both a right and an avenue to promote and protect the exercise of other rights and freedoms, and a requisite condition for the development of a broader process and institutions of democratic governance.

Too often, however, regimes with autocratic tendencies have used elections that they tightly control to maintain their grip on power. These are elections in name only. It was only following electoral processes that were subverted that citizens in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere rose up to defend their fundamental political rights. In many of these cases, U.S. democracy assistance programs provided invaluable support to democrats working to protect these rights.

NDI's programs, and those of other nongovernmental organizations, in these and other places are not designed to seek particular electoral outcomes, but to support those political processes that embody the aspirations of the people, are guaranteed by their country's constitutions, and are consistent with the principles of regional groupings to which these countries belong, as well as international protocols and standards. These programs have supported: domestic and international observation that seeks to promote a more open electoral process, and deter misconduct, or oppose it should it occur; and efforts of political parties to participate more actively and effectively in the political process. These efforts however, are not simply oriented towards elections. Rather they are designed to support the long-term development of political parties and civic groups—organizations that are central to democratic society.

In recent months, the world has witnessed a number of elections in the Middle East and Central Asia that will have far reaching results. In each situation, significant challenges remain ahead, and there is an ongoing need for international support.

Afghanistan:

Following the collapse of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, the international community began a collaborative effort to rebuild a viable economic and political structure in Afghanistan. Many of the Bonn Agreement's ambitious mandates have fulfilled—albeit with some delay—including the ratification of a new constitution, promulgation of a political party and election laws, and the holding of the country's first-ever direct presidential election in October last year.

This election demonstrated Afghan citizens' overwhelming interest in, and commitment to, participating in the country's democratic process. Voter turnout was high, with 70 percent of registered Afghan voters participating in the polls, 43 percent of whom were women. While there were some reports of voter intimidation and poll-related violence, the elections were significantly more peaceful and orderly than expected.

A coalition of local civil society organizations, The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), supported and trained by NDI, fielded 2,300 non-partisan election monitors, the largest observation group in the country. This nationwide monitoring effort was particularly important, because security concerns kept international observers confined to Kabul.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for September 18. These elections will provide Afghans the first opportunity in almost four decades to choose their representatives. Election authorities face significant administrative challenges in conducting parliamentary, provincial and district-council elections simultaneously, and their task is greatly complicated by the tenuous security environment.

Yet many of Afghanistan's most daunting challenges still lie ahead. In particular, ensuring that the newly elected parliament plays an independent and substantive role in the governing process will be critical if Afghanistan is to institutionalize the democratic gains made to date. To that end, it is essential that reform-minded, democratically-oriented parliamentary members and staff receive the necessary support. The emergence of broad-based, multi-ethnic coalitions will be difficult, as elected representatives may instead resort to organizing around familiar ethnic, tribal or religious patterns.

Continued support from the international community is essential if the government is to be able to address the problems still facing the country. Challenges include reducing the power of warlords and militias, eliminating the narcotics trade, strengthening the disarmament, decommissioning and reintegration process (DDR) and expanding the limited reach of the central government.

NDI has been conducting programs in Afghanistan since 2002 to support the development of emerging political parties and civic groups as effective and viable participants in Afghanistan's political and electoral processes. The Institute has provided technical assistance on political party development and established eight Election Training and Information Centers throughout Afghanistan. In advance of the election, more than 2,500 party members received training in one of these centers. In addition, NDI produced and distributed 50,000 copies of a handbook for party and presidential candidate election monitors, and trained over 10,000 pollwatchers throughout the country.

Iraq:

Despite onerous security, political and logistical challenges, and predictions that violence would disrupt the elections, 59 percent of Iraqis turned out on January 30 to elect members of the 275-seat Transitional National Assembly (TNA) that will run the country, draft a permanent constitution and choose a president and prime

minister. Local elections were also held to select regional assemblies, and the Kurds held elections for their own National Assembly.

Most of the nearly 6,000 polling stations expected to operate opened on time and remained open throughout the day. The elections were monitored by a number of officially registered domestic observers including NDI's partner organization, the Iraqi Election Information Network (EIN), which was responsible for training, deploying and overseeing almost 10,000 accredited monitors who observed the voting at 80 percent of the polling stations.

NDI's programs were designed to assist the efforts of parties, civic groups and citizens to participate in the country's political process. In the lead-up to the polls, NDI conducted training sessions for candidates, campaign managers and party agents. The Institute also organized workshops for women candidates for local and national office. NDI helped 60 political entities and coalitions to design and produce printed campaign materials which were distributed throughout Iraq, established a media center where political groups could produce and disseminate effective television messages. Overall, the Institute worked with 11 of the 12 political entities and coalitions that won seats in the TNA.

The democratic process in Iraq, however, has just begun. A new constitution must be drafted with citizen input and new elections for a National Assembly must be held over the next year. Civil society and political institutions must be built from the ground floor. In the months ahead, NDI will provide new TNA members with information and advice on procedural and protocol issues, will offer orientation trainings for new TNA staff members who have little or no previous governance experience, and will help conduct public education on constitutional matters. The Institute will also continue to work with political parties—including those that chose not to participate in the January polls—on participating in the constitutional development process, coalition building, improving internal democracy within the party, and organizational development, and will continue to support EIN as it prepares for the October constitutional referendum and December national elections.

West Bank and Gaza:

Large numbers of Palestinians turned out to vote in the January 9 elections for president of the Palestinian Authority, and election day was orderly and generally peaceful. The significant presence of political party and candidate agents, as well as nonpartisan domestic and international observers, added transparency to the process.

International observation delegations, including one organized by NDI and co-led by President Jimmy Carter, former New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman and former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, found that overall the election was contested vigorously and administered fairly. The Central Election Commission was able to successfully organize the election in just 60 days under difficult circumstances of the ongoing conflict and occupation, and the Israeli authorities followed through on their commitment to help facilitate freedom of movement of voters and electoral officials through Israeli check points.

