

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

**Democracy Promotion in the Next Administration**

Gerald Hyman

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**Q1: Will the next administration abandon or at least diminish the role of democracy and democracy promotion in U.S. foreign policy?**

**A1:** The next administration will almost certainly undertake a substantial rhetorical shift, but not so much a substantive shift. Democracy promotion is not a Bush administration innovation. Democracy has been a core American value and policy principle since the founding fathers. It has been an ingredient of U.S. foreign policy at least since President Wilson. It has become increasingly central since President Carter who, notwithstanding opposition from more traditional voices, established the Bureau for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Department of State, making human rights an official dimension of our foreign policy. In 1983, President Reagan and the Congress established and funded the National Endowment for Democracy to promote democracy globally. President Clinton expanded the mandate of the Bureau for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and renamed it the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has had an active democracy promotion program since 1990, but its antecedents reach back to the 1960s. So democracy promotion has been supported by each of the last six presidents, Democratic and Republican. Moreover, in their present positions, several of the candidates from both parties have supported foreign assistance in general and democracy in particular. Democracy promotion therefore will almost certainly continue to be a central part of our foreign policy and foreign assistance programs.

**Q2: Will there be any differences between the Bush administration and its successor?**

**A2:** Again, there will almost certainly be a rhetorical shift, irrespective of which party wins. The next president is not going to speak so regularly, loudly, or unqualifiedly about democracy. It will not be so central an element in the next president's statements about the U.S. role in the world. But that may be a good thing for democracy, which is now broadly associated with our invasions of Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan. The next president will not be the author of the globally unpopular, even reviled, war in Iraq. The association between U.S. efforts to advance democracy and our policies in the Middle East has been counterproductive for democracy, even though the invasion of Iraq was not primarily motivated by concerns about democracy, but by concerns about (nonexistent) weapons of mass destruction. Only after that primary reason disintegrated did the administration emphasize democracy, but Iraq is how too many people now think the United States supports democracy more generally. The next president will certainly want to break that connection, as well as the uncertain relationship between democracy and what President Bush has called the Global War on Terror.

**Q3: So what will the next administration do?**

**A3:** Of course there are substantial differences among the candidates on many issues, and to date, democracy has not been emphasized by any of them, leaving a bit of uncertainty about specifics. None of the candidates, Democratic or Republican, is echoing President Bush. Moreover, placing such public emphasis on our commitment to democracy was unrealistic. It led to understandable charges of hypocrisy when, inevitably, other U.S. interests required tradeoffs with our interest in democracy and support for democracy did not always prevail. Second, the next administration will probably be more forthright about the place of democracy in our foreign policy. Support for democracy is important but not always dominant. Most people, here and abroad, understand that we have multiple interests and that any individual decision requires a context-specific balance among them. The next administration is likely to be more straightforward about that, if only indirectly, by emphasizing our other interests relative to democracy. Doing so would not diminish our support for democracy or the public perception that we do so. Third, the next administration ought to be careful about making—or seeming to make—democracy a public tool of antiterrorism or antijihadism. Doing so risks confusing democracy with a process, and a fundamental right with a specific policy outcome. It makes our democracy efforts appear totally self-serving, the result of what others believe is self-absorption with September 11.

*Gerald Hyman is a senior adviser and president of the Hill's Program on Governance at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.*

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