

18. Grassroots Globalization: Underneath the Rhetoric of “Democracy Promotion”

Edmund Berger

It was a December morning in Cairo when the soldiers came. Armed for combat, they descended upon the offices of foreign NGOs, sequestering staffers inside their offices and shutting off communication to the outside. “We’re literally locked in. I really have no idea why they are holding us inside and confiscating our personal laptops,” tweeted one worker who was shocked to suddenly find herself a prisoner.¹

The security forces had been ordered to raid the NGOs - ten in all² - by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the highest governing body of the Egyptian military. Since the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak in the face of the ‘Arab Spring’ protests, it was also the highest governing body in the nation. Upon the transfer of power between the dictator and his military confidants, the SCAF had closed Parliament, suspended the Constitution, dangled the promise of elections in front of the people - and now the assault on the NGOs had, in the eyes of the West, revealed that even though Mubarak was gone, his autocratic style of governance still lurked in post-revolutionary Egypt. American politicians quickly moved to reach a diplomatic solution as a handful of NGOs staffers were put on trial. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned Egypt’s foreign minister that “failure to resolve the dispute may lead to the loss of American aid.”³ The warning sent a clear message about just how much had changed between the two countries: Egypt, like Israel, had long been the US’s key strategic ally in the Middle East and North Africa region. During Mubarak’s rule over the nation, a

time when raids and suspensions of civil liberties were common place, Egypt was receiving \$1.3 billion in US military aid.⁴

However, many of the NGOs in question are also recipients of US funding, and were even created through legislation passed in Washington. These included the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), two organizations that operate under the mantle of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Freedom House, another target of the raid, began as a private NGO in the 1940s, yet over time its budget has received ample government money through the NED. Outfits like the NDI, the IRI, and Freedom House work in tandem in places of social unrest. They view themselves as an institutional manifestation of civil society, and thus the attacks on them are an attack on the people as a whole. Yet the SCAF is certainly not the first to crack down on them. In the aftermath of Iran's 2009 Green Revolt, the regime in Tehran barred some sixty NGOs, including the NED, IRI, the NDI, Freedom House, the Open Society Institute, and Human Rights Watch, from operating in the country on grounds that they were fomenting 'seditious' activity.

This particular network of NGOs is no stranger to crackdowns. In 1997, the government of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus charged the Open Society Institute with tax fraud and seized the philanthropy's bank accounts, and in 2003 Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia threatened to shut down its Tbilisi offices.⁵ Figureheads from states worldwide outside the US's sphere of influence, from Venezuela to Russia, have attacked the NED in speech and in print, characterizing it as a tool of the Americans to intervene in the affairs of other countries. These are precisely the same accusations leveled at the NGOs by Egypt's SCAF.

Quasi-governmental NGOs like the NED and private NGOs such as the Open Society Institute profess that their work is not one of intervention, but an act of 'promoting democracy' in countries where governments enforce iron-fisted governance on its citizenry. But there are problems with this narrative. 'Democracy promotion' is implemented on an extremely selective basis, and a cursory glance inevitably leads one to conclude that ulterior motives lurk behind the veneer of democratic enlargement. (See also Fisher, Chapter 2.) For example, it is tough to see why the US was keen on promoting governmental change in Georgia when it supported authoritarian rule in nearby Azerbaijan, or why the NED worked so hard in Chile in the 1980s to undermine Augusto Pinochet when many of its principals openly supported the Contra rebels in Nicaragua.⁶ By the admission of the NDI program director in Georgia, his organization's work had less to do with electoral democracy than it did with geopolitical primacy: "There was an overarching

understanding that Russia having a lock on the movement of hydrocarbons to Europe is a problem,” he reported, speaking of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline route.⁷ And sometimes it had to do with economic incentive: George Soros, the founder and head of the Open Society Institute, made ‘democratization’ in post-Soviet Eastern Europe his *raison d’être* in the 1990s. When the process was complete, however, he turned around and profited handsomely from his philanthropy’s work. “... I have no rhyme or reason or right to deny my funds, or my shareholders, the possibility of investing there, or to deny those countries the chance to get hold of some of these funds,” he explained.⁸

Critics of ‘democracy promotion’ NGOs frequently characterize these intervention platforms as the driving forces behind social unrest. While it could certainly appear that way (and the countries whose governments are targeted for ‘democracy promotion’ usually tout this line when justifying raids on offices and other crackdowns), this viewpoint ignores the dynamics of this system. The social unrest is not the creation of the State Department; instead, ‘democracy promotion’ generally piggy-backs preexisting grassroots movements. This is born from a very real dependent relationship that movements have with NGOs: as Clifford Bob, a political science professor at Duequesne University has observed, “outside aid is literally a matter of life or death. NGOs can raise awareness about little-known conflicts, mobilize resources for beleaguered movements, and pressure repressive governments.”⁹

One of the more intriguing factors in ‘democracy promotion’ activities is the fact that Western backers, characteristically opposed to anything with even shades of socialism, frequently interact with left-wing movements. An excellent case in point was the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland, which successfully liberated the country from the Soviet sphere of control. While national independence was the primary goal of Solidarity, it envisioned sweeping reforms for the country more in line with early socialist philosophers than America’s neoliberal market economy. “We demand a self-governing democratic reform at every management level and a new socioeconomic system combining the plan, self-government, and the market.”¹⁰ Even though the plan called for democratically operated worker co-operatives instead of corporate behemoths, participatory government structures and a regulated economy, aid came from the NED and Soros for the fledgling movement.