There are significant challenges ahead as Palestinians move to consolidate their democratic institutions. Municipal and legislative elections are scheduled for July, and will require careful preparation. Palestinian-Israeli cooperation that marked the planning for the January elections should continue, and the international community should continue to provide support in this crucial transition period. Moreover, as the NDI observer delegation noted, Palestinians have an opportunity to enhance their efforts to ensure public order and to curtail violence, address corruption, reform their political organizations and build a legislative institution that can genuinely perform its representative function.

Central Asia:

Efforts aimed at promoting the growth of civil society, freedom and democracy in Central Asia appear—at this moment—to be bearing fruit. Parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan on February 26 and March 12 that both international and domestic observers criticized as seriously flawed, brought citizens into the streets to demand their political rights, and eventually led to the dissolution of President Akaev's government. The situation remains fluid as various factions jockey for position, but for now an interim government has restored calm and is working to set dates for a new presidential election in the coming months.

The citizens of Kyrgyzstan were responsible for the developments that have unfolded in recent weeks. Obviously flawed parliamentary elections only compounded frustrations over a crumbling economy and a steady rollback of political freedoms. Yet the people of Kyrgyzstan have not operated in isolation. They have been influenced by the world beyond Kyrgyzstan's borders. The democratic transitions re-

cently experienced in nearby Georgia and Ukraine inspired the events of late March. There has now been a breakthrough in each of the key subregions of the former Soviet Union: the Caucasus, the Slavic region and Central Asia—no corners of Eurasia now seem impermeable to democratic aspirations.

The credit for the breakthroughs in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine rests squarely with the citizens of those countries. Outside support has made a modest but important contribution to democratic trends in the region. Programs to promote the growth of civil society, freedom and democracy in Central Asia have been operating for well over 10 years. For example, NDI initiated its first democracy assistance programs in Central Asia with USAID funding in 1992, and first opened an office in Kyrgyzstan in 1996.

Democracy assistance programs in Central Asia have focused on reducing the isolation that characterizes these countries of the former Soviet Union, and providing impartial information to allow citizens to engage more actively in the political arena. For its part, NDI has helped in the development of civic groups and worked with political parties, ruling and opposition alike, to organize and reach out to their constituents.

NDI has assisted in building a domestic and regional capacity for election monitoring. Civic organizations from 16 countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have come together under the banner of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) to observe elections in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Collectively over the past 15 years, these organizations, assisted by NDI, have trained more than 100,000 monitors and observed more than 100 elections in their own countries.

In Kyrgyzstan, NDI established a network of 20 information centers where citizens could read the news, share ideas with neighbors, and learn how to conduct nonpartisan community action campaigns. The centers became important sources of information about election-related events during the campaign and immediately following the elections. The Institute also supported the development of a coalition of domestic election monitors that was able to offer an impartial assessment of the recent election procedures and results.

I hope the lesson drawn from events in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Georgia for other countries in the region is the need to embark on meaningful political reform and organize truly democratic elections. Governments should not react by restricting political space or curtailing the work of local and international organizations. In the meantime, the international community should continue its efforts to support the development of political parties, civic groups and legislatures.

INTERNATIONALISM IN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

At a time when there is growing recognition of the interconnectedness between economic prosperity and democracy, more and more other nations, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and international financial institutions are beginning to engage in democracy promotion and human rights activities.

We have been most successful at NDI when we have joined with others to share democratic skills. As a practical matter, peoples making the transition to democracy require diverse experiences. The experiences of democrats from other nations—from new and established democracies alike—are often more relevant than our own.

Cooperative approaches also convey a deeper truth to nations attempting a transition to democracy: that they are not ceding something to the United States when they develop democratic institutions; rather, they are joining a community of nations. That other nations have traversed the same course. That while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on natural allies and an active support structure. And that other nations are concerned and are watching—something that would-be autocrats, who flourish outside the glare of the international spotlight, will bear in mind.

ROLE OF U.S. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS)

While the U.S. government can set the tone, and foreign aid can provide needed resources for democratic development, much of the work on the ground must be done by non-governmental organizations. This is particularly true in the Middle East and Central Asia. Groups such as NDI are capable of assuming responsibility, yet are not constrained by the stringent rules of formal diplomacy. NGOs can readily share information, knowledge and experiences with groups and individuals who are pursuing or consolidating democracy, sometimes without the cooperation or sanction of their government.

Perhaps most important, in countries where one of the primary issues being addressed is the paucity of autonomous civic and political institutions, the funda-

mental idea that government ought not to control all aspects of society can be undermined by a too-visible donor government hand in the development and implementation of democracy programs.

NGO initiatives must grow out of the needs of democrats in the host country. The work should always be in the open and should be conducted with partners committed to pluralism and nonviolence. At the same time, consultation is necessary with the Congress, USAID missions and embassies. When public funds are used, transparency and accountability should always prevail.

IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL PARTY PROGRAMS

If there is one area where the allocation of additional resources would increase the effectiveness of democracy assistance programs, it would be in the area of political party modernization and reform.

Political parties serve a function unlike any other institution in a democracy. By aggregating and representing social interests, they provide a structure for political participation. They act as training grounds for political leaders who will eventually assume governing roles. They foster necessary competition and accountability in governance. In the legislative arena, they translate policy preferences into public policies. It should come as no surprise, then, that when political parties fail to fulfill their special roles, the entire democratic system is placed in jeopardy.

In recent years it has been civic organizations that have received the bulk of democracy assistance funding. The international development community has buttressed civic groups and assisted their rise. This is a good and necessary endeavor; NDI has participated in many such initiatives and continues to do so. At the same time, the danger in focusing almost exclusively on civil society development is that civil society activism without effective political institutions quickly creates a vacuum. It sows opportunities for populists and demagogues who wish to weaken parties and legislatures—the cornerstones of representative democracy. The international community must respond to the need to build, sustain, and renew political parties in a way that matches our efforts to build and sustain civil society.

