

**A. Democracy Program.** The United States and Europe have so many problems making their own democracies work well that they no longer have credibility to promote democracy in other parts of the world. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Carnegie Endowment Junior Fellow Application

Essay – A: Democracy Program

The idea that U.S. democracy promotion requires one of two broad approaches represents a false choice. Outright public condemnation of regime abuses and more gradual engagement with civil society are not mutually exclusive policies, and the desire to treat them as such has the serious potential to hamper U.S. efforts to support democratization and political development in countries around the globe. Instead, the most effective means of promoting democracy abroad is through a multifaceted approach that seeks to disincentivize anti-democratic behavior on the part of regimes while building up capacity amongst societies and the opposition to engage in real democracy. Ultimately such a strategy recognizes the need to foment democracy from the top down as well as from the bottom up.

While evidence suggests that public condemnations of human rights abuses, economic sanctions, and other forms of punishment are not effective ways to support democratic reform *on their own*, they should not be abandoned as a component of U.S. policy toward autocratic regimes. Such actions serve three main purposes. First, they weaken the regimes themselves, forcing them to rethink their approach to governance. Second, such policies signal to pro-democracy forces within an autocratic society that the United States stands with them and supports their aspirations. Such a signal has the potential to embolden opposition forces to continue to push for political reform. Finally, such actions affirm U.S. support for democracy worldwide and allow the U.S. government to remain consistent in its moral opposition to despotism. This final, values-based argument has been detailed in the State Department's Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) and the President's National Security Strategy, which both establish the American values of political freedom and democratic governance as driving forces behind foreign policy decisions.

Despite their positive potential, policymakers and observers often view such policies negatively because they appear to fail in so many cases. Upon closer examination, however, the failure of such policies to produce democratic reform generally reflects the lack of a serious, comprehensive strategy or particularly challenging circumstances, rather than an overall indictment of their effectiveness. While high-profile cases of failure, like North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, lead to the belief that such strategies are ineffective, in reality, sanctions have consistently achieved a modest success rate in moving autocratic regimes toward reform, and public condemnations of human rights abuses rarely have a profoundly negative impact on democratization. Nevertheless, these policies alone are not enough.

Societal engagement must also remain an important component of U.S. support for democracy internationally, but, like political and economic pressure, the evolutionary change it promotes generally does not serve to transform non-democratic societies on its own. Civil society is a crucial building block of any democracy, and a population that is engaged through institutions within civil society will be much better equipped to succeed in the context of democratic reforms. Therefore, programs like educational exchanges and support for NGOs that promote all sorts of civic engagement, from female empowerment to local elections, can be transformative to the extent that they give a society a kind of democratic practice.

However, without a concerted push for political openness and democratic reform from the top, "evolutionary change" generally fails to produce real results. Democratic practice is useful in states that are making strides toward democracy. But if a regime feels no real pressure to reform itself, the result will be either a country in which civil society is relegated to the margins or an increasingly agitated population willing to resort to more destabilizing routes toward democratic transition. Neither produces the kind of positive, sustainable change that is in

the interest of the country in question or the United States.

In addition to political pressure and societal engagement, a crucial third prong in U.S. efforts to promote democracy in autocratic countries is active engagement with the opposition. Without capable opposition leaders, states that pursue democratization have a higher risk of reverting back to authoritarianism. If no credible alternative exists to the ruling party or group, competitive democracy will ultimately prove unsustainable. That is why capacity-building amongst opposition parties is critical. Organizations like the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), which receive funding from the federal government, are important partners in efforts to build capacity amongst opposition leaders and parties. In many countries, these organizations maintain established relationships with political leaders both inside and outside of the government and they have developed a great deal of respect amongst the population. Their strategy is focused on ensuring that true competitiveness exists in the electoral realm in countries at various stages of democratization.

Ultimately, government reforms have a much greater chance of success when they are being implemented in a society that is capable of serious democratic engagement. Likewise, a people yearning to be free under the yoke of a regime unwilling to make democratic concessions generally fails to produce tangible results and can often lead to the type of political unrest witnessed across the Arab world in early 2011. That is why U.S. democracy promotion cannot be an either-or choice. It must engage simultaneously on three levels: 1) to push regimes to be more open and democratic through both punishment and incentives, 2) to promote the development of an active civil society with institutions capable of democratic engagement, and 3) to work with the opposition to establish a legitimate and capable governing alternative.