CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
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Transcript

# DEMOCRACY POLICY UNDER OBAMA: REVITALIZATION OR RETREAT?

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JAMES TRAUB: Good afternoon. I'm Jim Traub, and I will be the moderator of today's event. And I'm enormously honored and delighted to be here. And I'm very happy to see a crowd this big, which just shows what an important subject today's topic is.

Let me just briefly tell you all who is going to be speaking and lay out a sense of how the day is going to go. This whole event is organized around a very important paper that Tom Carothers wrote on the Obama administration's democracy promotion policies. Tom is my mentor on democracy promotion. He's taught me that you can believe in it very much without very much expecting it to happen. And so – and so Tom will be speaking first. He will then be followed by David Kramer, who had a very important democracy promotion role in the State Department in the latter part of the George Bush administration up until 2009, and has recently become the executive director of Freedom House. And that will be – he will be followed, in turn, by Jeremy Weinstein, who also played a central role in formulating democracy promotion policies from inside the Obama White House, and who recently has returned to Stanford where he is teaching.

So Tom, why don't you begin?

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THOMAS CAROTHERS: Thank you, Jim. Twelve years ago, here at Carnegie – in fact, in this very room – we had a similar session to discuss a paper I had written called, "The Clinton Record on Democracy Promotion." (Laughter.) We had simpler graphics back then. (Laughter.) We had Harold Koh, who then the assistant secretary for democracy and human rights, and Elliot Abrams, who had been in that position as well before, to discuss. Four years ago, at the end of the Bush administration, had a session in this room to discuss – better graphics – to discuss this report, "U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush." At that time, we had Vin Webber, who'd been chair of the board of the National Endowment for Democracy, and had Frank Fukuyama to discuss that.

So it's really a pleasure for me to be here today to discuss this report on the Obama administration's policy to democracy promotion. I do these reports at the end of each administration because I think it's important to step back and try to take stock towards the end of an administration, of its policy on this area, particularly as we head to a campaign period in which there's the inevitable oversimplification and over-polarization of these issues. I do think it's useful to try to have a calm and, if you will, rational debate about these questions before we head into the heat of the campaign.

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Now, trying to assess any administration's democracy policy is surprisingly difficult and elusive for a couple of reasons I want to just start with – which are probably known to you, but I think are worth highlighting. To start, it's not really clear that there is such a thing as democracy policy of an administration. The United States tries, in many different places, in many different ways, to support democratic movements, democratic transitions, to push against authoritarians who are leaning backwards. But there is no central policy, if you will. Rather there is – we have a policy

towards Russia, which has some component of this in it. We have a policy toward Malawi that has some component of this, and on so through a hundred other countries. We can take out the different elements from around the world and call them a democracy policy, but in some ways, that's an analytic creation, rather than a reality.

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It's also difficult because there's a tendency to focus on just a few elements – what the president said in a speech, what the White House spokesperson said in response to a particular election – and to focus on a couple of countries – Iran, Russia. Yet, the bulk of U.S. democracy promotion takes place much more quietly, behind the scenes: pro- democracy diplomacy – that's the work of an ambassador; of a visiting assistant secretary of state; of democracy assistance program – who are pressing their counterparts in one way or another, efforts to facilitate change or to oppose change; democracy assistance programs that reach the interstices of political process in so many places. In my view, that's a lot more important than many of the more visible things. But it's – again, it's hard to piece together. It's often not very visible, attracts a lot less attention.

And there's a third reason that makes it hard, is that democracy policy, more than almost any area I see in U.S. foreign policy, is prone to mythmaking about the past. There's a constant tendency to take previous administrations and romanticize their commitment to democracy and to forget all of the things that cut against it. And this is a bipartisan tendency. It's been true with the Reagan administration, it's certainly been true with the Clinton administration, been true by some of the George Bush, Jr. administration, in the tendency to go back and read speeches and say, remember when the policy was like this, without looking at all those details. And therefore, presidents get held to a kind of an imaginary standard of you don't meet the standard of these previous people who look at the beautiful speeches they gave or the things they did here and there. So all of those things make it surprisingly difficult.

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But OK, it's hard and complicated. That's what you're paid to do, Tom. Get on with it. (Laughter.)

Looking at Obama's policy in this regard, I'd like to first just give a – really a thumbnail outline of how it's evolved over the last three years before I turn to what I think are its most important features. It has proceeded really in three phases, the first phase being fairly brief – the first six to nine months of the administration, in which the Obama team, the president and his new foreign policy team, sort of initially stepped back from the subject. And there was a stepping back and an attempted recalibration and – of tone and of messaging. The stepping back was more about rhetoric than about stepping back on substance. But initially, the president and his team did not talk much about the issue in public statements and declarations and in speeches. They stopped referring to Iraq and Afghanistan as democratic exemplars or as the leading edge of American democracy policy. And there was a clear effort to make the – let the topic cool off, after what was seen as the overheated Bush approach on rhetoric and, in general, the feeling that the subject had been tainted in some ways by the Bush administration, and so there was a stepping back.

When they did start to talk about it, like in the Cairo speech in the summer of 2009, they set out a very clear set of message(s) which they intended to set the united – their approach apart from

that of their predecessor. They said that the United States would not impose democracy militarily. They emphasized that this wouldn't be about U.S.-style democracy, but rather a more comparative approach to democracy promotion. And they also said democracy is not just about elections, and it's not just about freedom, but it's tied to the rule of law and to justice and development and other things. And so they tried to broaden the appeal in that way as well. And they also acknowledged poor U.S. practice with respect to human rights and the rule of law by the U.S. government itself, and said that we need to repair this in order for the United States to have a better standing in the world on these issues. And they took some measures about vowing to close the facility at Guantanamo Bay and to stop torture and other things.

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And then fourth, they also emphasized early on, engagement, diplomatic engagement with hostile governments that had gotten the cold shoulder from the Bush administration – Iran, most notably, but there were at least some signals towards others, a little bit towards Cuba and Venezuela. There was a reset of policy with Russia, an effort to rebuild the Russian relationship. And these efforts of engagement involved toning down public criticism of these governments with respect to their democratic practices. And it wasn't intended as a pulling away from the issue, but rather taking it in a different way in the hope that if you built some influence towards these governments, you might get a better hearing on these other issues.

This initial shift was appreciated by some in the world, I think. European partners, in particular, heard messages that they were comfortable with and familiar with in their own approach. And I think other people around the world appreciated the change of tone and waited to see what would come.

Here in Washington, the initial stepping back provoked a lot of concern in the democracy community. Some of this came from conservative commentators who interpreted it in, I would say, a fairly partisan way and sometimes, I think, overstated way. For example, in summer of 2009, Joshua Muravchik, who's a seasoned and distinguished commentator on democracy affairs, wrote an article called, "The Abandonment of Democracy." And that tone was typical of the reaction, I'd say, from the conservative commentator community, pointing out, you know, that they felt that the administration had – was falling badly short in a number of areas.

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But there was also a reaction within not so much a partisan reaction, but within the sort of professional democracy community here in Washington – the organizations that involve themselves on the subject, as well as commentators or analysts who care about the subject, who are also concerned and I think not in partisan ways, but really were worried about this stepping back. Many of these organizations are funded by the U.S. government, and it's hard for them to express themselves out loud, their policy concerns. But there were concerns expressed behind closed doors to Obama officials.

Second phase came fairly quickly. Starting in the second half of 2009, there was greater engagement by the administration that started. Ken Wollack, at the time the head of NDI, described it as the pendulum starting to swing back. There was – there were a number of speeches given by the president and the secretary of state in which democracy was featured or played a

significant part in the speech. They were starting to talk about it more in policy formulations in governmental meetings and not avoiding the topic, as had been done in the first six months. And then there was a gradual engagement in pro-democracy diplomacy, one-by-one, place-by-place, in many countries around the world. The Honduran constitutional crisis of May 2009 was the first that the administration had to face, that forced it to sort of start to define its approach. But in many countries, in Haiti, Kenya, and Belarus, Niger, and Kyrgyzstan, Cote d'Ivoire, place after place this tends to happen. Democracy issues came to the fore, and the administration had to react and, in most cases, began to engage. And the administration began to work on a number of multilateral initiatives that I'll take more about and to build democracy promotion in other ways.

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What led to this reengagement? I think it – in some ways, it was natural, in the sense that the team was coming into place. The first period of the first six months, there really wasn't the sort of democracy team within the administration in place due to the way Washington works. A number of those people at the State Department and USAID were not in their jobs until a year to a year and a half after President Obama was elected. So as the team came into place, they began to advance the policy.

And secondly, it's the natural tendency of administration that comes in and, you know, is making grand lines and grand strategy, but then things happen in the world and you have to react – the coup in Honduras or a crisis in Haiti and one type or another, and you're forced to react. So you're pulled into democracy policy no matter what your initial intentions are.