The democratization of political parties must be a priority in the efforts to restore public confidence in parties and the democratic process as a whole. Greater citizen participation, accountability of leadership, transparency, and institutional safeguards are more important now than ever for this effort to succeed.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Dr. Johnson, would now like to proceed.

STATEMENT OF RON JOHNSON, PH.D., SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP, RTI INTERNATIONAL

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. Chair, I thank you very much on behalf of RTI International for the opportunity to present testimony today on U.S. efforts to promote the development of democratic reform and civil societies in the Arab and Muslim world but, indeed, elsewhere in the world. RTI International is a nonprofit independent research-based organization in North Carolina. I did submit a written statement for the record and I would like to highlight a few points of that.

Since 1981, RTI International has been engaged in programs to promote good governance. We encourage the development of civil society in post-conflict situations and societies transitioning from centralized authoritarian regimes to modern governance systems.

Our work has been in partnership with the U.S. Government through the Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Departments of State and Defense.

In our experience, there are four key components that contribute to stable conditions under which a democratic society can develop and flourish. They are: Freedom for a society to select its own leaders in an open democratic process; security that prevents outside agents from dispensing violence and supporting insurgents; societies investing in their own people in education and health and so-

cial programs; and, finally, a system of governance in which the populace can observe and hold their leaders accountable. Such a system allows the electorate to throw the rascals out in orderly elections if the leaders refuse to be accountable.

It is this last component, institutions of governance, that promote accountability to the populace, and, in turn, promotes democratic open society, that I will address a bit today.

In our experience, shifting from central authority to local control is essential to providing citizens the opportunity to influence the delivery of everyday government services such as water, sewer, streets, health, education, social welfare programs. Day to day, these are the things that matter to people. These are the things that define the quality of life.

In Pakistan, for example, through USAID support, RTI International is assisting the Government of Pakistan to provide for greater local management of the education system without sacrificing national standards for curriculum and quality.

Indonesia is an excellent example where U.S. Government programs have prominently assisted decentralization of authority. While prosperous and growing a decade ago, large segments of society were left out of both the political process and the rising prosperity. Less than a decade after the economic collapse and the overthrow of the Suharto regime, Indonesia has made significant reforms and remarkable progress, due in significant measure to a number of United States-supported programs to decentralize government.

Indonesia has held successive elections for national office with virtually no violence. This year for the first time in its history, all Indonesian local officials—executive and legislative—will have been legitimately elected. These programs in Indonesia, many conducted by RTI International, have focused on shifting authority from central to provincial and municipal governments.

Currently, critical work is underway by RTI and other partners to strengthen local government in Aceh Province to enable it to cope with the overwhelming governmental responsibilities in the wake of the tsunami. Indonesia is far from finished on its path to a prosperous as well as democratic society, but much of Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, with notable exceptions, remain even further away.

The Indonesia example appears relatively simple compared to the challenges in Iraq. Under the USAID local governance program, RTI started work in Baghdad just 3 weeks after the city fell. Over the course of this project, now entering its third year, RTI has employed more than 3,500 Iraqi nationals; but, most importantly, we worked with thousands of courageous Iraqis at the local level who have formed civil society organizations and served in local government. We collaborate closely with NDI and IRI in a growing number of Iraqi nongovernmental organizations in these efforts.

During the course of our work in Iraq, in many cases working alongside coalition forces, especially in the early first year, we supported the formation of about 700 of the over 1,000 local government councils throughout the country. More than a year before Iraq elected its first national assembly, local councils were operating all across Iraq. Though these councils were far from perfect

examples, they nonetheless provide a valuable means for citizens to express grievances, set priorities, and demand accountability from local leaders.

Last July, shortly after the handover from the CPA to the Iraqi interim government, I had the privilege of attending the weekly meeting of the Babel Provincial Council in Hillah in south-central Iraq. The council was conducting the kind of business recognized as commonplace in my hometown of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, or any other city council in America. There were discussions over which projects the council should fund with a small grant fund, and debate on a motion of censure of a council member for trying to improperly influence a contract. We would not know the difference between the agenda for that council meeting and any one of the cities that we might reside in.

Most impressive, though, was that the entire day-long meeting was locally broadcast on television. Conduct of open meetings and local media coverage for these councils is the norm rather than the exception with these councils in Iraq. The pride which Iraqis feel in serving on these councils and the dedication and courage that they exhibit in the face of threats and deaths of some local council members are an inspiration.

Overlooked in the international media coverage of the January national assembly election—absolutely a hallmark success—was that, at the same time, provincial councils were also elected for all 18 provinces across Iraq. These new provincial councils are now organized throughout the country and, I am proud to say, that our Iraqi national staff and our project are training these new council members in the basic functions of councils in a democratic society in every province including those three to five provinces in which the violence is most prevalent.

Looking back over our 2 years of experience in Iraq, we truly have seen the value of working at the local government level to create local political institutions that speak to and for citizens.

As Subcommittee Members consider the way ahead in encouraging reform, freedom, and democracy in the Middle East and indeed elsewhere, I offer a few recommendations. First we need to recognize the critical role that local government structures and their elected officials play in creating legitimate governments and stable societies.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Dr. Johnson, if I may interrupt, in the interest of time if you could briefly summarize and give us a summary paragraph. I am sorry to interrupt. It is absolutely fascinating.

Mr. JOHNSON. That is all right.

The first point is the importance of local governments and local civil society organizations. Second, as both speakers have indicated, this is not a short-term fix; it is a long-term investment on the part of the United States in promoting these kinds of institutions. And lastly, for these reforms to be successful, citizens have to see improvements, and concrete improvements, in the delivery of government services, services that are most often provided by governments at the local level.