In the end, however, Poland was nothing like what Solidarity had planned. Structural adjustment plans drafted by the IMF forced the privatization of the former state-owned enterprises, so that before they

could be transformed into the co-operative model they were picked up by foreign investors. Regulation was barred, and economics were formally separated from any form of political interference. A nationalist, left-leaning movement had been successfully utilized to break open a country into the purest form of neoliberalism possible. However, abandoning earlier goals or changing rhetoric isn't something uncommon for grassroots movements. Clifford Bob pointed out that the NGOs' "concerns, tactics, and organizational requirements create a loose but real structure to which needy local insurgents must conform to maximize their chances of gaining supporters."¹¹

The Dialectic of Liberation

Despite its utilization of liberation movements as a medium for promoting strategic interests and capitalist integration, 'democracy promotion' paradoxically has a progenitor in the practice of colonialism. Colonialism, although dressed in a cloak of nationalism, has always been an affair of international economics. Cecil Rhodes sold imperialism to Great Britain by proclaiming that "in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced by them in the factories and mines... If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."¹² Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of the internationalization of capitalism followed this argument closely: "All conquerors pursue the aim of dominating and exploiting the country, but none was interested in destroying their social organization."¹³

National liberation struggle built itself upon this pattern, and for a while it seemed as if Luxemburg's theories were being confirmed. From Algeria to Palestine to Vietnam, left-wing economic forms blended with the nationalist zeitgeist to produce revolutionary uprisings against the oppressors. Their post-revolutionary politics, however, paint a very different picture from these earlier ambitions. Just as Russia had to turn to the IMF and open up its market in order to keep itself afloat (the rapid economic 'shock therapy' implemented by the post-Soviet leadership under Yeltsin proved to be the catalyst for a major economic downturn),¹⁴ liberated nations frequently find themselves in economic chaos and in need of a helping hand - a hand that international interests are willing to lend. Or as in the case of post-Apartheid South Africa, the exploiting elite remain a cog in the machinery of the nation. (See also Berger,

Chapter 12.) Franz Fanon, a psychologist and veteran of the Algerian struggle, wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the post-revolutionary domestic elite's "vocation is to not transform the nation but prosaically to serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism, forced to camouflage itself behind the mask of neocolonialism. The national bourgeoisie, with no misgivings and great pride, revels in the role of the agent in its dealings with the Western bourgeoisie."¹⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have also written about this odd paradigm, describing the national liberation struggle as one of the key factors in the development of the globalized market economy:

... the equation nationalism equals political and economic modernization, which has been heralded by leaders of numerous anticolonial [sic] and anti-imperialist struggles from Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh to Nelson Mandela, really ends up being a perverse trick. This equation serves to mobilize popular forces and galvanize a social movement, but where does the movement lead and what interests does it serve? In most cases it involves a delegated struggle, in which the modernization project also establishes in power the new ruling group that is in charge of carrying it out... the revolutionaries get bogged down in 'realism', and modernization gets lost in the hierarchies of the world market... The nationalism of anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles effectively functions in reverse, and the liberated countries find themselves subordinated in the international economic order.¹⁶

The relationship between the grassroots liberation struggle and world capitalism is further revealed by taking into consideration the changing nature of the capitalist system. During the heyday of colonialism, capitalism was certainly international but existed in a state-centric form, but with the collapse of much of the old colonialist world - which had accelerated with the breakdown of the statist forms of capitalism advocated by the adherents of Keynesianism - markets were unhinged from the state. It effectively transitioned into what Felix Guattari and other early theorists dubbed "Integrated World Capitalism,"¹⁷ and what is commonly identified today as globalization. One of the by-products of this transnationalization of economics has been a shift in Fanon's 'domestic elites', who became what William Robinson calls the "transnational capitalist class (TCC)": the "the owners and managers of the TNCs [transnational corporations]" and the

“transnational managerial elite” of the integrated world capitalist system.¹⁸ In Robinson’s analysis, the TCC reject the Fordist-Keynesian class compromise, instead charging that they are characterized by “‘flexible’ regime of accumulation” built on neoliberal programs such as deregulation, informationalization (the rise of computerized data systems and other digital networks), and a new fluctuating nature of labor. They are inherently technocratic, relying on transnational regulatory agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to manage the stateless economic system. (See also Robinson, Chapter 4 and Carroll and Greeno, Chapter 9).

