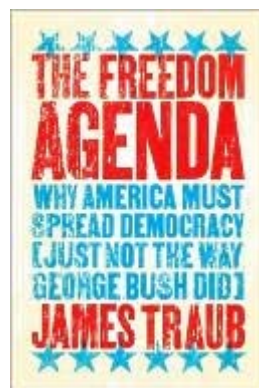


## The Freedom Agenda: Why America Must Spread Democracy (Just Not the Way George Bush Did)

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- [Introduction](#)
- [Remarks](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#)

### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I'd like to welcome our members and guests, and to thank you for joining us.

Today it is a pleasure to welcome back a friend, Jim Traub, who will be discussing his latest book, [The Freedom Agenda: Why Americans Must Spread Democracy \(Just Not the Way George Bush Did\)](#).

In response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, President [Bush](#) laid out his national security strategy, but it wasn't until his [second inaugural address](#) that he formalized his plan, in arguing that bringing democratic freedom to the oppressed of the world was a moral necessity. In launching the Freedom Agenda, President Bush spoke eloquently of freedom when he said that the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. But with the invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration soon realized that there was a big difference between defending existing democracies and trying to create new ones through invasion and occupation.

It wasn't very long before the world saw the discrepancy between his words and his actions, especially as our own civil liberties began slipping away as a result of the [Patriot Act](#) here at home.

I think many of you would agree that promoting democracy around the world is a noble and highly desirable pursuit. In fact, if we were to make the global diffusion of freedom a central pillar of our foreign policy in a way that professed the principles of our [Founding Fathers](#), you would probably be quite pleased. Nevertheless, the way the present administration has gone about this task has created the opposite effect.

Jim Traub has always been a writer of provocative wit and erudition. His writing is formidable in both scope and scholarship, as evidenced by many of his articles, which have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The New Yorker*. His last book, [The Best Intentions](#), which was about [Kofi Annan](#) and the United Nations, was widely acclaimed.

*Freedom Agenda* is no exception to the astute analysis Jim brings to all his endeavors, as it is written with panache and imbued with a fierce conviction of one who believes that democracy promotion is a part of what our role in the world should be, not only for moral considerations, but out of self-interest as well.

Here in this new book, Jim analyzes the history of American foreign policy with respect to the promotion of democracy worldwide. He takes us on a journey that begins in the late 19th century with America's invasion of the Philippines, and then he goes on to review events of the 20th century, especially the last 25 years. He ends in the present, as he covers the challenges encountered and the efforts to succeed in spreading democracy by our recent presidents. As a primer on American intervention in a changing world, this is one book you may want to read.

This time in the race for the White House, there is an incentive to find a new foreign policy doctrine. For the next administration, much is at stake. America's standing in the world is at a low ebb, and President Bush's self-styled crusade to promote democracy has run aground. The new commander-in-chief will have an opportunity to dramatically change the direction of our foreign policy.

Therefore, as we say goodbye to Mr. Bush and his presidency, one question we might want to ask Jim is whether he believes there is anything to salvage from Bush's foreign policy initiatives. Specifically, in the efforts to spread democracy, is there anything that can or should survive the end of Bush's final term in office and be resurrected in the next administration?

This is just one question among many we could ask, but it is one for which I know the speaker has the answer.

Please join me in welcoming a writer of immense talent, who cares deeply about democracy promotion. He has not only written about this subject, but as the new policy director for the [Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#), he hopes to have an impact on strategy as well. Our speaker this morning, Jim Traub.

## Remarks

**JIM TRAUB:** I'm so delighted to be speaking here. Of course, I'm a regular spectator at these events, and so I feel kind of a special pressure to perform up to Joanne's expectations.

Joanne's introduction made, probably, certain portions of my speech irrelevant. She covered things that I planned to say. But I know I'm up here and you all have gathered for breakfast, so I should just go ahead and say something.

What I'm going to do is take the subtitle of my book in reverse order. I'm going to start with "Just Not the Way George Bush Did" and then, as Joanne said, I'm going to try to find some rationale, nevertheless, for doing this democracy-promotion thing.

When [Charlie Gibson](#) asked [Sarah Palin](#), "What's the Bush Doctrine?"—of course, she famously got it wrong and he said, in effect, "You idiot, it's preemption"—I actually felt kind of sympathetic. I thought the Bush Doctrine was democracy promotion. I do think that if you woke the man up in the middle of the night and said, "What's your legacy?" he would say, "Democracy." I think he really deeply believes that.