Thank you very much. And I look forward to any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RON JOHNSON, PH.D., SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP, RTI INTERNATIONAL

Madame Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of RTI International, I am pleased to provide testimony concerning United States government programs and efforts designed to engage in dialogue about democracy, encourage political reform, promote the development of civil society, and develop transparent and accountable governmental institutions, in Arab and Muslim societies as well as throughout the world.

I am Executive Vice President for International Development at RTI International, an independent, non-profit research organization based in North Carolina that conducts a wide range of scientific research and provides a wide range of scientific and technical services to the U.S. Government and a number of private sector clients.

For the majority of my professional life, nearly 30 years, I have worked in the field of international development, primarily in the areas of decentralization policy and strategies, municipal finance and management, and urban infrastructure finance systems. During that time, I have witnessed firsthand the progress being made by nations in many parts of the world to increase participation in government to improve public health, education and social welfare as a result of U.S. Government-sponsored programs.

Since 1981, RTI International has been engaged in programs to promote good governance and encourage the development of civil society in post-conflict situations and in societies transitioning from centralized, authoritarian regimes to modern governance systems. Our work has been in partnership with the U.S. government, through the Agency for International Development, and the Departments of State and Defense.

In our experience, there are four key components that contribute to stable conditions under which a democratic society can develop and flourish. They are:

- Freedom for a society to select its own leaders in an open, democratic process;
- Security that prevents outside agents from dispensing violence and supporting internal dissidents;
- Investments in their people—education, health and social welfare programs, which are assisted in early stages by donor organizations such as USAID and other bilateral or multilateral organizations; and
- Finally, a system of governance in which the populace can observe and hold accountable their leaders for inappropriate actions or conduct. Such a system provides the mechanism through which the electorate can, if necessary, “throw the rascals out” at the next election.

It is the last component—institutions of governance that promote accountability to the populace in a society and in turn promote a democratic, open society—which I will address today. RTI International develops and strengthens decentralized systems of governance and civil society to support these evolving institutions. Over the past twenty-five years, we have assisted countries making the transition from highly centralized regimes to systems where government is closer and more easily controlled by the people. These efforts are critical because while national elections may occur even in highly centralized systems, national elections alone do not provide citizens with sufficient influence over government services or accountability. Shifting some central authority to local control is essential to providing citizens the opportunity to influence the delivery of everyday government services such as water, sewers, streets, health, education and social welfare programs. Day to day, these are the things that matter to people, the things that define the quality of life. In Pakistan, for example, through U.S. Government support, RTI International is assisting the Government of Pakistan to provide for greater local management of the education system without sacrificing national standards for curriculum and quality.

GOVERNMENT DECENTRALIZATION IN POLAND

Sometimes, these components are obtained relatively easily. Poland is such an example. There, significant advantages such as a low threat environment, an educated populace and major assistance from other countries such as the U.S. already existed. With these advantages, Poland required mainly the end of an authoritarian, centralized regime so the society could choose and hold accountable their leaders. RTI International is proud to have been a part of establishing a decentralized governance system in Poland, a system in which significant authority is vested in elected executive and legislative leaders at the local level. The system allows citizens to

readily assess whether the basic services of public utilities, health and education are provided efficiently and effectively.

However, the central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union and many Middle Eastern countries have not had the same starting point, and have not fared as well. With notable exceptions, there are few Middle Eastern or Central Asian societies in which individuals can select and hold accountable their leaders. While there are signs of change in the region, such reforms will require U.S. and indeed the world's encouragement and support. Successful municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza along with processes put in place to allow Palestinians to engage their government officials on a daily basis are hopeful signs. Elsewhere, political stability was notably increased when the Philippines adopted the Local Government Code. This code defines the powers and authority of local governments and shifted substantial responsibility for public services, health and education to local governments, along with central government revenue sharing and provisions for local government revenue generation.

Effective central institutions are necessary, especially when security and economic structures have collapsed. Aware of this, the United States employs a balanced approach in supporting countries that are transitioning to more democratic and stable societies. Individual rights, civil society organizations, fair and open electoral systems, and a balance between central, regional and local government institutions are necessary if U.S. programs are to be effective. In the aftermath of a catastrophic event, such as war or economic collapse, it is tempting to quickly re-establish strong central institutions. It is critical that the U.S. in its democracy building programs not succumb to the tendency to focus only on the quick re-establishment of strong central control. Such an approach may facilitate a new authoritarian regime to find an easy path to power.

EL SALVADOR EXPERIENCE

Here, El Salvador is a useful illustration. In El Salvador, we can look back well over a decade since the country was embroiled in a civil war and review the institutions and processes that contributed to a more stable, democratic society. When the FMLN became a legitimate political party, emerging from years of a guerrilla campaign, it vied for power with well established parties who controlled the national assembly and most of the cities and towns. Though still unable to capture majority control in the national assembly, FMLN and other parties have been able to win mayoral and council elections in several towns, including the capital city of San Salvador, thus creating a balance of power that promotes societal stability.

In addition to political reforms, El Salvador has enjoyed improvements in civil administration. There, locally elected officials are shaping the delivery of basic services to their constituents. As part of these reforms, participatory processes have been developed through programs sponsored and funded by the U.S. government, and implemented by RTI and local partners, which enable citizens to control the priority setting process that determines the allocation of local government investments. Civil society organizations have developed around these participatory processes, enhancing the culture of citizen voice in political affairs and strengthening the ways citizens hold government accountable.

Local governments that successfully adopt these participatory processes are rewarded with additional resources from the central government. In short, the more democratic the local administrative and political process, the more resources local government has at its disposal to improve the everyday conditions of the population. Strengthened local government in El Salvador provided an avenue for a former insurgent group to gain important political power even though it has not been strong enough to capture national office. Strengthened civil society holds those newly elected local officials accountable for good governance and for delivering basic services to citizens.