Individuals such as George Soros would fit into the TCC schema, as would many former activists involved in pro-democracy uprisings. We could use Vaclav Havel as an example here: he went from leading Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution against Soviet control (with NED support) to working with global capitalist institutions such as the New Atlantic Initiative, the Trilateral Commission, and the Orange Circle, an organization that assists transnational corporations invest in Ukraine. Global elite figures such as Soros and Havel operate within informal transnational networks; just as sociologist G. William Domhoff has argued that domestic elite networks constitute an inordinate degree of influence over electoral politics, scholars such as Anne-Marie Slaughter (who was a member of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s Advisory Committee on ‘democracy promotion’) have identified transnational networks as forming a sort of global governance.¹⁹

This ‘global governance’ is not to be viewed through the lenses of conspiratorial thinking; it is an inherent byproduct of the current epoch’s transnational tendencies and not a creation of concentrated design. The problem does arise, however, when one considers that the power and influence of these elite networks creates a governance system where the underclasses have less and less say in matters that affect their daily lives. Under the regime of neoliberalism, the market is well insulated from the powers of politics. As such, the so-called democracy practiced in ‘developed’ nations - and the kind being promoted to ‘developing’ nations - is more akin to a form of management than an expression of autonomy and empowerment. (See also Fisher, Chapter 2 and Barker, Chapter 11.) It is best described, following William I. Robinson, as a “low intensity democracy”. As William Avilés writes:

Low-intensity democracies are limited democracies in that they achieve important political changes, such as the formal reduction of the military’s former institutional power or

greater individual freedoms, but stop short in addressing the extreme social inequalities within... societies. ...they provide a more transparent and secure environment for the investments of transnational capital... these regimes function as legitimizing institutions for capitalist states, effectively co-opting the social opposition that arises from the destructive consequences of neoliberal austerity, or as Cyrus Vance and Henry Kissinger have argued, the promotion of 'pre-emptive' reform in order to co-opt popular movements that may press for more radical, or even revolutionary, change.²⁰

Already practiced in the leading countries around the world, this is precisely the form that 'democracy-promoting' agencies hand down to grassroots movements seeking help in their domestic fights.

The National Endowment for Democracy, From 1967 to Beyond

In April of 1967, a Democrat congressman from Florida by the name of Dante Fascell took a bill before Congress that would create an "Institute of International Affairs," an "initiative that would authorize overt funding for programs to promote democratic values."²¹ The catalyst for the proposal had been the recent revelations in *Ramparts* magazine that the CIA had been passing funding through non-profits, NGOs, and philanthropic foundations in a bid to influence events being conducted at the grassroots level. Ideas had been floating around Washington for some time about the creation of a sort of private CIA, one that could conduct these kinds of operations without the bad press that comes with covert action. Regardless, Fascell's bill was a failure. Undaunted, he tried again eleven years later. Partnering with Congressman Donald M. Fraser, a bill was drafted proposing a "quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization" to fund and aid NGOs around the world. This organization was to be called the Institute for Human Rights, and would function identically to the future National Endowment for Democracy by providing technical and financial assistance to organizations around the globe under the rubric of human rights. But once again the idea failed to catch on. It did catch the eye, however, of a political scientist by the name of George Agree.

Agree had been conducting a study of West Germany's *Stiftungen* complex, a set of government-subsidized foundations that worked with

developing political parties and movements around the globe. In the scheme, there were multiple *Stiftungen*, each aligned with a different power bloc in Germany's government - and each worked in comity to cultivate pluralist, Westernized forms of liberal democracy in the transitioning country. The project was of immense interest to Agree, himself affiliated with an American NGO by the name of Freedom House, which had been founded by a consortium of progressive internationalists brought together by Eleanor Roosevelt at the start of the 1940s. By the 1970s, Freedom House was already closely aligned with the Cold War effort, measuring the levels of freedom of countries outside the US's sphere of influence. In 1967 it worked closely with the United States Information Agency (USIA), a propaganda outfit that worked in conjunction with the US president's National Security Council. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman have charged that Freedom House "has long served as a virtual propaganda arm of the government and international right wing",²² while later researchers have dubbed the organization a "Who's Who of neoconservatives from government, business, academia, labor, and the press," thanks to the presence of high-profile figures such as Donald Rumsfeld (longtime corporate executive and Secretary of Defense for President George W. Bush), Samuel Huntington (right-wing political scientist and author of *The Clash of Civilizations*), Zbigniew Brzezinski (President Jimmy Carter's National Security adviser and adviser to transnational corporations), and Lane Kirkland (the hawkish president of the AFL-CIO labor union) on its board of trustees.²³

For Agree and his Freedom House milieu, the *Stiftungen* model provided an excellent platform for 'democracy promotion' in a manner different from the covert actions of the intelligence community, and in 1979 he was joined by Charles Manatt (the chairman of the Democratic National Committee) and William Brock (the chairman of the Republican National Committee) in establishing the American Political Foundation to study the logistics of creating such an organization. The Foundation received the bulk of its funding from the major liberal philanthropies and its leadership was packed with Cold War-era heavyweights from the foreign policy establishment, business, and labor: national security advisers such as Henry Kissinger and Brzezinski, representatives from the USIA, and Kirkland were just a few of the thinkers at work on the task at hand.²⁴