The Bush Doctrine, in effect, is a combination of these two things: preemption on the one side and democracy promotion on the other. There is a certain logic to that. Preemption, in effect, is the negative or military side of the response to 9/11, and democracy promotion, in effect, the kind of positive, hopeful side.

But it's easier to understand how the military part of this came about than how this political part of it came about. You can see clearly that the combination of the shock of 9/11, the fact that we suddenly discovered that, not armies that we could easily see and track, but small numbers of terrorists in remote places could attack us—all those things would at least make it plausible to argue that we need to have access to the doctrine of preemption. Clearly also the Bush Administration's wish to throw off what they felt were the shackles that had been placed on American power would also lead to that.

So whether you think it's a good idea or not, it's not hard to understand how the preemption thing came about.

That's not quite true of the democracy-promotion thing. After all, in 2000, Bush was not the candidate of foreign policy adventures and ideals. Quite the opposite. The neoconservatives had all lined up behind [McCain](#), not behind Bush. Bush was the realist. The people he surrounded himself with, who came to be called "[the Vulcans](#)," his group of foreign policy advisers, were, almost all of them, classic Cold War realists, with the exception of [Paul Wolfowitz](#). Then, when he came into office, the people who were his principals—[Rumsfeld](#), [Cheney](#), [Rice](#), [Powell](#)—these people were not neocons, they were not foreign-policy adventurists; they were at different places on a spectrum of Cold War conservative.

So if you had thought about what this administration would be, coming in, you would have thought this was going to be a kind of [George Bush, Sr.](#), administration, maybe a little bit more hard-edged.

That raises the question: Where does this democracy-promotion thing come from? I think the answer there, as for preemption, is 9/11. As Joanne mentioned, in the quote from the president's second inaugural, 9/11 said, in effect, that what happens inside other countries matters to us in a way that it did not before. That is, before, the idea that it would be good if we could make other countries more democratic, better governed, less corrupt, and so forth, felt more or less like a kind of humanitarian imperative. 9/11 says, "No. It becomes a national security imperative. We can be greatly harmed by events happening inside the political culture of other countries."

So that was, I think, the underlying thought.

But this, then, I think, merged with Bush's own psychology in a way that proved to be really toxic. Let me just briefly read a short passage from the book, where I try to make sense of how it was that Bush so quickly went

from what seemed to be one kind of mindset about how to deal with the world to, in some ways, you might say, almost the opposite mindset.

"Less than a year earlier, of course, Bush had been warning against the arrogance of imposing the American way on others. But Bush's sudden conversion to the cause of liberty did not have the feel of mere expedience or of hypocrisy"—though, of course, a lot of people would say that's precisely what it was. I don't think so, myself.

"If anything, the realism and restraint he had preached in the campaign seemed like a poor fit for his sunny and deeply moralistic nature. He had absorbed from Condoleezza Rice a doctrine that offered a satisfying critique of his opponent, without necessarily fitting his own intuitive world view. The president believed in transformation. He had, after all, abruptly reversed his own life trajectory.

"What's more, his politics were infused with an evangelical faith in America and the American way, a deep belief that people everywhere aspired to the American condition of freedom. The terrorist attacks may have rendered an incoherent world into a reassuringly clear alignment."

So there is, I think, this combination of a kind of strategic imperative with a sort of magical world view. Clearly, Bush is also absorbing this from a lot of other circles, from neoconservative thinking.

Specifically, right before the second inaugural, he was given a copy of [Natan Sharansky](#)'s book. Sharansky wrote this book, whose title I always forget, though it's not as long as mine, of course, [The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror](#)—a title all by itself guaranteed to appeal to Bush.

It's a book that argues that just as, Sharansky says, in the 1980s [Ronald Reagan](#) brought the Cold War to an end by insisting that the Soviet way was unacceptable, by demanding freedom, by saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall," and so forth—obviously, itself, a highly arguable premise—so now, the Middle East was ripe for a democratic transformation, except that people were too fearful, too conservative in their thinking, too unwilling to believe in democracy to actually be willing to undertake this thing.

So Bush reads this thing. I'm sorry to say, in fact, that a former friend of mine gave Bush this book, for which he will never be forgiven.

So he reads this book. This is late 2004. He has just won the election. This is really the genesis of his second inaugural speech.

Again, let me just read a brief passage from the book:

Bush was so impressed with what he read that a week later he met with Sharansky in the Oval Office. "Mr. President," his visitor said, "you are a real dissident." As this was a term Bush had probably not heard applied to him before, Sharansky explained what he meant. "You really believe that Arabs can live in freedom. People criticize you for this. They call you naïve. But you stick to the idea of bringing democracy to the Middle East, even when it is unpopular. That is the mark of a dissident."