INDONESIA DECENTRALIZATION

Indonesia is another example of a country in which remarkable changes have occurred in the past decade, and where U.S. government programs have prominently assisted those changes. A decade ago, Indonesia, while prosperous and growing, offered limited opportunity for popular political choice, and left large segments of society out of both political processes and the rising prosperity. When the economy collapsed, the centralized, autocratic regime lacked the legitimacy of popular support and the economic and political institutions to make the changes necessary to recover. Less than a decade after the economic collapse and the overthrow of the Suharto regime, Indonesia has held successive elections for national office with vir-

tually no violence. This year, for the first time in history, all Indonesian local executive leaders and local parliaments will have been elected.

In 1988, RTI, through USAID, started helping the Government of Indonesia develop a policy for shifting some authority from central to provincial and municipal governments. While decentralization reform was slow during the last decade of the Suharto regime, it accelerated rapidly after the first national elections. Within the past five years, the Indonesian parliament enacted two critical pieces of legislation that define additional powers and authority for provincial and municipal governments. These measures provide for local revenue generation as well as a formula for sharing between central and local government national resources such as forestry, precious ores, and oil and gas. Combined with the popular election of local leaders, versus the former appointment by central government, these reforms are fueling a more open society and providing channels for legitimate, peaceful dissent.

At the same time, there are elements within Indonesian society that are not committed to peaceful resolution of differences. In response, U.S. assistance has been reorganized to support strong, accountable local government with a focus on improvements in health, education, basic urban services, and environmental programs. The shift provides a focus for democracy at the local level, where citizens see and can interact with government on a daily basis. The growing experience of Indonesian citizens with democracy through the electoral process and through participation with local government in setting local priorities will help Indonesia to thwart attempts by extremists who rely upon failure of political institutions to attract individuals who feel they are unable to exert influence and control over the things that matter to them in their daily lives.

Through our work in Indonesia, RTI has learned that even as mechanisms such as electoral systems and institutions such as political parties are created to allow for the election of national leaders, mechanisms and institutions at the local level also must be developed to link citizens to their local government. Over the past three years we have worked in more than 100 local governments across Indonesia to help form community-based groups to participate in planning and priority setting for local government services. In addition, we trained local government service departments and political leaders in implementing a participatory development planning process. The result is improved delivery of local services and increased citizen satisfaction with local government as leaders are seen to be accountable to citizens. Through newly awarded U.S. government contracts in community management of education and local government capacity building, we will be working over the next five years with at least 100 additional municipal and provincial governments.

For example, currently, critical work is under way to strengthen local government in Aceh Province to enable it to cope with overwhelming governmental responsibilities in the wake of the recent tsunami. Indonesia of course is far from finished on its path to a prosperous as well as democratic society. Much of Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East is further away even than Indonesia.

ESTABLISHING LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN IRAQ

Each of these examples appears relatively simple compared with the challenges we have faced in Iraq, where RTI International has been engaged with U.S. efforts to promote a stable, democratic society since coalition forces liberated Baghdad. Under the USAID Local Governance Program, RTI started work in Baghdad, just three weeks after the city fell, drawing upon the talents and courage of a truly international staff that has brought experience from a dozen other Middle Eastern and Central Asian Islamic societies. Over the course of its project, now in its third year, RTI has employed more than 3,500 Iraqi nationals as part of our team. Most importantly, we have worked with thousands of courageous Iraqis at the local level who have formed civil society organizations to secure improvements in their lives and who have served on local councils, as Mayors, as Governors, or as department heads. We continue to collaborate closely with NDI, IRI and numerous other partners including a growing number of Iraqi non-governmental organizations such as the Foundation for Development and Democracy, a relatively new Iraqi NGO formed to focus attention on issues of decentralization.

Two years ago, Iraq was a totally centralized, totally authoritarian regime that had oppressed its population, was accountable only to a cadre of political favorites of Saddam Hussein, and permitted no expression of political dissent, and no means for citizens to influence the actions of government. As RTI staff first met with neighborhood groups in Baghdad and elsewhere, we sought to develop mechanisms whereby citizens' voices could be heard, and a degree of control over political processes could be taken by citizens at the local level. Working with colleagues from USAID, the Department of State, and the U.S. military, we devised a program of

neighborhood “town meetings” to enable citizens to articulate to the Coalition concerns and issues needing immediate redress. The town meetings also provided the forum to elect a group of citizens to represent their neighborhoods in forming a City Council for Baghdad.

By the first week of July 2003, 90 neighborhood councils, 9 district councils, and the City Council had been formed through this bottom-up process in Baghdad. U.S. military civil affairs officers and enlisted personnel provided the person power to achieve this remarkable feat within two months. We are indebted to the resourcefulness and bravery of these personnel who accompanied RTI staff, who took the initiative, and who ultimately covered all of Baghdad.

This effort to form small councils at the neighborhood or sub-district level and more geographically comprehensive councils at the district, city or province level took place throughout Iraq. Approximately 900 of the more than 1,000 councils ultimately were assisted through the formation process or subsequent training and technical assistance by RTI. But RTI was only one of the actors committed to giving Iraqis for the first time in their history a voice in government through working at the local level. U.S. and British military forces also helped Iraqis form councils around the country and provided sustained support side by side with RTI staff throughout all the provinces in Iraq. More than a year before the first elected Iraqi national assembly, local councils were operating across the country.

These councils were far from perfect given the expedient nature of their formation. Yet despite their shortcomings, the councils provided a valuable means for citizens to express their grievances, identify priorities, and demand accountability from local leaders for the services that affect their daily lives. Equally important, the councils have provided for the first time the means whereby a local political body can interact with and influence the technical departments that operate at the local and provincial level, even though the managers and staff of those departments remain central government employees. The local nature of these councils is exhibited by the way meetings are conducted openly, in full view of the public.