Two years later President Ronald Reagan gave a speech at the Palace of Westminster in London, emphasizing America's commitment to cultivating democracy abroad by concentrating efforts on building "the infrastructure of democracy - the system of a free press, unions, political

parties, universities - which allows a people to choose their own way, to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means.” After the speech the US Agency for International Development (USAID) provided \$300,000 to the American Political Foundation, which in turn put the money to use by creating the Democracy Program. This initiative brought together the informal network of ‘democracy promotion’ advocates - Fascell, Agree, Kirkland and others from the AFL-CIO, numerous congressmen, representatives from policy think-tanks, and political scientists from many of America’s elite universities. A study of the works of these democracy scholars will reveal a common mentality on the necessity of power structures for social management, making the framework of low-intensity democracy essential to any ‘altruistic’ foreign policy. An example worthy of quoting is William Douglas, whose 1972 book *Developing Democracy* provided the intellectual cornerstone of the American Political Foundation’s initiative:

That a firm hand is needed is undeniable. However, it is harder to accept the claim that only a dictatorship can provide the sufficient degree of firmness. First, in regard to keeping order, what is involved is basically effective policy work, and there is no reason why democratic regimes cannot have well-trained riot squads... democratic governments may be able to do the same things as dictatorships to overcome centripetal social forces: use police to stop riots, strike bargains with the various groups to keep them reasonably satisfied, and call out the army when peaceful means fail... There is no denying the need for organization structures by which the modernized elite can exercise tutelage. However... it is common experience that in obtaining the desired behavior from a balky mule, a balky child, or a balky peasant, the real key is to find just the right balance between carrot and stick... Democracy can provide a sufficient degree of regimentation, if it can build up the mass organizations needed to reach the bulk of the people on a daily basis. Dictatorship has no monopoly on the tutelage principle.²⁵

In 1983 the Democracy Program titled “The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach,” to the Reagan White House. Chock full of patriotic imagery, quoting Abraham Lincoln and the latest President’s Westminister address, the report outlined a model directly adapted from the German *Stiftungen* that they referred to as the National

Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED would act as a clearinghouse for government funds, transferring them to four subsidiary organizations that existed under its umbrella. These subsidiary organizations would consist of two agencies aligned with the major American political parties, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), one aligned with the Chamber of Commerce, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and a network of interrelated international labor organizations operating under the auspices of the AFL-CIO. These included the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), the Asian-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI), and the African-American Labor Center (AALC). Much later these four would be consolidated into a single organization, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, known more commonly as the Solidarity Center. Money from the NED would also be slated for Freedom House.

The ideal behind this structure is that it would provide a developing or transitional government with a series of checks and balances inside government, business and civil society - opposing political parties, a balance between capital and labor, and dialogue between capital and labor with the multiple parties in the government. However, such idealised Westernized 'democracy' frequently serves as a mask for interests of the powerful over the majority: rarely is there any true deviation between the left and right wings of the spectrum when it comes to the supremacy of the market or foreign policy. This false dichotomy is also found in the so-called conflict between capital and the AFL-CIO's moderate form of unionism, which William Domhoff has observed "involved a narrowing of worker demands to a manageable level. It contained the potential for satisfying most workers at the expense of the socialists among them, meaning that it removed the possibility of a challenge to the capitalist system itself..."²⁶ The AFL-CIO would take this mentality to the extremes during the Cold War (and certainly after), moving beyond its partnership with capital to becoming a tool of US foreign policy and defense. Early AFL-CIO leaders such as Jay Lovestone were on the payroll of the CIA, and the AIFLD worked extensively in Latin America in the 1960s, using funds provided by the US government and major corporations to undercut radicalized and militant labor union movements. Sometimes this involved the explicit use of violence: in one incident, AIFLD trainees firebombed the headquarters of the Brazilian Communist Party in Rio just prior to a US-backed coup that toppled the nation's left wing president, João Goulart.²⁷

This ‘democracy promotion’ structure became activated through legislation with the passing of House Resolution 2915. This was introduced in part by Dante Fascell who briefly served as chairman of the NED, but stepped aside to allow John Richardson to take the helm. Richardson, a longtime fixture in the State Department having held prominent roles in a slew of CIA-linked organizations, oversaw the election of Carl Gershman (himself a former socialist from the hawkish Social Democrats USA and a close associate of the AFL-CIO leadership) as president of the NED. Gershman continues to hold this position today. Under his presidency the NED has become a major fixture in the world of transnational activism: in 1990 it began to publish a quarterly called the *Journal of Democracy*, which has published works not only by political scientists and State Department apparatchiks, but also by international figures such as the Dalai Lama and Vaclav Havel. In 2000, it helped set up the Community of Democracies, a global forum for democratic nations devised by Madeleine Albright (the longtime chairwoman of the NDI). A year earlier the NED itself had launched a sort of transnational civil society precursor to the Community of Democracies, the World Movement for Democracy (WMD). Joining with other ‘democracy’ promoting agencies such as the UK-based Westminster Foundation for Democracy, (see also Fisher, Chapter 20) the WMD links together pro-democracy activists from around the world to foster solidarity and establish the networks critical to cultivating ties between domestic movements and international NGOs. The WMD’s steering committee’s membership roster veers from the unsurprising (international political figures such as Kim Campbell) to the unexpected (Xiao Qiang, a famed Chinese dissident and an advisor to Wikileaks).