And there was also some reaction to the criticism. The Obama people, like most new administrations that come in, are touchy about criticism. And they were surprised by this wave of criticism, and I think listened to it to some extent. And they began to discover just how annoying and persistent this democracy policy can be – community can be towards the – any administration. And they felt that, you know, there are a number of people who cared. Didn't seem to be a large number of people to them, but they were certainly persistent, and the administration found itself listening.

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The second phase took us into last year. And then, suddenly, a third phase occurred, again, not really because of the administration's doing, but because of events in the world, and this was the emergence of the Arab Spring. Suddenly, a wave of political upheaval around a region that had been so politically stable, at least in certain ways, for decades forced the administration to confront this and to develop a policy in response. And the Arab Spring was – you know, it was an electrical shock through the system of the democracy community, which had gotten used to the idea of stagnation in that region and was fairly gloomy about the state of democracy in the world generally. And so the Arab Spring woke up both the community and the administration, and they have engaged, again in ways that I'll talk about later, much more than they anticipated. And so by the end of 2011, the pendulum had swung fairly far back. The administration was fairly engaged, and the initial stepping back of early 2009 had passed.

So those are the basic contours of the policy. Now, what I'd like to do is focus on when we look at the substance of it, what's been familiar and what's been different. In other words, there's a great deal of continuity in U.S. democracy policy. Although the Bush administration did have some very particular features, even the Bush administration's policy was part of a larger continuity since the mid-1980s in this area that is really – generally, the continuity is much greater than the differences from administration to administration. And I think it's important to highlight the ways in which – what's familiar in the Obama approach and then what's not so familiar.

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With respect to what's familiar, first of all, on process, it is very familiar that a new president comes in and does not plan to spend a lot of time on this issue, but then the world changes that view. George Bush, Sr., when he came into office in January 1989, was known as the realist, and he clearly was not very interested in this issue. But it was 1989, and a year later George Bush, Sr. had a policy that was all about supporting democracy in former communist countries and then elsewhere.

Bill Clinton came into office with many other preoccupations. Democracy was not really one of them, but found himself invading Haiti in 1994, before – well before, I think, he expected any such military action on behalf of democracy. And he got pulled into the Balkans and elsewhere.

George Bush – George W. Bush, when he came in office, also had been critical in the campaign of foreign policy as social work – in Mike Mandelbaum's phrase – and didn't intend to spend a lot of time on this issue either. But of course, the story changed there as well. And so getting pulled in is the pattern. That's what presidents think that they're going to take a different approach, but then they don't.

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When they get pulled in, then there's also a tendency of rediscovery and of relearning basic lessons. And we saw these same things happen. There's a tendency to rediscover basic elements of democracy promotion and to feel that you're the first administration ever to take this as seriously and to engage in these ways. The Clinton people had to go through the same learning and often paid little attention to what had gone on before. The Bush people did it with respect to the Clinton administration and so forth. This is a deep Washington pattern. They have to learn basic lessons like, gee, you can push a friendly government on human rights or democracy issues and not lose the entire friendship. And somehow, that takes testing and practice to do, and each administration has to relearn that pattern.

Other process elements have also been familiar. There was an effort to set up – there has been effort in the Obama administration to set up an interagency group on democracy. Every administration seems to want to set up an interagency group, and then the group somehow doesn't go all that far, it doesn't meet, and people say, is there really any single coherent policy or process around this? And therefore, what happens is it turns to the different agencies involved – the White House, State Department, USAID – and they fall into certain predictable patterns.

The White House always has a few strong and colorful personalities – usually the White House staff, who tend to pursue certain elements of democracy issues in accordance with their interests. The State Department is busy doing its own thing through its own mechanisms, and is

often not as connected to that as one might think. USAID is also busy with democracy assistance, and the State Department and USAID don't communicate as well. And USAID laments that it's not listened to as much in policy fora as it would like. Frustrations and personal grievances start to accumulate, and people who used to be friends before they became political appointees, once in these jobs, take on the mantle of these jobs and get along surprisingly poorly in many cases.

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So these are familiar patterns. They're not debilitating, but they're elements of democracy policy. And then, there's also this puzzle that emerges of separation between the president and his own bureaucracy. President Bush talked about being a dissident in his own administration, something that I'm sure confused people abroad who – (laughter) – who tried to understand the American presidential system. But you also hear people around President Obama say that his true views on democracy are somehow – he's frustrated with whether or not his views are being sort of embodied in the policy. And there's sort of a puzzle over whether or not the president's personal views are really the policy or not. I'll return to that a little bit later.

There's also – what else is also familiar is the tendency to emphasize speeches. Democracy policy, when you ask people in an administration what's the policy, they usually start by telling you about a speech, and they tell you about words in a speech, and they quote you the speech. And there's often speeches that are given with very little preparation for how is the beautiful words in this speech then going to be turned into policy. The Cairo speech in the summer of 2009, for example, was widely noted around the world. But there was really a very little follow-up to it. And within a year and certainly by two years, people were holding the speech up as an empty marker, rather than an important one.

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The substance of prodemocracy policy under Obama, I say, has largely been familiar, both in the kinds of mechanisms that have been used and the kind of places that the administration has emphasized, and trying to fit in some democracy element to our Russia policy, for example, and to our China policy, as a continuing story that's a very familiar one going back over 20 years and we haven't seen anything all of that – all that new under this administration.

Also familiar, unfortunately, is the fact that there's a frequent downplaying of democracy for the sake of other interests, usually economic or security interests. We've seen this under Obama with respect to China. We see it a lot in Central Asia. We see it in the Caucasus. We see it in the Persian Gulf. We see it in sub-Saharan Africa or in places like Rwanda or Ethiopia, Angola, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea. Democracy concerns are put aside for other interests. Again, this is a familiar tendency from administration to administration, stretching back across the last three decades.

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We've hoped, since the end of the Cold War, that these other interests are going to fade, and the United States is going to magically fuse ideals and interests – a term that every administration rediscovers this concept of fusing ideals and interest. But it doesn't happen. Counterterrorism has emerged in the last 10 years as a larger countervailing interest than existed before. Oil is playing more of a role, particularly in our Africa policy, than it used to, and usually a negative one.

So all that's familiar. What's been distinctive? What's been less familiar?

There are a number of things here I'd highlight. The first is the – to return to the president's view and stance on this issue. President Obama's position on democracy policy is a – in a sense, as a person, has been puzzling. On the one hand, this is a president who seems to intuitively understand the dangers of the United States pushing itself politically on other people who – the sensitivities involved of the United States getting out in front of a foreign opposition movement or events in a – in a – in another society. And he seems to have a very – like I say, a sensitivity to this that I think is unusual among American leaders. Yet – and this tends to make him clearly hesitant on a number of democracy issues.

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Yet at the same time, he's also attracted to the inspirational nature of democracy promotion, and he himself is an inspirational figure to many people in the world and has the natural ability to speak on democracy in a way that has greater credibility than many American leaders in the past.

But somehow these two different elements still float somewhat uncertainly in the mix. We're not really sure where it comes down. And there's, even within the government, I think, a number of people whom I talked to who still are not entirely sure where the president comes down on this issue. And in some ways I think that is unusual and that usually a president has defined himself by this point on the subject.

With respect to substance, one thing that's distinctive – somewhat distinctive, at least – has been an emphasis on what I call in the report "the long game" – (laughter) – which is a – an attempt to create a number of initiatives, which are generally multilateral or normative, that try to help put in place broader structures and – or sort of normative frameworks that support democracy in the world.

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Now this isn't the only administration to pay attention to this, but I think it reflects the administration's larger foreign policy outlook, which is: an emphasis on international norms and frequent reference to universality – administration officials are frequently talking about the universality of human rights norms; the value of multilateralism – this is an administration that takes multilateralism seriously; and a need for the United States, due to its changing power in the world – the relative loss of U.S. power vis-à-vis other countries – to find ways to be an effective partner rather than an imposer. And therefore this long game is a response to more multilateralism, normative, the need to be a partner.

So these are things like – and I'll just touch by them very briefly – the Open Government Initiative the United States has launched with Brazil and a number of other countries; trying to promote the role of rising democracies, non-Western democracies, in democracy support – like South Africa and Turkey and Brazil and India and Indonesia – efforts to rally action by those countries; civil society dialogues by the secretary of State in other societies; anti-corruption initiatives and seeing better governance as a good door for democracy promotion; the community of

democracies, which initially the administration was unsure how much time and energy to put into, but has taken seriously the rejuvenation of that.

So all of these things – they're not entirely new, and certainly the Clinton administration and the Bush administration gave them some attention – but I would say this is one notable feature or distinctive feature of the substance. It's not yet clear how much they add up, in a sense, or what they add up to, and whether they will be sustained even in a second Obama administration or in a – in a subsequent Republican administration if that's what comes about. But they're worth noting.