Last July, shortly after the handover from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Iraqi Interim government, I had the privilege of attending part of the weekly meeting of the Babel provincial council in Hillah, in South Central Iraq. Most noteworthy was the council was conducting the kind of business that would be recognized as commonplace in my home town of Chapel Hill or any other city council in America. There were discussions over which of several projects the council should fund with a modest grant and debate on a motion of censure of a member of the council for trying to improperly influence the awarding of a contract. But most impressive was that the entire day-long meeting was being televised over local television. Conduct of open meetings and local media coverage is the norm, rather than the exception, with these councils.

The pride that Iraqis feel in serving on these councils and the dedication and courage they exhibit in the face of threats and deaths of many local council members are an inspiration to our staff. Overlooked in the massive international media coverage of the January national assembly election in Iraq was the fact that provincial councils were elected for all 18 provinces across the country. Those new provincial councils are now organized throughout the country, and I am proud to relate that on our USAID project RTI Iraqi staff members are training those new council members in the basic functions of councils in a democratic society.

We are helping to implement a code of conduct for council members, means of engaging citizens in discourse with the council, and legislative-executive interactions. These council training sessions are taking place in all the provinces, including those where some of the worst violence is still occurring.

Looking back at our two years of experience in Iraq, we see the value of working at the local governance level to create local political institutions to speak to and for citizens. The visibility of these councils as the first-ever government bodies selected by the citizens of Iraq re-emphasizes a valuable lesson learned. Having local elected bodies, as outlined earlier in El Salvador, the Philippines and Indonesia, is helping create a more pluralistic society. Also, the bodies are helping avoid a “winner take all” syndrome in which citizens perceive that only capturing control of the national government matters. More work has to be done, especially in those provinces where voter turnout was very low, to help these bodies be truly representative of the population in their province, but there have been critical steps.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the key lessons learned in our experience over the past twenty-five years in promoting stability and the development of democratic societies in a wide variety of transition settings, refined by our ongoing experience in Iraq, include:

1. Citizen participation is the key. An essential component of societal transition toward a democratic system from a tumultuous past, whether the result of the downfall of the Soviet system, economic collapse, dissolution of civil society, or military conflict, is the creation of or strengthening of existing institutions in which large segments of the population can participate. National government institutions are critical, but citizens' connections with national government are tenuous and in many cases opaque. Civil society organizations formed at the local level are easy to observe and facilitate widespread participation through running for office, advocacy with local government officials, or directly participating in leadership selection.
2. New civic organizations are needed. A possible obstacle to overcome in developing an active civil society is posed by pre-existing civic groups. In Iraq, the Ba'ath Party established unions representing every occupation, e.g., the Lawyers' Association, the Iraqi Nurses' Association, the Iraqi Engineering Union, the Iraqi Teachers' Union, Iraqi Women Federation, etc. These organizations functioned as extensions of the party, mainly to gather information about people in their communities, and were largely detested and feared by ordinary citizens. Helping Iraqis form civil society organizations at the local level, however, enabled them to build organizations composed of members they know, whose behavior can be monitored, and who can advocate directly for things of more visible and immediate benefit. Already in Iraq, national "unions" of local NGOs are forming to replace previous regime-appointed institutions.
3. Formation of associations. A similar application of this principle of "start local and expand nationally" is being played out now in Iraq with the formation of local government associations. In some countries, regional differences are not so pronounced as to impede the early formation of trusted national institutions. However, in Iraq, significant regional variation in tribal affiliation, religious affiliation, and ethnic groups makes Iraqis reluctant to join in and rely upon national organizations. We have found Iraqis much more interested in forming local government associations within their respective provinces, consisting of membership from council members at the sub-district, district, and province level and some mayors/governors and department heads. At least a dozen province-level local government associations have been formed to date. Within larger regions, these associations are now willing to discuss "associations of local government associations" combining forces across several provinces, and these associations are beginning to discuss how they can be advocates for local government issues with the national government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I offer Subcommittee Members the following recommendations as you consider the way ahead in encouraging reform, freedom, democracy and opportunity for Muslims and indeed for all people.

First, we need to recognize the critical role that local government structures and their elected officials play in creating legitimate governments and stable societies. In America we have a saying that all politics are local. That saying is true as well in developing nations and in nations in transition, so political reform must begin and be supported at the local level. While effective central institutions are essential to providing the framework for security and economic structures, U.S. Government-sponsored programs must balance efforts to support central, regional and local government institutions if we are to create lasting stability in these nations.

Second, we must recognize the significant investment in time and resources is required to sustain our efforts to promote institutional reforms in developing nations. Experience tells us that government reforms require a commitment to reform and decentralization by the host nation's central government and that government reforms must be integrated with other programs to improve public health, education, social welfare and economic development. Together such programs provide the foundation of a democratic society, and to be efficient and effective, U.S. Government-sponsored programs must be integrated and supported by the host nation.

Lastly, and most important, for democratic reforms to succeed, citizens need to see concrete examples of improvements in the delivery of government services—services that are most often provided by governments at the local level. As USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios said during a press briefing in March of 2004, the best way to begin democracy is at the grassroots level because the problems there are very practical. If you want the water system to work, it's not a matter of political ideology or religious theology—it is simply a matter of does the water system

work or doesn't it? Is the water clean? Does the pump get turned off all the time? People need to see the tangible benefits of government and they need a mechanism to hold government accountable for those services. Improving conditions for average citizens—providing health care, education, clean water and electricity—is essential to creating stable democratic societies.

CONCLUSION

Promotion of democracy and civil society is an institution-building effort. Success in sustaining new non-governmental and governmental institutions does not happen overnight. While we can all appreciate the limitations on our resources, it is in the national interest of the U.S. government to maintain long-term programs to help form and sustain these types of institutions in order to counteract forces that promote disintegration of societies.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, thank you all very much for your attendance today, your generosity of time to be with us. I would like to start by asking a question that you all three can respond to.