‘Democracy Promotion’ in the Post-Soviet Age

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsequent transition into neoliberal capitalism (a change assisted by the NED, among other US agencies) was heralded as a global victory for westernized ‘democracies’. Conservative and liberal pundits alike lauded the accomplishment and the dawn of a new order; these attitudes were personified in the now-infamous *The End of History and the Last Man*, a Hegel-inspired tome by Francis Fukuyama that proclaimed that corporatist low-intensity democracy was the apex in cultural and political evolution. It should come as no surprise that Fukuyama has been an adviser to the NED, the *Journal of Democracy*, and Freedom House.

Still, there were scores of countries with dissident movements toiling under oppressive state regimes. For the western democratic project to be completed, these hold-outs would still need to be brought into or brought up to date in the transnational economic system, and as early anti-colonial struggles and 'democracy promotion' had proved, domestic grassroots movements provided the perfect vehicle for this integration. The post-Soviet globe saw the rise of non-state actors working for transition; the most notable being the hedge fund billionaire George Soros, whose Open Society Foundations have worked directly with the NED in promoting capitalist economics across central Europe and in Russia. Another major player has been the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a well-known but little discussed nonprofit that "has throughout its history been closely connected with the State Department, successive presidents, numerous private foreign affairs groups and the leaders of the main political parties."²⁸

'Democracy promotion' received a new urgency in foreign policy during the administration of President Bill Clinton, thanks to the efforts of Larry Diamond, one of the founders of the *Journal of Democracy*. Diamond had also been an affiliate for the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), a think-tank dedicated to promoting the "Third Way," a sort of American re-articulation of Europe's social market democracies; the organization had functioned as the 'brain trust' of the Democratic Party and can take credit for many of President Clinton's policy initiatives. While at the PPI, Diamond had drafted a report titled "An American Foreign Policy for Democracy", which pushed for a foreign policy outlook based on Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) - the idea that liberal democratic nations don't go to war with one another - as an alternative to the "Peace through Strength" mentality of the Reagan years.²⁹ Diamond was quick to identify the economic benefits inherent in DPT, writing that democracies provide equitable "climates for investment," and as such, America must seek "to reshape the world."³⁰ The report also served as the impetus for the creation of the earlier-mentioned Community of Democracies by recommending that the US establish an "association of democratic nations" that can provide transnational "action on behalf of democracy."

The Clinton administration's 'democracy promotion' agenda was furthered by the National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake. Lake, whose earlier credentials included having moved from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace into Carter's State Department alongside Zbigniew Brzezinski (not to mention a later tenure on the board of Freedom House), went about establishing a task force to properly articulate this new foreign policy program. Together with Jeremy

Rosner, a speechwriter at the NSC and Vice President for Domestic Affairs at the PPI, he drafted a four-point “blueprint” for enlarging “the world’s free community of market democracies”.³¹

... (1) “strengthen the community of market democracies”; (2) “foster and consolidate new democracies and market economies where possible;” (3) “counter the aggression and support the liberalization of states hostile to democracy”; and (4) “help democracy and market economies take root in regions of greatest humanitarian concerns”.³²

Even as Clinton told Congress that “We have put our economic competitiveness at the heart of our foreign policy”,³³ a sort of counter-intellectual current began to form in opposition to President Clinton amongst the neoconservatives in Washington. This coalesced in 1996 as the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a think-tank that argued for a militarized effort to bring democracy to regions under the control of authoritarian regimes - most specifically, Iraq and Iran. Much has been made about the close-knit relationship between PNAC, pro-Israeli lobbying organizations, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the defense industry, and rightfully so: everything that the neoconservatives were urging for strategically benefited Israel’s supremacy in the Middle East and involved financial booms for firms specializing in warfare. But what hasn’t been addressed is the close interlocking relationship between PNAC and the ‘democracy’ promoting agencies. The following chart illustrates this quite clearly:

Project for the New American Century Member

Elliot Abrams, *Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs under President Reagan*

Paula Dobriansky, *senior Vice President of the Council on Foreign Relations’ Washington offices*

‘Democracy Promotion’ Affiliation

Former member of the Social Democrats USA with Carl Gershman and many other NED and AFL-CIO principles; heavily involved in ‘democracy promotion’ activities in Augusto Pinochet’s Chile.