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Another distinctive feature is the effort to position democracy promotion in a larger development policy. This is the first administration to articulate something called a comprehensive development policy. It's not even a term that is familiar in the U.S. policy community. The administration put forward a comprehensive development policy, and spent a lot of time on the QDDR to look at the relationship of development and diplomacy, and has tried to talk about democracy in these terms and reposition in some ways.

This hasn't really gelled, I would say. I think it's an interesting initiative. It has led USAID, where there is a fairly serious effort at institutional reform – I think the most – I would say the most serious institutional reform of USAID since the mid-1990s – to talk about democracy promotion in some new ways; to talk about integrating it into development and undertaking some initiatives, and also trying to relaunch the democracy office there as a democracy center and build up attention to the issue and say that it can play a wider role within the institution.

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So there's been an effort to reposition democracy, but as I say, it hasn't really gelled yet as a concept, and it's provoked a certain amount of uncertainty or even suspicion by parts of the traditional democracy community that are worried this is really a way of watering it down.

Another distinctive area, of course, has been the engagement on democracy support in the Arab world. Of course, President Bush got the United States engaged in Iraq for other reasons, but that turned into, in some ways, a political reconstruction effort. And the Bush administration partially engaged in the Arab world on democracy issues. But by 2006, particularly with the Palestinian elections in 2006, the Bush administration pulled back on most efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world. It didn't go that far.

Now the United States is deeply engaged in Egypt – a difficult effort to support democracy there. It's engaged in Tunisia, seriously engaged in Libya, engaged in Yemen, probably soon to be engaged in Syria. And so the United States is now making, I would say, real efforts on the ground to support Arab democracy. It's been hesitant, and I think in many cases – particularly Egypt, the administration has had a very hard time moving beyond the traditional framework of stability above all, traditional relationships with the military that are hard to question – but there has been some change. And in Libya, on the other hand, the administration was not so hesitant, got deeply involved – partly for humanitarian reasons, but clearly a political change impetus as well.

But U.S. policy in the Arab world has ended up in a very, sort of, halfhearted, I would say, or divided place – like the region. The region is now divided between a number of republics that have experienced regime change or may soon. In another half of the region, the monarchies that – all of the regimes are intact, and there has not yet been a single monarchical regime that has fallen.

And U.S. policy tracks those two halves. In the republics, the United States is quite involved in democracy promotion efforts. In the monarchies, it's almost like you're traveling to another era, when you hear about the need for enduring friendships; and the old framework of friendly tyrants is really still the main intellectual framework of U.S. policy or operative framework in that area. And so in the Arab world I think we see a very divided policy, and one in which there has not emerged really a comprehensive rethinking of U.S. approach to Arab politics.

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And I'll finish up with just two more distinctive elements. Another is that – and this is really more about the broader political context of U.S. democracy promotion internally in the United States, rather than the policy itself – which is, this is an administration which has – having to put forward a democracy policy at a time in which the United States' political system is in serious trouble with respect to the amount of respect that it is commanding around the world.

I mean, and certainly we have faced this issue in the past to some extent. Do you remember in the late 1990s during the attempted impeachment of President Clinton, a lot of foreigners sort of made fun of how our political system could spend so much time on what seemed to be sort of distractions. But those were distractions at a time when the U.S. economy and the management of the U.S. economy was commanding respect and was powerful in the world. And so these were just silly distractions that puzzled people.

And then there was the 2000 elections, how badly they were handled by our electoral system, which also caused a lot of ironic comments by foreigners about, you know, our ability to have free and fair elections. And that was – that was real as well. And Bush human rights policies were disturbing to people, but they were mostly with respect to people abroad.

But now we're facing poor functioning of the American political system – whether or not basic governance by the American, sort of, political institutions – both of our economy and, I would say more widely, of our – of our society – as not radiating out a very positive sort of image to the world. Instead, what they're seeing is a country which, A) created the greatest international economic crisis of the last 70 years; has followed it up with a seeming inability to manage its basic financial policies, fiscal policies, the wider economic policies and a number of social policies as well.

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And trying to project a revitalized American democracy policy in such a context – it's hard. It's hard to calculate the actual damage that you face when you're trying to do that. But there's no doubt – if you're trying to do this in a world where that's the image you're sending out of your own politics, and there are rising powers in the world that seem to be making other systems – whether it's other types of democracy or authoritarian systems – seem to be doing a lot better on many of these basic management issues – then it's – then it's trouble indeed.

And another distinctive feature, the final one that I'll mention, also about the broader context, is that – I would say that there's a deeper change here, which is: American democracy policy is no longer part of a larger transformative narrative of how the United States positions and acts in the world. In the 1980s, democracy policy under Ronald Reagan was part of America's struggle in the Cold War and part of a global narrative of American power and accomplishment. In the 1990s, democracy policy was part of globalization and making globalization a positive force. And people used to, at the time, talk about: Is there any difference between Americanization and globalization?

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Those times have long since passed. But that was the narrative at the time, that democracy policy was part of an expansive, lone superpower feeling about the American role in the world. In the last decade, democracy promotion was again part of a transformative narrative, which was the war on terrorism – transformative in different ways. All three of those were the – were versions of how the Americas – America saw itself in the world as – you know, as the lone transformative agent, in a – in a way – if you are creating an international order, that the United States would play a central role or dominant role in.

Now democracy promotion is part of a U.S. foreign policy that I think by necessity is much more eclectic and does not have a single narrative framework in the same way. The United States is trying to do many different things in foreign policy. It's trying to maintain its security against a whole range of different threats, whether it's North Korea's potential instability, Iran's nuclear program, the continued threat of terrorism coming from radical Islamist sources. It's trying to get along with China in a very different sort of relationship than the relationship between the United States and Soviet Union, a complex mix of rivalry and partnership. It's trying to deal with this global financial crisis which is sort of ending but sort of not.

So the United States is positioning itself in the world, trying to deal with many different, sort of, types of threats and challenges to the United States. And there isn't a single narrative of transformation here, that the United States is the driver of global transformation. And therefore, democracy policy doesn't have a natural place in any such policy anymore. Instead, democracy policy is one more thing that we're doing that does fit with a larger vision of the world, but often doesn't fit with specific policies that we might have – whether it's Afghanistan or Pakistan or China or Russia or elsewhere. You don't see democracy promotion very much at the core.

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To some people, this seems like a shortcoming. And there are some people who would like to rekindle an idea of an American foreign policy that would be all about the projection of American strength and transformation and central place in a – in a global agenda. But I think that's not really what's happening in the world, if you will. We're – we are living in the age of the rise of Asia, the closing of the gap between some poor countries and many rich countries, and with the many different parts of that – whether it's Europe's crisis or Brazil's dynamism in certain ways.

And all of this can sound like bad news for democracy promotion, relegating it to a relatively minor role. But I don't think that's what it has to mean. I think democracy policy has always been more about the many different small things that you can do around the world, rather than just a few

big things. And it's also been more about being a helping hand rather than a controlling or a dominant agent – and that it is possible for democracy still to advance in the world rather than to retreat, and for us to have a lot to do with that, without that being in a sense the central preoccupation or transformative narrative of America's place in the world. And so I think attempting a – if you will, a more normal version of democracy promotion as part of a more normalized view of the U.S. role in the world is where we've ended up.

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So in conclusion or in balance, I would say that there's a lot that's familiar in Obama's policy. And some of the familiar things are good; some of the familiar things are regrettable. There are some things that are distinctive, some of which I think are also good, and some of which are just – that's the way the world is these days. But there has been revitalization. The tone has changed. Democracy promotion is no longer something that, if you go abroad and speak about, you initially fear that the audience is going to have an immediate sort of hostility or skepticism about.

United States is engaging in pro-democracy diplomacy in many ways, and continuing democracy assistance and other elements of the policy. The administration has started some fairly interesting and potentially important new initiatives. Yes, I think it could have been more assertive in many places. I think opportunities were missed. I'm not sure we're there, for example, in Egypt, where I'm not sure the administration has been handling it all that well in the last six months. I don't think we've really changed the fact that there's a powerful default mode towards autocratic friends in a number of places. It's still a struggle to make the argument again and again – whether it's in Kazakhstan or Uganda or many other places that we really could do a bit better on this. And I think the Arab world, we've really only partially risen to the challenge of this historic moment there.

But the revitalization that has occurred is taking place in a different world, where U.S. democracy is not functioning very well and where U.S. power is changing and in some ways slipping. And so therefore I think the basic question – and when we look ahead to – potentially, I guess, the next report in – not quite sure how many years, depends how the election comes out I guess – the real question now is, it's a kind of readjustment. Is democracy promotion going to be part of an intelligent way that the United States adjusts to its new global position? And, just as any – if you look at the record over the last 200 years of countries that reduced their relative power, they can adapt effectively to that reality or less effectively.