In each of your testimonies—Mr. Craner, you referred to democratic practices; Mr. Wollack, democratic values—you referred to democratic reforms and the process for building civil society. And I think this is very important because, as you know, words mean things.

In our jubilation in the West to help others, we talk very, very loosely about democracy. Now, that can be construed, I think, sometimes as a Western form, a Western style of government imposed on a people that may not have cultural or historical foundations for the types of systems that we take, basically, for granted. So I think that is very, very important as we go about our work, and again in Congress in our jubilation to help others, in what we are all intending in referring to democracy is obviously a systematic movement toward universal principles of freedom and liberty, a system that protects the inherent rights and dignity of the human person.

But I bring that up for two purposes: For you to comment on, but also to make the point that as we go about this important work, to be very, very careful as to the way we pursue this with our language is essential to not undermining our very efforts.

Mr. CRANER. I think that is a very good point. One of the things that all of our groups endeavor to do is not to turn up in a country to say: "We are the Americans, we are here, we know how to do this, just watch us."

I also think that it is a point that people should be concerned about. I think it is interesting, however, that over the last 25 years, you have had a tremendous wave of democracy. I think if you talked about democracy in practice 25 years ago, you would have essentially been talking about Japan and countries that were descended from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the United States. There were, all together, maybe three dozen countries in the world that could be described as democratic.

Today there are 120. And those countries are all the way from Mongolia—a very isolated, very poor country in Asia that had no contact with democracy until it became independent—to a country we were talking about during the break, Mali—a dirt-poor country in Africa, perhaps the most democratic country in the continent—to nearby countries like Mexico. What that illustrates is that there is a hunger around the world for people to have more control over

their lives and not to worry that they are going to get a knock on the door and that the police are going to drag them off.

Often in our jubilation, we say when a country has had elections, they are democratic. They are not. What happens between elections is equally important. I always say that you cannot have democracy without elections, but elections do not make a democracy. And in between, you need to build up civil society. You need to build up the journalistic sector. You need to build up the rule of law. You need to build up labor unions even to allow workers to be represented. There are all sorts of institutions in between elections that will ensure that the country is governed in a democratic manner.

But what we have found around the world is that people want this. We are not imposing it on them. People want more liberty and they want more control over their own lives.

Mr. WOLLACK. I would just say very briefly, Mr. Chair, that overseas, those that make this argument that somehow these are Western notions of democracy being exported, are usually the leaders who want to maintain their grip on power. When you look at people on the ground, if they are given a choice, they usually choose democratic systems. All the polls that I have seen worldwide show that there is hardly a clash of civilizations on sort of the fundamental tenets of democracy: Freedom of press, the right of assembly, functioning representative system with a parliament that oversees an executive branch, rule of law. These are all fundamental tenets that are shared by people all over the world.

And there used to be the proposition that those of Latin America, because of the hierarchy of the church or being susceptible to Caodaism, that they did not want democracy. It was said about Germanic cultures; it was said about Confucian societies that were based on consensus that political contestation was alien; and it was said about tribal systems in Africa.

But as Lorne has said, when you give people the choice, or when you ask people what their views are, these issues are fundamental issues that cross borders and cross regions; and we have found that the debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy was solved years ago for the democratic activists that are on the ground. They are choosing to open political space, to have something to say about the political issues that govern their lives, and we do not believe that putting food on the table and wanting to have a role in those political issues are somehow mutually exclusive.

Mr. JOHNSON. I think you are quite right to caution against the use of one particular word like democracy or any other general concepts. I think in our work—and I think that reflects all of the organizations represented here—we focus on those things. Instead of talking about the word “democracy,” we focus on the things that it means. We focus on those things in which people can control their own fate as noted. Where the opportunity to hold your leaders accountable, rather than your leaders being accountable to Baghdad or Djakarta or, indeed, to Washington, DC, those are the things that matter more to people. And if you focus on those things, many people opt for that, and they don’t worry too much about the label

attached to it. If you overuse the label, then you do seem to be shilling for a particular point of view and we all try to avoid that.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you. Mr. McCotter.

Mr. MCCOTTER. Thank you, gentlemen. This has been quite enlightening.

And a side note: One of these days I am going to dig up the parliamentary debates on home rule for another tribal people called the Irish and see how we took to democracy. I don't think it went too badly.

Dr. Johnson, I was particularly interested in what you had to say, because when I returned from Iraq in 2003, I gave a speech on the House Floor. Granted, that is one of the 28 months of my illustrious career here, but at the end of the day I believe that the town councils were the true anchors upon which Iraq democracy must be built; that bringing people into the town councils, letting them have more control of their lives in the decision-making process, bringing the fruits of this transformational change into the streets, into their homes, that you would then be able to design a system that was decentralized. You could then work up toward the provinces, you could then work up toward the national government of the Iraqi people.

And that that would be a nice way to go, in some way a Balkanized tribal setting. They would take to the town councils quickly. And that the less power you gave to the Federal Government in Iraq, the national government, the less threatening it would be to the different ethnicities on the ground. And as they operated and controlled their own futures, they would feel less of a threat and more secure in themselves and have a greater stake down the road.

I personally want to commend you all. But I am very glad to hear that, and anything that I, in my capacity, can do to further that effort—because I agree, it is a long-term proposition—I would be more than happy to help.

In the overall context, I do want to thank you, too, because I have been saying it for quite some time, and this is the American mentality of doing it overnight. The only thing I expected to happen overnight was to go bald. I was right. I am one for one and I am going to stop there.

But at the end of the day, with democracy, it is an experiment in democracy. That is what we learned from our own founding. It was an experiment in democracy. You go back to the Athenian city-state, the experiment can end. But if it is properly done by every generation, it carries out from election to election to election, with the work in between. But at any time, you can never wash your hands and walk away and say we are done here.