Board member of the NED, board member of Freedom House

Project for the New American Century Member

Steve Forbes, Jr., *heir to the Forbes family fortune*

Francis Fukuyama, *author of The End of History and the Last Man*

Donald Kagan, *professor at Yale University*

Peter W. Rodman, *longtime assistant to Henry Kissinger*

Randy Scheunemann, *political consultant and lobbyist*

Vin Weber, *former congressman*

George Weigel, *theologian and adviser to the USIA*

R. James Woolsey, Jr., *former director of the CIA*

Paul Wolfowitz, *former Undersecretary for Defense Policy*

'Democracy Promotion' Affiliation

Trustee of Freedom House

Adviser to the NED, Freedom House, and the *Journal of Democracy*

Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Trustee of Freedom House

Director at the International Republican Institute; more recently, his firm has lobbied on behalf of George Soros' Open Society Institute

Former chairman of the NED

Member of the American Political Foundation's Democracy Program

Former chairman of Freedom House

Former member of the Social Democrats USA, board member of the NED

The majority of the people listed above went on to assume positions in the administration of President George W. Bush. Paul Wolfowitz was appointed as president of the World Bank; Elliot Abrams became a member of the National Security Council; Paula Dobriansky was appointed as Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs; Peter Rodman went on to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International

Security; and Francis Fukuyama became a member of the President's Council on Bioethics. It should also be noted that Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had been members of the PNAC, and Senator John McCain - chairman of the IRI - had lent his name to letters issued by the organization, while Randy Scheunemann served as an adviser to Rumsfeld on matters pertaining to Iraq. Scheunemann also founded the pro-intervention lobbying outfit Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, whose members included John McCain, Stephen Solarz (a director of the NED), and R. James Woolsey, Jr.

The influence of these 'democracy promotion' advocates resonated sharply within the administration of President Bush, especially after the events of September 11th 2001 and the declaration of the 'War on Terror'. In the face of the new, essentially territory-less global enemy, Bush envisaged himself as the Ronald Reagan of the millennial era: at a 2003 address to the NED (where he was introduced by PNAC's Vin Weber), the president declared Reagan's Westminster speech as a "turning point... in history." As he applauded the NED's bipartisan commitment to the "great cause of liberty," he couldn't resist harkening back to the Clintonite directions in 'democracy promotion' by stating that "the advance of markets and free enterprise helped to create a middle class that was confident enough to demand their own rights... Successful societies privatize their economies, and secure the rights of property."³⁴ Bush also greatly enlarged the NED's funding, increasing it from \$40 million in 2003 to \$100 million in 2007.³⁵

Much of the NED's work in this time period would focus on Afghanistan and Iraq - the two primary targets of the 'War on Terror,' interventions that were being sold to the international community not only as strikes against terrorism, but as 'democracy promotion' and nation building. The disastrous economic consequences of this agenda were felt most strongly in Iraq under L. Paul Bremer, the administrator of the US's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Bremer, an American diplomat who had just finished a twelve year stint as the managing director of Kissinger Associates (the international consulting firm founded by former national security advisers Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft; the latter being a board member of the IRI), had replaced the recently-sacked Jay Garner. Garner's crime had been to reject the Bush administration's program of forced privatization of Iraqi state-owned assets prior to the election process,³⁶ but Bremer's commitment to neoliberal orthodoxy allowed him to carry out the task. "Getting inefficient state enterprises into private hands is essential for Iraq's economic recovery," he said, and *The Economist* agreed whole-heartedly

by reporting that the US's reform program was the "wish-list that foreign investors and donor agencies dream of for developing markets."³⁷ NED interests, unsurprisingly, entered into the CPA's fray - Larry Diamond joined in as a senior adviser, while Bremer brought in J. Scott Carpenter, a veteran of the IRI, to serve as director of the authority's governance group. Bremer, incidentally, would join the IRI's board in 2006.

However, not all involved in 'democracy promotion' activities were pleased with the Bush administration's efforts in the Middle East. Francis Fukuyama cut his ties with the neoconservative circles he had been so active in,³⁸ and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who by this point had served on the boards of the NED and Freedom House, attacked the ideology in an interview with *Le Figaro*, declaring that "the neoconservative formula doesn't work."³⁹ Yet Fukuyama is still insistent that the US follow a foreign policy based upon "realistic Wilsonianism," and Brzezinski has been no stranger to urging interventionist politics in the post-Iraq War world. Soros himself, while launching a crusade on Bush and the neoconservatives, worked closely with the NED in training and subsidizing the activists involved in Georgia's 'Rose Revolution' (2003) and Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' (2004); both of these revolts were squarely in line with US policy towards Russia and also served to spearhead foreign investment in the markets of the former Soviet Union.⁴⁰

Bush himself didn't feel that militarized hard power was the only mechanism for 'democracy promotion' in the Middle East; soft power via economic incentives (something far more in line with the ideas of Fukuyama, Brzezinski and Soros) drove Bush's proposal for a Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA), a "plan of graduated steps for Middle Eastern nations to increase trade and investment with the United States and with others in the world economy, with the eventual goal of a regional free trade agreement."⁴¹ To assist this, Colin Powell in 2002 announced the creation of the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative (MEPI) at the neoconservative Heritage Foundation. Critics in the Arab world reacted skeptically to MEPI, while experts at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces have written of it as a "Trojan horse for Western ideals and values."⁴² These suspicions seemed to be confirmed with the announcement that Elizabeth Cheney, the daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney, would head up MEPI. Cheney laid out the MEPI agenda in full at the 2003 World Economic Forum, where she was joined by Paul Bremer. Together, they would act as the vanguard of the new Middle Eastern neoliberal revolution.