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And I think democracy promotion – if done smarter and better, and seen as still an important part of the policy, and finding a(n) artful place within that – can be part of a smarter, better way to adapt to this reality. Or democracy promotion can be inflated and blown up and distorted in ways, and part of a resistance to adapting to the world as it is. So that choice will be what the next administration faces, whether a continuation of the Obama team or a new group of people. Thanks for your attention; I look forward to your comments and questions. (Applause.)

MR. TRAUB: Thank you very much, Tom.

David?

DAVID KRAMER: Tom, I'm reminded – when I used to be a colleague of yours here at the – in the '90s at Carnegie – that I never envied anybody who followed you after you spoke. And so I don't envy myself here in doing this. But let me – let me commend you for a terrific report – as usual from you, a very thoughtful and thought-provoking report that I think should be required reading for any university students out there, but also for those of us outside of government and all people in government who work on these issues.

Let me make two broad points, and then I'll try to elaborate on them in my further comments. In the report, I think you let the president off too lightly. I think the role of the commander in chief, the role of the president, matters enormously. And here I think President Obama has come up short. I think the title, "Revitalization or Retreat?" – I would phrase it – I would give it more of a characterization of uneven recovery, unsteady recovery, rather than revitalization or retreat.

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And the other broad point I would make is, I do think there is a transformative narrative out there, and I think started about a year ago. And I think it is the Arab Spring, or the Arab revolutions – whatever one wants to call them. I do think that there is a narrative out there that the administration is not on top of. And frankly, I'm not sure any administration would be able to be on top of it. It – the events in the Middle East have moved so rapidly that it is a challenge for any government – Republican, Democrat – it's a bit overwhelming. So I have sympathy for the administration, but I also have criticism at the same time, because I don't think they have been ahead of the curve during this whole process.

Now let me be clear. I was a political appointee in the Bush administration, but I also head a human rights and democracy organization that is bipartisan in nature. But having said that, I can criticize the Bush policies probably better than most people, having worked on the inside. So I don't look at the previous administration from a kind of mythical point of view or from a romantic point of view. But I do also recognize that President Bush believed deeply in his heart about democracy and freedom and human rights. And perhaps he didn't come to power with those thoughts front and center, but he certainly did as he – as he served out his two terms. And of course his second inaugural speech was devoted to these very issues. And I do think that matters.

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Now, the implementation of the vision that the president sent out, I would argue, left a lot to be desired. And I think if you look at the number – the issues and policies that you cited in your report – Iraq, of course, probably being the most prominent one, interrogation techniques, or torture, as people often call it, Guantanamo renditions. I would also cite Russia, where I was quite involved in Russia policy in the previous administration. I don't think we did a good job on issues of democracy and human rights in Russia at all.

I think the accusation that some people in the government currently, and people outside of the government, have made – that the Bush administration took a finger-wagging, patronizing, lecturing approach to Russia – is absolutely not true. I wish it were true. (Laughter.) I wish we had taken that approach to the Russians. But we gave them a pass; and we gave them a pass during a

time when Russia suffered through its greatest deterioration in the area of human rights and freedom under Putin. And I deeply regret that.

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I think we also gave the Chinese a pass. We missed an opportunity during the Beijing Olympics, when President Bush early on decided to go to Beijing for those Olympics. We did not effectively use his decision to go to Beijing for those Olympics, which mattered greatly to the Chinese, and use that and say, we want some things in return. And I say that as somebody who believes very fervently in the issue of linkage, which I also would argue this administration has repudiated.

The previous administration, I think, and President Bush deserve great credit for changing the way we think about the Middle East. And this came about in the – in some speeches – notwithstanding your valid point that speeches aren't the be-all and end-all – but certainly in speeches that the president made at the NED in 2003; his inaugural address; the decision by Condi Rice not to go to Egypt while Ayman Nour was serving in prison. And her decision to cancel her visit got him out of jail, and then he was able to run in the presidential election. And then he was put back in jail. And then Condi went to Egypt.

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So we gave up on the policy that we found in 2005 actually worked. And the Hamas elections, as you mentioned, I think, was perhaps the greatest blow to efforts to promote democracy in the Bush administration. After the results of those elections the Bush administration, I would argue, became gun shy when it came to promoting democracy out of fear that elections in these kinds of societies could produce very undesirable outcomes. And I think that was a regrettable development as well.

Nevertheless, with all those problems, and many activists and human rights defenders and civil society leaders that I met with, they still look to the United States as the leader in this area. They still valued a meeting in the Oval Office. They still valued that meeting in Staten Island in 2008, on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly meeting. Those were very important to these activists. It energized them; it gave them necessary support knowing that they had the United States in their corner, even if frankly, beyond rhetoric, there wasn't much we could do. But just standing shoulder-to-shoulder with these people, I think, was very important to them.

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The president, as you mentioned, had often described himself as a dissonant. I think that bureaucracy, in many respects, didn't go along with his policy and his vision. And I think there is a tendency within the bureaucracy to simply go along and manage relations, and not necessarily to promote values and promote interests. I'll probably regret having said that if I ever go back into the government.

Turning to the current administration, I think – I would sort of sum up the initial approach with three letters – ABB, anything but Bush. And the ABB was most closely identified when it came to foreign policy on democracy promotion – Iraq and Afghanistan – obviously, but there was a

connection, I would argue, that was made. But it was also – and you cite this in your paper – the three Ds, wherein Secretary Clinton showed up in the first day at the State Department and talked about development, diplomacy and defense. And in my old bureau, DRL, everybody was going, well, there's one more. There's a fourth D.

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The comments the secretary made on her way to China – which you also cite in your paper – the engagement strategy with authoritarian regimes, it gave the impression that it didn't quite matter how these regimes treated their own people, the point was to engage them to try to change their behavior, vis-à-vis the United States. The decision on the Dali Lama, the reaction on the Green Movement in Iran, where – I think this was perhaps the most painful thing as I was watching from the outside – people in Tehran holding up signs saying: Obama, which side are you on? It seems to me we should never want activists, in Iran or anywhere else around the world, wondering which side the United States stands on.

And then lastly and more recently, the Arab Spring, where I think the administration has not sufficiently appreciated the importance of the "big mo" – momentum – where, going from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya, Syria, who knows where else, that was critically important. And while I give the administration credit for intervening in Libya and doing the right thing there, it was done, I would argue – at least from the outside – more out of humanitarian reasons than out of a sense that this was important to keep a movement going that was in favor of freedom and democracy.

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It was extremely important that Gadhafi not prevail and cut off this movement that was taking place – a unique movement in a region where, in the years that Freedom House has documented this, there had been virtually no progress toward freedom in our Freedom in the World surveys. The speeches – and, again, I – with the caution that you offer in your remarks today and in your report – the speeches that were given that I think were important – and I do attach a lot of importance to speeches as well as statements and who says them – I think that's critically important – nevertheless took on, I think, almost retrospectively a check-the-box kind of feel to them.

One speech you didn't cite in your list was the president's speech in Russia in July 2009, which I thought was an extremely well-done speech. It laid out the concerns on human rights and democracy in Russia very effectively. I would argue the president never really came back to this after that. The Cairo speech, I would say, same thing. China, with the press conference with President Hu, there was such an expectation and anticipation that the president had to say something, finally, because the administration had been reticent to do so up to that point.

And then the Middle East speech that I attended, in fact, at the State Department in May of last year, the first two-thirds, I thought, were a great speech, laid out a very good vision. Then I would argue the president tripped over his own speech with the last part about the Middle East peace process, because that's all anybody focused on. It really does require leadership at the top. And I do think that President Bush, again, for all the problems and mishandling of implementation, did at least set out a vision.

I haven't really felt or seen that from the current president. And I'm not going to question whether the president believes it in his heart, I don't know him, I've never met the man. But the impression I get is that there is a greater focus on engagement with authoritarian regimes than there is standing with those who are trying to bring about change in those kinds of regimes.

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And the kind of engagement that the administration has followed – Jackson Diehl talked about this in his piece the other day – in Burma it's been successful but in the other places, I would argue, it really has not. I do sense, as well, that there is almost more emphasis on process over actual policy and action. And the two areas I would cite here are a laudable initiative announced last summer on anti-mass atrocities while Syria was taking place, the creation of the new J Office in the State Department that Maria Otero is in charge of while the crackdown in Egypt got considerably worse. So there's relabeling, there's process that's under way, and I don't want to say that that's unimportant, but it almost seems to make up for the lack of action and policy in dealing with some of these challenges.

The bureaucracies do take their cue from the top. Now, it takes a while. And again, as I said in the previous administration, they didn't do a very good job of it. And it matters who is in senior positions to make sure that a vision that a president lays out is followed through on.