You need look no further than places like Russia to see if you are cheated out of a democracy and instead end up with a kleptocracy, you might wind up with the reincarnation of Peter the Great on your hands.

So I would just be curious to hear what we do in countries that have a democracy that are not necessarily in the Weimar Republic stage, but have had progress and continue, so that we do not—it is human to focus on the worst case that we are trying to fix, as opposed to those places there has been progress. What are we doing to make sure that the progress continues, while we still focus

on the prime problems of terrorist states that are trying to transform?

Mr. WOLLACK. I think that if there is a weakness in our democracy programs worldwide—the U.S. and other international donors—it is this notion of working in a place for a period of time and then walking away as if these problems have been solved. And countries are somehow graduated.

I remember President Kennedy once said: “Democracy is never a final achievement. It is a call to an untiring effort.”

The international linkages and the solidarity on these issues and the sharing of experience, I think, have to go well beyond not only initial elections but years after those elections. And we are seeing this happen in Latin America right now. This was a continent, this was a hemisphere that we thought had come to democracy, and now we are seeing backsliding in many countries primarily because political parties are failing to fulfill their representative function.

So I think all of us have to begin looking at this to see if there are the resources available to allow us to remain in countries for extended periods of time.

Mr. MCCOTTER. I appreciate that. I have to run. But imagine the nightmare scenario in a place like Latin America where they think democracy has failed and they are looking to see what else will fill that ideological void. They tried Communism in some places. Now they have tried democracy. Maybe it works. But if it does not work, what are they going to latch onto down there? And what kind of problem would that constitute for the United States of America and our national security?

Mr. WOLLACK. And often that vacuum is filled by nondemocratic sources in these societies.

Mr. CRANER. And you are already seeing that.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Boozman.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the things that was a priority for U.S. policy across the region, as I understood, was fostering independent media and things along that nature. Can you elaborate on some of the specific programs that we are doing to support journalists and independent media in Central Asia?

The other part—the second part or the second question was in traveling through those areas, traveling to different Muslim countries, to be honest, on several occasions they brought up that they were not very impressed at all with our efforts as far as the materials that we were beaming out in one way or another. And I think those comments were unsolicited. It did not matter who you were visiting with, whether it was—you know, I am not going to name names, but on several occasions, that has come up. That they really—and I don’t know if that has changed in the last several months or whatever. And I don’t think, you know “ridiculed” is too harsh a statement from these very high-level individuals that commented on our efforts to inform the public or whatever.

Mr. CRANER. I don’t think too many people would disagree with your assessment of that. I don’t think our efforts in public diplomacy are anywhere what they should be. And they clearly need to be a lot better, not only in the Middle East but throughout the Muslim world. There are a few people in this town who are probably able to do that, and I think the new team that is coming to

the State Department to do that, Karen Hughes and Dina Powell, are perhaps the best qualified in this town to do it.

On media efforts, we do not do that. NDI does not. I happened to have dealt with some of those groups while I was at the State Department, and currently I sit on the board of something called Internews which does a lot of that kind of work. And essentially what Internews and other groups are doing in the Middle East is to try to bring together journalists, some from the more repressive states and some from the more democratic states, to learn from each other.

One common element they are trying to get across is the need for objectivity in news reporting. A lot of journalists in a lot of these countries, as you find elsewhere, are given to sensationalistic reporting. The accounts that I have heard of this kind of training are pretty hopeful. In a lot of the training, for example, the reporters are encouraged to write a story; they are told of an event and asked to write a story as they normally would, and then they try to deconstruct the story with the reporter to pull some of the emotionalism out of it and the slant out of it. And a lot of the reporters that I have heard who have been trained say they are prouder of the latter-type of story, the more objective informative-type of story than they are with what they were writing before.

Again, this is something that I think is going to take time. They have to go back and get the stories past their editors now. I think working with the editors will probably be the next challenge. But I do think you are finding more and more informative and objective efforts across the region. It is going to take time.

Mr. JOHNSON. To the Chairman's point earlier about particular concepts and then the underneath constructs that make up terms like democracy, our work with the media typically has been in working with the media as a device to hold government, and especially local government, accountable. And what we have found with the media with, for example, the televised provincial council meetings and so forth, is that the attention that grabs the population is that the media is there to witness what is happening in government.

But to your other point, there was a democracy dialogue activity sponsored by the Coalition Provisional Authority in January through July of the first year, and we participated extensively in that with the CPA and the Department of State and others. We drew on materials about those underlying principles behind words like democracy from all over the Middle East and other regions of the world. Rather than translating American material on these concepts into Arabic, we started with the original Arabic or with other countries which may have been developed in English but not necessarily American. And that seemed to work very well.

So that I think sometimes it is in the selection of the materials in the public diplomacy that we want to look for examples that resonate with the region that we are working in.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you very much. I guess it is a challenge in the sense that some of these areas, you said impartiality is one of the things that we try to do, and yet, you know, I guess at times you are working with groups that just do not understand that. We assume that, because of the way that we are educated and things,

that that is a natural. But I guess in many situations you can't assume anything. You have to start with the basics.

Thank you very much.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, the hour is late, the shadows are growing long, so we do not want to keep you much longer. But thank you for your extraordinary work and your dedication to this most exciting new venture in many, many ways. We live in, obviously, very difficult and serious times, but very, very exciting times, particularly in terms of the development of institutions, democracies, that are going to be about the business of promoting self-determination, freedom, liberty, fundamentals of human rights. And so your work in this regard is extraordinarily impressive. It must be extraordinarily fulfilling for you.

So I thank you. I wish what you said today could be incorporated into a high school curriculum, because I think it would teach us a lot about what we basically take for granted in our own country.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your time. There will be other questions for the record submitted to you. We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:14 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