In 2004, Cheney turned the reigns of MEPI over to J. Scott Carpenter, previously of the IRI and the CPA. MEPI subsequently began

to fund NED-related enterprises; the program has allotted money to all four of the key NED subsidiaries, as well as the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) to cultivate 'independent media' in Middle Eastern countries. Carpenter also continued to work outside MEPI on 'democracy promotion' and other interventionist platforms. In 2006 he participated in the creation of the Office of Iranian Affairs within the US State Department, a program overseen by Elizabeth Cheney with an agenda to "promote a democratic transition in the Islamic republic."⁴³ Another cog in the State Department machine, David Denehy, moved into the Office;⁴⁴ like Carpenter, he had made the transition from the IRI to the Coalition Provisional Authority under Bremer.

Carpenter would also play a role in the establishment of Fikra Forum, "an online community that aims to generate ideas to support Arab democrats in their struggle with authoritarians and extremists."⁴⁵ Fikra Forum contributors come from across the Arabic world and frequently have ties to NED programs in their home countries. For example, the Syrian activist Radwan Ziadeh, who founded and (at the time of writing) directs the NED-financed Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, and Abdulwahab Alkebsi, who served as the executive director of the NED-funded Center for Islam and Democracy before serving as the NED's Director of MENA programs. What Fikra fails to advertise openly on their website is that they are, in fact, a program of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), itself a program of the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the central organization of the Israeli lobby in the US.⁴⁶ The fact that AIPAC, where, incidentally, current NDI director Kenneth Pollack spent a long-time residency, exists in such close proximity to political change advocates, 'democracy' promoters, and Israeli interests suggests that the Fikra Forum is geared towards promoting Western economic and military hegemony throughout the MENA region. It's near impossible not to see President Bush's entire so-called 'Freedom Agenda' - of which both MEPI and massive NED budget increases are a part - as pursuing this goal. When the White House announced National Security Presidential Directive 58: Institutionalizing the Freedom Agenda (NSPD-58), it ignored the complicity of the US in the 'color revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine even as it held these up as examples of a model of what the citizens in the MENA region should follow. (For more on the 'color revolutions' see Berger, Chapter 12.) Bush saw the invasion of Iraq - an action of crony capitalism that had led to tens of thousands of casualties, a tattered economy at home and a nation sold off for pennies in the transnational economic auction that is mass privatization - as a

shining pillar of hope that would inspire a democratic revolution across the region.

Just as the backlash had formed against Clinton that propelled the neoconservative ascendancy in Washington, near-universal condemnation of the wars led to a presidential campaign that, for a large part, focused primarily on the contentious issue. On the conservative side was John McCain, the hawkish senator from Arizona and the head of the IRI, and on the other was Barack Obama, a former community organizer and centrist senator from Illinois. Obama rallied the support of a massive grassroots advocacy base; in addition to Obama's own Organizing for America, the most prominent of these was a coalition called Americans Against Escalation in Iraq (AAEI). While the AAEI maintained the veneer of an organic activist movement, it was in actuality a consortium of different Democratic Party-aligned organizations, in particular, the Open Society Institute-financed Center for American Progress. It is clear, however, that Obama's vision of American foreign policy was, in reality, hardly different from Bush's in its intentions and neoliberal ambitions. Obama "followed the violin model," said a former Clinton administration official. "You hold the power with the left hand you play the music with the right."⁴⁷ Joseph Biden, Obama's pick for vice president, had foreshadowed the administration's commitment to intervention by writing in the *Washington Post* that "Promoting democracy is tough sledding. We must go beyond rhetorical support and the passion of a single speech. It's one thing to topple a tyrant; it's another to put something better in his place."⁴⁸ This was further confirmed when Obama pledged to significantly increase the NED's funding.

The similarities between the left and right-wings of the American political spectrum when it comes to foreign policy, which concerns itself less with multinational balances of power than with the exporting of capital-led governance structures, establishes a firm basis on which critiques of the prevailing socio-economic conditions can be built upon. This, of course, is not a new tactic; it has been one of the longest-running methodologies of analysis that dissent utilizes. But for far too long the simple image of 'corporate colonialism' has been used to analyze the usage of militarized hard power; and the formations of soft-power and the 'democracy promotion' process itself have been pushed to the margins of discourse. 'Democracy promotion', especially in relation to liberatory struggles and seemingly grassroots movements, needs to be rearticulated as a fundamental strategy of current US and European foreign policy. Only then can we clear a way through the uncomfortable questions and complexities that 'democracy promotion' provokes. This is

not to say that we can only utilize critiques and analyses of ‘democracy promotion’ to examine the external actions of a country; it also allows us a chance to look inward at the dynamics driving our own internal political systems, and find a way to change the status quo in a time when democracy is only a game of the rich and powerful.