Let me cite an example. In December 2010 there were three statements that I would argue highlight the problem that I'm talking about. The Belarus crackdown after the December 19th elections, the White House issued a very good statement in the name of the press spokesman. In Russia there were arrests with the 31st protesters who appeared – again, another good statement from the White House in the name of the press spokesman.

But when Ukraine transferred highly-enriched uranium to Russia, the White House issued a statement from Hawaii in the name of the president congratulating President Yanukovych for this. That meant, to many people, that the transfer of highly enriched uranium – important issue – was much more important than regimes cracking heads of protesters who were fighting for democracy and human rights in places like Belarus and Russia.

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In Egypt – you mentioned this, Tom – and I just came back from Egypt; I was there last week – in light of the raid that took place on my office in Cairo as well as a number of other offices, I do sense that we are way behind the curve here. I do think what happens in Egypt is absolutely critical. And I worry that the SCAF and the ministries involved have not miscalculated by raiding our offices – because you only miscalculate if you undertake an action and then pay an unexpected price. They haven't paid any price for what they've done. And they seem to know – or think, at least – that they won't pay any price.

We have to change that calculus among leaders in Egypt and elsewhere, that if they engage in gross human rights abuses – and I'm not just talking about a raid on my office. I don't want to sound self-serving, because there as many Egyptian offices raided as there were foreign offices. There are 400 Egyptian organizations under investigation in Egypt today. This is much more about

Egyptian civil society than it is about whether Freedom House's office gets raided or other foreign organizations does.

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Why do they think they can get away with this kind of behavior? Why do they think they can get away with this – these policies and these attacks on civil society against their own people? We really need to think about why that happens. And so I do think there is a transformative narrative that exists out there. And I think it is in the Arab world, where we've seen movements that we had never seen before. And I do worry that the administration has not been as on top of it as it should be. I understand the interest in having it seem local, that it's native, it's not the United States imposing its way. And I say that as somebody coming from the previous administration. I get that. But I do think leadership matters. I don't want people standing in those squares or those streets with more signs asking: Which side are we on?

So what do I want to see? I want to – let me use a metaphor of a three-legged stool. I understand -- having worked in the government for eight years, not just on democracy and human rights issues, I understand that there are security interests that we have with countries. I understand that there are economic and energy interests that we have in – with other countries. I'm not suggesting that we eliminate those interests and only focus on democracy and human rights.

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What I'm arguing is don't shortchange that leg of the stool that deals with democracy and human rights, because if you do, you will wind up with an unstable stool that might tip over. It's critically important that all three legs get the same attention. We should avoid the talk about trade-offs. I understand they exist. I understand we're guilty of double standards. I'm realistic about this stuff. But what I am arguing for is more attention than we've seen in the past three years toward democracy and human rights and freedom.

My worries, as I mentioned, are about Egypt first and foremost; Syria, of course, where the terrible bloodshed continues, though I certainly join those who are hoping that Assad is on his last days. I worry about Russia, though I'm a little more optimistic after December 4th than I was. And I appreciate the great efforts that many people in the administration have done on this, including Tom Melia, who's been there many times working on this issue. We have a terrific ambassador going out there in Mike McFaul, who's probably the best on these issues. But Russia is a concern. I do worry that Putin feels his days are not over. I worry about China.

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I worry about the authoritarian pushback against efforts to promote and spread democracy around the world. We wrote a report several years ago, before I joined Freedom House, "The Authoritarian Challenge." And I think to the Chinese reaction on the Nobel Peace Prize decision, where the president issued a statement as having been awarded the prize the year before, congratulating Liu Xiaobo, but nobody stood with Norway while the Chinese cancelled high-level meetings with the Norwegians. Nobody stood with Norway while the Chinese were trying to discourage diplomats from – I'm out of time. I'm almost done anyway. (Laughter.) I can wrap up, yes.

No one stood with Norway while high-level meetings were cancelled or diplomats were being pressured not to attend the Nobel ceremony. If we can't stand among ourselves as democracies while these authoritarian regimes are pushing back, then we're going to be in trouble.

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So I want to, again, commend you, Tom, for this report – terrific report, very thought provoking, and appreciate your invitation for me to join you. Thanks. (Applause.)

MR. TRAUB: Thanks, David.
Jeremy?

MR. CAROTHERS: That was sudden.

JEREMY WEINSTEIN: It's great to be back in Washington, out of hibernation in California. This is my first trip back five months after leaving the administration. And so thanks to Tom for the invitation to comment on this terrific paper.

In my brief comments today I'd like to do four things. First, I want to put the administration's approach to democracy promotion into context. And Tom did a bit of that, but I think following David's comments it's important to reiterate some of the points that Tom began with. Second, I want to identify five features of this period in American democracy promotion that I think are going to stand out in historical retrospect as distinctive. And third, I want to talk about what the limits of the U.S. response to the Arab Spring reveal about some of the enduring challenges that we face promoting democracy as the U.S. government. And finally, I want to end on an optimistic note.

So let me start with putting this administration's approach into context. Tom stole my line and held up his balance sheets from the Clinton administration and the Bush administration, because one of the things I did when I went back to Stanford – suffering all of the sort of doubts and uncertainty created by my two years in the administration, did we do everything we could – was to take a look back at prior administrations and what strategies they pursued, the pluses and minuses of their approaches.

And I immediately went to the dean of democracy studies works, Tom Carothers, and read these two balance sheet documents. And so now we have three to take a look at. And one of the terms that Tom defines in his work is the split personality of American presidential administrations on democracy promotion, which isn't something specific to the Obama administration. It's something that's been a consistent part of our democracy policy over time.

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And if I had to summarize the four takeaways of these three balance sheets that Tom has written, it's that U.S. democracy promotion policy, aside from the rhetorical shifts that David just pointed to, boils down to four things: rhetoric, generally unmatched by reality; a positive, important role in a set of critical transitions, usually driven by events; consistent support for democracy assistance, which has grown over time; and continued close relationships with a set of autocratic

allies. The exact configuration of those autocratic allies changes over time on the basis of our strategic interests.

But that represents the sum total of American democracy promotion policy regardless of what the president says, over time from administration to administration, since the early 1990s. And this is about where Tom comes out on the Obama administration as well. You can check each of those boxes. These apply equally to the Obama administration as they did in Tom's reports about the Bush administration and the Clinton administration.

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And I think that's key as a starting point for thinking about democracy promotion policy, and I'm going to come back to this in the end because some of our challenges of responding inside the administration to the Arab Spring are reflective of some enduring challenges of breaking out of that very simple menu that defines democracy promotion policy for U.S. administrations.

So let me turn to the second issue. What are – what are the features of American democracy promotion policy during the Obama administration that I think are likely to be seen as distinctive in retrospect.

First, I think the president used, in the early stages of the administration, a set of speeches to rehabilitate the concept of democracy and support for democracy, support for human rights around the world, to reclaim the language, to refresh the language and to clear up some of the very negative associations that had come to define U.S. democracy promotion policy as a result of actions taken by prior – by the prior administration.

And as Tom relays in this report, this was affecting not only the level of support for promoting democracy and human rights abroad domestically, but it was also having dramatic implications for how U.S. efforts to promote democracy and human rights abroad were received, not only by our natural allies in Europe but also in other parts of the world, most notably in the Middle East.

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And so you saw a whole set of changes in the president's language on democracy and human rights policy, a change in rhetoric focused on issues of dignity and injustice, a focus on bottom-up change driven from within countries rather than from the outside, this foreswearing of military intervention as a tool for promoting democracy, and this real focus on investing in the American model and rebuilding our own commitments to democracy and human rights at home.

This is fundamentally important. We sort of take for granted that we're in a better position now, able to engage our partners, able to act effectively around the world. But this required a lot of hard work, and it required some rhetorical shifts and some of the recalibration that Tom described. And so I think we'll look back at this period as enabling this recalibration and this rehabilitation of language.

Second, despite what Tom claims in the paper, I think the administration has begun in this multipolar period – this period of changing power dynamics in the world – to begin to construct a

strategic narrative and to figure out where democracy fits in this narrative. It's not as simple as the narratives that have existed in the past, with a single enemy or a single challenge on which to focus, but it does have a coherence that I think has begun to guide the administration's approach and that will be visible in retrospect.

This is a narrative that was laid out in the president's first speech at the U.N. General Assembly and then in the National Security Strategy. And it really focuses on the idea that we confront a set of common challenges around the world – collective challenges, challenges that require collective action. And these were the challenges that were very much on the president's plate when the administration began – the global economy, the financial crisis, climate change, terrorism and so on.

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And there's a focus in this administration on modernizing the mechanisms for international cooperation, the international system, to reflect these changing power dynamics – the shift from the G-8 to the G-20, the change in the voting shares at the IMF and the World Bank – recognizing that the dynamics of collective action on the international stage are changing, but that facilitating an international system – modernization of the international system that can handle these collective challenges has to got to be at the core of our foreign policy going forward.

And where does democracy fit into this strategic construct? Democracies are absolutely central critical allies in this effort. You keep hearing the countries' names thrown around this table: Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa. These are the new heavyweights. They're the new heavyweights in the global economy, but they're also new key players in these efforts to secure collective action not only on issues of democracy and human rights, but more broadly. And they're democracies, and that's important and that's not a fact that's gone unnoticed by folks inside the administration.

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Third and most importantly as a distinctive feature, this will be a period that is remembered for significant progress on democracy and human rights where it was absolutely least expected: in the Arab world. And with respect to this dramatic wave of change in the region, the U.S. didn't resist it, and I think, by and large, the U.S. did not screw it up. This was change that was driven from within these countries.

And I think as we'll discuss in more detail, I'm sure, in the question and answer, while there's been a mixed record with respect to specific countries, there has been a strategic shift – a shift that began with the rhetorical changes in the Bush administration, but that has really begun to be put into effect by this administration as change swept the region.

And thinking about this just with respect to specific examples in the region, the administration moved very quickly to embrace the events in Tunisia, to put it and highlight it in the State of the Union speech – something that was well-noticed by Tunisians – support to the elections, and as Tom rightly points out, an acceptance of the results of the elections and an engagement with the Islamist party that comes to power, in distinct contrast to how we've handled such results in the past.

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With respect to Egypt, at least in the early stages, something that's not so commented on in the report is the active and high-level behind-the-scenes engagement drawing on our historical ties to the Egyptian military that I think paved the way in the early stages for a transition for much lower levels of violence. But as I'll come to in conclusion, the challenge of remaining in line with the aspirations of the protesters, the aspirations for reform, has become more and more challenging over time. But in the very early stages, the president – as David rightly points out, leadership needs to come to the top – was centrally involved in setting the strategic direction, and I think ultimately played an important role in shaping the nature of that transition.

Libya, I think, can't be understated. If you think back to the moment at which the intervention in Libya was being contemplated, Bahrain was still very much a live case of protest. Things were just beginning in Syria. Change was uncertain throughout the region. And so the decision to intervene in Libya, even in spite of two ongoing wars overseas, I think was made not only on the case of the humanitarian grounds, but also a recognition that the consequences of allowing the protesters and the rebels in Libya to be suppressed by Gadhafi would have huge spillover consequences not only for the transition in Egypt, but also the Arab Spring. And the list goes on and on, but I think careful and deliberate engagement that has supported, maybe not as much as some would have hoped, but has very much aligned with the transformation that's under way in the region – two other points that are distinctive which I think get less attention in Tom's report.

Fourth, I think this administration continued a bet that has been made by administrations in the past on the value of multilateralism. And I think we've seen in this period, over the last three years, clear evidence that investments in multilateral democracy and human rights mechanisms are really paying off. Regional and multilateral architectures that are designed to promote human rights norms, and to support collective action around these issues, have really come into effect, whether it's the coup in Honduras and the concerted action of the OAS, whether it's the actions of ECOWAS in response to a stolen election in the Ivory Coast, whether it's the absolute transformation in the behavior of the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council around Libya and the actions in response to Belarus. These are multilateral normative framework and a set of multilateral and regional mechanisms that are demonstrating and creating the space for regional and international coherence in responding to transgressions against human rights and democratic norms that are absolutely unbelievable. Couldn't have been contemplated, I think, 20 years ago, the power that these norms and these mechanisms have actually had in the context of the changes that we're seeing.

And I think the investment of this administration in the U.N. Human Rights Council, the decision to engage, is absolutely doubling down on that investment in multilateralism. And the HRC's role with the expulsion of Libya, pressure on Bahrain and Yemen, Syria prevented from assuming a leadership role – these were all huge signals not only to these countries but also to the world of collective support for the promotion of human rights and democracy norms.

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And I think the final point that's distinctive about this period is that the administration has made a sincere and deliberate effort in strengthening and modernizing the enterprise of democracy promotion for the 21st century. Tom mentioned some of these examples in the papers: the role for

emerging democracies, thinking about how to harness the profound democratic experiences of democratic transformation in South Africa and Brazil, India and Indonesia, to bring them on as partners in this global effort, the focus on accountability, transparency and anti-corruption – things that have great meaning in the context of the Arab Spring, but also more broadly and have been at the core of this administration's efforts in the G-20, the Open Government Partnership, the attempt to knit together democracy and development in much more serious ways.

And one thing that Tom didn't point out, but the very strong and assertive emphasis on connection technologies and Internet freedom is really the 21st-century frontier for thinking about civil liberties and human rights. So those are six distinctive features that I think in retrospect we'll look back as defining features of this period of democracy promotion.

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And what I want to conclude on is what the limits of our response to the Arab Spring reveal about the challenges we face promoting democracy. I think Tom is right to point out a number of ways in which the administration fell short: inconsistency in the approach across countries, not an enormous commitment of resources, very few institutional or other policy changes, at least that have been announced since the May 19th speech. And this isn't all that surprising, given the history of U.S. democracy promotion policy in environments such as the Middle East. And thinking back to some of the debates within the administration, there are a whole number of things about views with respect to the Middle East and North Africa and its relationship to democracy that changed, but many more things that didn't change yet as a result of the Arab Spring. So some things have changed.

Undoubtedly, there's a recognition that Arab publics care about democracy. And it was a common refrain inside the administration, and even more broadly in Washington, to make the case that people in the region didn't care that much about democracy. They cared about jobs, they cared about basic human needs, but they weren't so interested in political freedom. I think that's been sort of knocked out the door. There was also a belief inside the administration and outside that authoritarian regimes were stable. And I think that has also been done away with.

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But let's talk about what hasn't changed: a fear of what democracy will produce – right? – a fear of the alternative; a sense that the cost of pushing for political change are likely to lead us to sacrifice other interests that we care about; and a belief that U.S. pressure and U.S. actions can't actually make a difference in these outcomes. Those three beliefs are still, I think, very widely held not only inside government but also outside government. And I think these are three impediments to U.S. support for democracy around the world, especially in regions like the Middle East and North Africa, where we have a set of competing interests, as Tom describes.

And this is the enduring challenge for U.S. policy in this period, and it relates as much to the Middle East and North Africa as it does to our autocratic allies in the Caucasus, as it does to other authoritarian regimes around the globe. And I think as we've seen in the response to the Arab Spring, after the enthusiasm of the moment of protest, after a sense that change was just around the corner, a recognition that in fact, change is not just around the corner, that battles remain to be fought, and the real risk that the U.S. falls back into its old patterns – right? – unsure of the alternative, preferring to engage with the folks that we know, unsure about the value of pushing –

continuing to push on human rights and democracy issues given the other interests that we have at stake; and some doubt about whether, even if we bear some costs, it's likely to have much of an impact.

And so one of the things that I've been thinking about in going back to Stanford and sort of grappling with the mixed record of the administration in response to the Arab Spring is, is what do we actually do about that reality? And I don't think it's sufficient to say that the answer to that is more presidential leadership, because I think we know from looking at Tom's work that presidential rhetoric aside, the implementation challenges remain the same administration to administration. And so we have to be doing different things beyond amping up presidential rhetoric.

And so let me give you, just as a – as a way of concluding, a couple things that I think we need to be thinking about. Given these challenges that we have, in some sense, honoring both our commitment to democracy and human right – rights, but also balancing the other interests that we have at stake, we need to be thinking about ways to tie our hands, to tie our hands so that the regular interplay of the policy dialogue doesn't make it impossible for us to look out for these medium- and longer-term interests that ultimately put everything at risk.

I think the National Endowment for Democracy was very much a model of saying that regardless of the comings and goings of administrations, regardless of the challenges that we face in any given country, we want an institution that is able and capable of providing direct assistance to democracy activists and dissidents around the world. That's a mechanism for tying our hands, right? It is hard for governments to push back on the National Endowment for Democracy. It's an autonomous group. They can complain to the State Department about it, but the National Endowment for Democracy makes its own decisions.

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I think with respect to the Arab Spring, there was a sense, perhaps, that something like the transformation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development could provide some of this stickiness to the commitment of incentivizing political reform in the region, regardless of some of the back-and-forth of the diplomatic interplay with political elites in these countries over time. The EBRD has a democracy mandate as part of it. And the notion of extending the EBRD's writ into the Mediterranean, into the Middle East and North Africa is a way of creating something that is beyond the control of our ambassadors, it's beyond the control of our high level policy dialogue that in some sense ties our hands to elevate our commitment to democracy and human rights, in spite of the challenges that we know that can be faced.

Another useful instrument for tying the administration's hands and honoring these commitments is Congress and the role of Congress. And I think we are having now in Washington a very serious debate, very much for the first time, about conditioning military assistance to Egypt. What should – these are the consequences that David refers to – what should be the consequences of the Egyptian government's crackdown on NDI, IRI, Freedom House, and most notably, the Egyptian civil society organizations that operate there? Congress can always and effectively help an administration by setting in place some of these mechanisms. And of course, multilateralism is another mechanism for tying our hands.