Notes

-
- 1 Peter Beaumont and Paul Harris, ‘US “deeply concerned” after Egyptian forces raid NGO offices in Cairo’, *The Guardian*, 29 December, 2011.
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/29/us-egyptian-forces-raid-cairo>>
 - 2 Rebecca Collard and Dan Murphy, ‘US “deeply concerned” after Egypt raids NGO offices’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 December, 2011.
<<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/1229/US-deeply-concerned-after-Egypt-raids-NGO-offices>>
 - 3 ‘Egypt to put foreign NGO workers on trial for “banned activity” claims’, *The Guardian*, 5 February, 2012.
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/05/egypt-foreign-ngo-workers-trial>>
 - 4 Marian Wang, ‘F.A.Q. on U.S. Aid to Egypt: Where Does the Money Go - And Who Decides How It’s Spent?’, *ProPublica*, 31 January, 2011.
<<http://www.propublica.org/blog/item/f.a.q.-on-u.s.-aid-to-egypt-where-does-the-money-go-who-decides-how-spent>>
 - 5 Mark MacKinnon, *The New Cold War: Revolutions, Rigged Elections, and Pipeline Politics in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007), pp. 65, 120.
 - 6 For those interested, this issue is tackled in William I. Robinson’s seminal work on democracy promotion, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
 - 7 MacKinnon, *The New Cold War*, p. 119.
 - 8 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), pp. 297-298.
 - 9 Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 4.
 - 10 Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, p. 218.
 - 11 Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*, p. 21
 - 12 Cecil Rhodes, quoted in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 231
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 226.
 - 14 Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* p. 275 - 304.

-
- 15 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005, reprinted), pp. 100-101.
- 16 Hardt, Negri, *Empire*, p. 133.
- 17 Felix Guattari, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutto, *The Three Ecologies* (New York: Athlone Press, 2000), p. 73.
- 18 William I. Robinson, 'Global Capitalism Theory and the Emergence of Transnational Elites', *Critical Sociology*, vol. 38, no.3, May 2012, pp.349-363. <<http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/robinson/Assets/pdf/emergencetnelite.pdf>>
- 19 Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005). For information on domestic elite power, see G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America? Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009, 6th edition).
- 20 William Avilés, *Global Capitalism, Democracy, and Civil-Military Relations in Columbia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 18-19.
- 21 David Lowe, 'Idea to Reality: The NED at 25'. <<http://www.ned.org/about/history>>
- 22 Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 27.
- 23 Diana Barahona, 'The Freedom House Files', *MRZine*, 1 March, 2007. <<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2007/barahona030107.html>>
- 24 Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, p. 90.
- 25 William Douglas, *Developing Democracy* (Washington: Heldref Publications, 1972), pp. 16-22; cited in Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, p. 84.
- 26 G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State: How Policy is Made in America* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), p. 73.
- 27 Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 444; citing Eugene H. Methvin 'Labor's New Weapon for Democracy' *Reader's Digest*, October 1966, pp. 21-28.
- 28 Inderjeet Parmar, 'Engineering consent: the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the mobilization of American public opinion 1939-1945', *Review of International Studies*, vol 26, Issue 1 (2000), pp. 35-48, p. 35.
- 29 Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p. 232.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Stephen Ambrose, Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 407.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 407-408.
- 33 Ibid., p. 408.
- 34 'Remarks by President George W. Bush at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy', National Endowment for Democracy, 6 November, 2003. <<http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary>>

-
- 35 Lowe, 'Idea to Reality: NED at 25'.
- 36 Paul Krugman, 'What Went Wrong?', *The New York Times*, 23 April, 2004. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/23/opinion/what-went-wrong.html>>
- 37 Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* p. 436
- 38 Francis Fukuyama, 'The Neoconservative Moment', *The National Interest*, Summer, 2004, pp. 57-68, p. 76. <<http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-neoconservative-moment-811>>
- 39 Marie-Laure Germon, 'Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Neo-Conservative Movement Doesn't Work', *Le Figaro*, 21 October, 2004. <http://bellacio.org/en/article.php3?id_article=3851>
- 40 Though this is certainly beyond the scope of this article, this issue is covered at length in MacKinnon, *The New Cold War*.
- 41 'Middle East Free Trade Agreement (MIFTA)', Office of the United States Trade Representative. <<http://www.ustr.gov/trade-agreements/other-initiatives/middle-east-free-trade-area-initiative-mefta>>
- 42 Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi, *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security Sector* (Münster, Lit Verlag, 2004), p. 271.
- 43 Elise Labott, 'U.S. to sharpen focus on Iran', *CNN*, 2 March, 2006. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/03/02/us.iran/index.html?section=cnn_latest>
- 44 Justin Raimondo, 'Scary Reunion', *Anti-War*, 26 May, 2006. <<http://antiwar.com/blog/2006/05/26/scary-reunion/>>
- 45 Fikra Forum, 'About Us'. <http://fikraforum.org/?page_id=2>
- 46 Maidhc Ó Cathail, 'Fikra: Israeli Forum for Arab Democrats', *Palestine Chronicle*, 21 February 2012. <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=19115>
- 47 Berger 'Strange Contours', reprinted in this volume, Chapter 12.
- 48 Hossein Derakhshan, 'Obama shares Bush's goals', *Al-Jazeera*, 17 September, 2008. <<http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2008/09/20089151314357484.html>>