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Two other points that I would just make on this issue of how do we elevate democracy and human rights beyond rhetoric. The second is we need to do much more to get comfortable with the alternatives to the set of regimes that we've engaged. Deputy Secretary of State Burns was with the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood yesterday in Cairo. This is something that we need to be doing much more systematically and long before the transitions happen. It's got to be a huge priority. As long as we fear the alternative, as long as we don't have a sense of what the alternative looks like, we're going to face these challenges going forward.

And the third challenge is internal to the bureaucracies – figuring out how to institutionalize these shifts – shifts like the president laid out in his speech on May 19th. Policy changes, rhetorical changes don't change the power imbalances, don't change the policy processes that exist. And unless we take those internal mechanisms seriously, it's hard to imagine that we're going to end up with a different balance sheet to take advantage of the transformational moment that David describes than the balance sheet that we've had for the past three terms.

[01:14:01]

But just to end on an optimistic note, when we came into office – the Obama administration – people need to remember where things started. It was a democratic recession around the world, rising authoritarian challengers, U.S. standing in the world was quite low. A year later, three years later, it's the year of the protester. Right? The list of leaders that are no longer in power includes Ben Ali, Mubarak, Saleh, Gadhafi, bin Laden you can add to that list, and perhaps Assad will be following close behind. The list of war criminals behind bars, unparalleled regional coherence in responding to transgressions of democratic norms, and a set of newly assertive democracies – Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, India, and Brazil – that have all played instrumental roles in advancing this agenda – some pulled along, but some playing much more of a leadership role. That's a very optimistic story, given where we were three years ago. (Applause.)

[01:15:02]

MR. TRAUB: So do we ask – I'd like to ask one very quick question of our panelists. Then, I'm going to throw it open to all of you.

So you've all talked about Egypt. Egypt is clearly the big kahuna of democracy promotion. We're at this very dramatic moment where the SCAF, the interim military government, has cracked down. The U.S. has leverage in the form of $1.3 billion of annual military aid. Should the United States make good its commitment to democracy promotion by telling the SCAF that it will begin to withhold all or part of that aid if it doesn't change its policies? That's a question for any of you.

MR. CAROTHERS: Well, I think as David said, the – first of all, this is the first time a foreign government has ever kicked out NDI, IRI, and Freedom House from a country. So this is big.

MR. KRAMER (?): Shut us down.

[01:15:49]

MR. CAROTHERS: It's never happened before – shut us down in this way, yeah – but asked to leave politely in Ethiopia and maybe a couple of other places – but to send military people in to seal the offices, et cetera – or armed people. So this is important not just for Egypt, but other governments around the world are watching this closely to see what the U.S. response is.

So I think the United States does need to say: We set down a marker last summer or thereabouts in conversations with you about things that we view as beyond the pale. This is – this is that. And therefore, we are now going to consider measures that we haven't up until now. I don't think it means we cut off aid tomorrow, but I think we need to say that this is now on the table, and then remind the Egyptian military that Congress is an unruly animal that can't always be controlled, and that the administration, you know, may find its own hands tied, and signal in a way that the military will understand that that means maybe the administration won't be working against that in ways that it has in the past.

MR. TRAUB: Either one of you want to address that?

MR. KRAMER: If I could, just very quickly – just as we should not accept the false choice that I think the SCAF is trying to present, which is it's either us, the SCAF, as the source of stability and security or it's the extremists, as the SCAF neuters and neutralizes the middle ground, I also hope we can avoid a situation where it's either business as usual, we – all the assistance continues to funnel to the – to the military or it's a total cutoff. There should be some middle ground there to get the SCAF's attention. But it seems to me the only way to get their attention is through talking about the assistance.

[01:17:20]

MR. WEINSTEIN: And the only two things I'd add are, one, that the line in the sand that needs to be drawn is not just about the operation of American organizations, but the space for civil society in Egypt more generally. The SCAF has told a story to the Egyptian public and to the international community that it's committed to shepherding a transition to democracy. And this set of actions demonstrably signal or raise doubts about that commitment, and that's something we need to make clear.

And I think the second point that I'd make is to honor the changes in policy, announced on May 19th, that are sort of designed to seize this moment, we have to change the way we do business, and this is one of the models of the old way of doing business. I think a cutoff likely doesn't solve the problem. But as David said, there've got to be some form of consequences. There's got to be a sense that the U.S. isn't going to fall into the same traps that we fell in in the past. And we need to signal that not only to the government of Egypt, but also to the people of Egypt and the people of the region.

[01:18:23]

MR. KRAMER: (Inaudible) – to say I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the efforts of Ambassador Anne Patterson on the ground. Bill Burns, on his visit yesterday and today, was also very helpful. But what isn't helpful are when other senior officials travel to Cairo and don't even bother to meet with civil society during this kind of crisis, or when a spokesman – not at the State Department, Toria Nuland's comments, I think, have been terrific – but at the Pentagon, who have

talked about improvements dealing with NGOs when they are nonexistent. We've got to be much more careful about the things we say and either the intended or inadvertent messages that are sent that: Don't worry about this. The relationship is going to be protected. Let's just get this behind us. This is a serious issue, as Jeremy was saying. This is about an attack on civil society writ large, not just three foreign NGOs.

[01:19:18]

MR. TRAUB: So let me please open the floor for questions. Just two provisos – one, tell us who you are; two, make it a question – i.e. a sentence that ends in a question mark. Thanks.

Sir. Wait for the microphone.

Q: Thank you. I'm Jim Michel. I'm a consultant in development cooperation, with a long history in democracy and governance and rule-of-law promotion. I wanted to raise the question of programmatic support for democracy and related aspects of good governance and rule of law. It seems to me that when Tom and I were – (chuckles) – doing this many years ago in the early 1980s, we had the rhetoric of support, which made it OK for us to pursue programmatic ways in which to support democratic transitions. And we had to do this in a way that would support the creation of demand, and so the culture of desire for democratic institutions and norms. And we developed programs to do this, and we took leadership internationally so that the multilaterals and the other bilateral partners in development cooperation developed these programs.

[01:20:39]

I have a concern that we are now at a time where scarcity of resources – not just for U.S. development programs, but for others as well; new partners who are participating in cooperation, who are less enthusiastic about democracy promotion; and a concern for immediate results; and an inclination, sometimes, to allow local ownership to be interpreted as deference rather than engagement on what a partnership agenda should be for development. And I wonder if we are losing some of the programmatic support that is one element of the tools of democracy promotion around the world –

MR. TRAUB: Thank you.

Q: – not just for the part of the United States, but the pro-democracy international community.

[01:21:36]

MR. TRAUB: OK. Let me take a few more questions so that our panelists can answer several at the same time.

Well, way in the back. The gentleman in the white shirt there. Yes.

Q: Thanks. My name is Brian Stout. I'm with USAID, but this question is in my personal capacity. I was struck by Mr. Carothers' comments or characterization of the USG response with respect to the Middle East republics and the monarchies. And I was curious, for the entire panel

and maybe Jeremy in particular, what a response for the monarchies might look like that would be more in line with the direction you see it going. Thanks.

[01:22:10]

MR. TRAUB: Maybe one more. Yes, ma'am. One moment.

Q: Thanks. I'm Anna Newby with the Project on Middle East Democracy. My question is also about Egypt. I'd like to ask about the USAID decision last year to reverse previous policy and allow USAID grants to go directly to unregistered organizations in Egypt. A lot of folks in the democracy promotion community really praised that decision, but sort of co-terminously with that or shortly thereafter, we saw a pretty serious crackdown on NGOs in Egypt. And I think that the SCAF and the interim Cabinet were predisposed to be hostile to the NGO community. But I guess my question is whether you think there's a case to be made that that decision exacerbated problems in Egypt.

MR. TRAUB: All right. Thank you very much. Any of you? Tom?

[01:23:06]

MR. CAROTHERS: Yeah. I can start. I'd like to thank Jim Michel for his question. Some people who wrote a doctorate spend the rest of their life worried about imaginary conversations with their thesis adviser on whether they're doing the right thing. Jim was my first boss in Washington, and so he always – (laughter) – asked me the first question – and are we getting it right?

Jim, I think it is the case that we're getting used to an era of stable or declining resources, and we're losing some of our energy and ideas about institution building and new ways of doing things. And it's striking, even though, I mean, USAID is, I think, serious about the institutional reforms and some of the upgrading of democracy activities are real there, but it's within a very, in a sense, limited framework.

And it's striking with respect to the Arab world. For example, in the last year, there hasn't been a single significant institutional response. How come there isn't a Middle East foundation, like the Asia Foundation, set up to promote reform in a serious way? Could cost $15 million. People have stopped – I mean, there have been some ideas floating within the bureaucracy in the last six months and maybe some things will come forward, but it's already been more than a year. And we look back to 1990, '91, '92 and the creation of the legislative initiatives and institutions that came out of that. We certainly see a faint echo by comparison. So I think there has been a limiting of ambitions in some ways.

[01:24:34]

Republics versus monarchies in the Arab world, and what might we do with respect to monarchies. Well, I didn't mention – I do, in the report – that we had an opportunity, I think, in Bahrain to push harder and better last spring, and we didn't. We basically folded our cards when the Bahraini regime cracked down a very widespread protest movement. And Saudi and other GCC troops came into the country, and we didn't say very much about it – and again, not many

consequences for that. And we've been eager to restart arms sales to Bahrain, and we've recently announced a historically large arms sale to Saudi Arabia. And so business is – as usual is going on.

[01:25:13]

Of course we have more influence in Jordan and in Morocco, particularly Jordan, because, you know, it's not an oil-rich monarchy, and there's a greater level of U.S. assistance relative to the budget. And I haven't seen in Jordan – for example, over the last year, particularly when King Abdullah visited Washington last summer – when you read the transcripts of what President Obama said about him afterwards, and the lack of emphasis on pushing, in a way, for him to embrace the political reform agenda in some serious ways – it is striking, I would say. And there's an absence of a framework of a new relationship with places where we do have some influence. So more can be done.

With respect to Egypt NGO assistance, I understand the spirit of your question, but I think we're – the danger of that thinking is falling into a little bit – the kind of particular psychosis of U.S.-Egyptian relations – which is a little bit like certain other particular bilateral relationships, like we have with Pakistan and a few others – is that Egypt is a world where, you know, this is a government that still doesn't accept international election observers. And it's one of very few governments in the world – other than, you know, North Korea and Cuba – that don't. And, I mean – and this is a government where the United States has for years cramped itself, and fallen into a way of talking and thinking about assistance to Egypt that's really strikingly limited.

[01:26:29]

And so, to sort of go to the idea that maybe the – our assistance in Egypt was too provocative – you know, we do, you know, less in Egypt than we've done, in some ways, in places like Russia – you know, which you would think would be more restrictive environments. And so we have to be careful about finding ourselves in an Egyptian conversation that is rather particular to the Egyptian mindset with respect to international presence in their society.

MR. TRAUB: Other – Jeremy?

MR. WEINSTEIN: Maybe just to start with the question on Egypt – I mean, I think focusing on U.S. policy is the – is the mistake here, and focusing on the change in Egypt is the right place to start. I mean, this is a moment at which a revolution had just taken place, and the restrictions that were put on civil society in the prior period – you know, there was a question about whether such restrictions even existed anymore and had the force of law as the constitution was abandoned and replaced.

[01:27:20]

And I think, consistent with the signals that were sent to the administration and to the public about the transition to democracy that was being shepherded, this was a natural response to be supportive of a democratic process that the Egyptians themselves had been embraced [sic]. So the challenges really rest at the foot of the Egyptian authorities with respect to the management of this issue, and not the United States.

On Jim's question – and it relates to the question on monarchies as well – I'd guess I'd say, one of the things that I took away from my time in government is that our challenges are not really on the programmatic and assistance front. We do that – we could do it better; we could spend more money; we could do impact evaluation and change our procurement policies; and all of those things are good things. But the challenge is that we have often seen our programmatic and assistance budgets as a substitute for serious pro-democracy diplomacy and the use of our other levers of influence. And that's a trap.

And I think the real challenge that we've had in the context of the Arab Spring, and also more generally, is to bring our policy engagement – the engagement of our ambassadors, the engagement of our diplomats – up to the seriousness of purpose that we have with our assistance – because I think the challenge is, when we use our assistance to program around the status quo – that is, we have to take things as given, so let's support this independent media group and hope for the best – we're not using the full force and measure of U.S. influence in the world, and so our real challenge going forward is how to use our leadership, and our diplomacy and the leverage that we often exert on a wide range of issues in support of this. And that's what, of course, hasn't been done, as Tom points out in the paper, as much with respect to the monarchies in the region as it has with respect to the secular authoritarian regimes that ultimately fell.

[01:29:10]

And the real danger is to therefore conclude that somehow we've now discovered which authoritarian regimes were stable and which are not. And if folks are walking away with the sense that somehow we've got the sorting that we need, and we can go on with business as usual, I think at least Bahrain is the poster child for the case that that's undoubtedly not true.

MR. TRAUB: So I think we have time for maybe two more questions, if they're asked very briefly. Yes, back there.

MR. CAROTHERS: (Whispering.) You confused her by saying "back there."

MR. TRAUB: Oh, sorry – (chuckles) – no, you, yes. I'm so, so sorry. Yes, you, ma'am.

Q: OK.

MR. TRAUB: Not "back there" – in the middle there.

Q: (Chuckles.) Juliana Pilon; I teach at the Institute of World Politics, and for many years I was with IFES. Question to any of you regarding Iran: I think it's fair to say that all of us were stunned by the lack of support in 2009 for the Iranian people from the administration. What would you suggest, David – whoever – Tom – at this point can be done and should be done?

MR. TRAUB: One other perhaps? I think there's somebody all the way in back there? Yes – (chuckles) – you've been bypassed.

MS. : Oh – (inaudible) – all the way in back.

MR. TRAUB: Yes.

[01:30:40]

Q: Hi; my name's Rhea Carrick (ph). I just had a question – with all this talk about, you know, promoting democracy in Egypt. What do you say about our policy for 30 years giving the second-highest rate of foreign aid to Egypt that's propping up somebody like that? And also, what do you think other countries would think of us promoting democracy when we have basically no criticism of Saudi Arabia, which is hardly a beacon of human rights and democracy?

MR. TRAUB: All right, Saudi Arabia and Iran. David, you didn't get a chance to go before –

MR. KRAMER: Sure.

MR. TRAUB: – so why don't you go ahead?

[01:31:19]

MR. KRAMER: Juliana, I would say on Iran – I would – I would answer it two ways. One is Syria. I think if Assad goes, and Syria moves in a more democratic direction – and those are big ifs, I realize – Iran – the Iranian regime will face a terrible setback. So I think a key to Iran – not the only key, but a key to Iran is Syria.

But I also think that there needs to be more attention focused on the gross and relentless human rights abuses that the regime commits. The – we need to do a better job of humanizing the suffering of the Iranian people there, because often you hear, well, the regime was elected. The regime engages in gross human rights abuses; the death penalty is carried out in Iran on an extraordinary scale. So I do think that it – while the nuclear issue is obviously critically important, the human rights situation there is something that gets shortchanged in this.

On Egypt and Saudi Arabia, yes, we propped up the Mubarak regime for three decades. It's a bipartisan mistake. It's not the current administration; it wasn't the Bush administration; we've been screwing this up for decades. And where I would say credit goes – Bush at least acknowledged that this was a mistake. He didn't do much about it, but the president did – and Secretary Rice did point out that, for decades, we were investing in what we thought were security and stability by supporting and propping up authoritarian regimes in the region. And it turned out that that was a bad bet. And I think what we need to do now is to make it clear that the assistance is not automatic – that the assistance cannot go forward if the Egyptian regime – the SCAF, whoever is there – engages in these kinds of problems.

On Saudi Arabia – this is the point I was making – we are guilty of double standards. Let's just admit it. But for a country that doesn't allow women to drive and has only recently, or will only in the near future, allow women to vote – the situation there, no question, is pretty abominable.

[01:33:36]

MR. TRAUB: Tom, would you wrap it up for us?

MR. CAROTHERS: Yeah, just one last comment. I think – and again, as we head into the campaign season – and democracy promotion will surface in the campaign, particularly probably in arguments about Iran, and possibly also Russia and maybe the Arab World – is – and I think we heard it today a bit – is that there's a tendency, in thinking about and talking about U.S. democracy promotion and how to do better, to think in a way that there's a choice between, in a sense, the emphasis on presidential leadership and the emphasis in a – in some ways, on the hard edge of the United States diplomacy pushing on this issue in a really assertive way; versus the thicker, sort of quieter, bureaucratic approach of thinking – I mean that in a positive sense of institutionalizing a commitment to democracy among ourselves, and also in other partners.

[01:34:20]

That doesn't have to be a choice. Ideally we can do both. But campaigns often present choices – that either we're, you know, a sharp knife in the world or we're a, you know, tool that spreads this more widely and carefully. Somehow we have trouble doing both, and we need to think about, you know, whichever the next – whichever character the next administration has politically – whether it's possible to see this as a bipartisan challenge, and not slip into thinking this is basically an either-or choice.

Thank you, everybody, for the – (inaudible).

MR. TRAUB: Great. Gentlemen, thank you so much, and thank all of you. (Applause.)

(END)