One can only imagine the power of such a blessing conferred by a man like Natan Sharansky upon a man like George W. Bush. He soon afterwards asked his speechwriter to write that speech, the second inaugural speech, in which he lays out the Freedom Agenda.

So there is this vision of a transformed Middle East that Bush has. Even though most of us don't really become aware of it until that second inaugural, the fact is, it had been a guiding concern for him quite early on. It first surfaces the first time Bush tries to go into the thorny politics of Israel and Palestine. He puts this off for a year, because [Bill Clinton](#) was too engaged, they all thought, with the Palestinians, and [Arafat](#) wasn't a fit interlocutor and so forth.

Finally, in June of 2002, Bush gives his speech on what should be done in Israel-Palestine. He rejects the idea that Colin Powell would have that we should have a big conclave and try to negotiate out the issues that ultimately Clinton had failed to negotiate out with [Ehud Barak](#). Instead, he gives a speech in which he first lays out this vision of his.

He says, "If Palestinians embrace democracy, confront corruption, and firmly reject terror, they can count on American support for the creation of a provisional state of Palestine."

Then he goes on to make even a bigger point: "If liberty can blossom in the rocky soil of the West Bank and Gaza, it will inspire millions of men and women around the globe who are equally weary of poverty and oppression, and equally entitled to the benefits of democratic government."

So here's the first version of this visionary sense that the solution is not slow, incremental reform, but a kind of radical remaking and democratic transformation of the Middle East. And, of course, this doesn't go anywhere, because these Palestinian interlocutors are not interested in hearing that if you make this radical change in your lives and somehow get rid of Arafat, then we will give you this fantastic gift at the end. It has no effect whatsoever because of the lack of any clear set of diplomatic steps in getting from here to there. The Palestinians dismissed this.

This vision, then, reappears in a new place, and that, of course, is Iraq. I don't argue that Bush went into Iraq because he wanted to produce a democracy there. I think it was the first end of the Bush Doctrine—that is, the sense that we can't afford to live anymore with a threat like [Saddam Hussein](#) in a world where terrorists can get hold of weapons of mass destruction. But increasingly this does become a rationale.

Another speech: this is three weeks before the invasion of Baghdad. It's a speech at the American Enterprise Institute.

He says, "There was a time when many said that the cultures of Germany and Japan were incapable of sustaining democratic values. Well, they were wrong. Some say the same of Iraq today. They are mistaken. The nation of Iraq, with its proud heritage, abundant resources, and skilled and educated people, is fully capable of moving toward democracy and living in freedom."

It occurs to me that this is a kind of foreign policy equivalent of Bush's phrase "the soft bigotry of low expectations." It's ingenious in a way. He's saying—this is sort of Sharansky's argument as well—"Nobody has believed in the people of the Middle East. I believe in them," in the same way as he said, "Nobody believes in the capacity of poor black kids to learn the same way as middle-class white kids."

It's a very powerful vision. Clearly, that's why I don't really argue that this was a kind of retrospective rationale on his part. This goes to the core of Bush's own nature, to believe in these kinds of magical transformations. What I see is that he keeps trying to find the locus or the lever where this transformation will take place. Obviously, Iraq doesn't become that place.

Then the last iteration of this is after the inaugural speech. In late June of 2005, Condoleezza Rice goes to Egypt and gives this quite astonishing address, the likes of which no senior diplomat had ever made in Egypt or anywhere else in the Middle East.

She said, "For 60 years, the United States has supported order at the expense of liberty, and we have gotten neither. Our politics in the Middle East have failed. Now we realize that that was a mistake. We're not going to do that again. We are going to support the forces of democracy in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East."

She goes on to rebuke the Egyptian regime, in remarkably unvarnished terms for a senior American diplomat, and basically says, "Stop engaging in arbitrary justice. Stop beating people on the street. Allow political parties to form."

The interesting thing is that here's Egypt, a country where the American administration is despised; nevertheless there is a tremendous response to this. People are very, very hopeful that the Americans are going to push the Egyptians, and [Mubarak](#) is going to have to do what Bush wants and he is actually going to have real elections and so on.

Well, this, too, comes to grief. They hold the elections. The opposition parties start to win. Mubarak sends his goons out into the streets. People are beaten and killed and prevented from voting, and the State Department says, effectively, nothing. That kind of brings the story to an end. That really is the last moment when it's possible to take this vision seriously.

So what happened? I think there are a couple of things.

One is, it's implicit in this kind of magical sense of the world—that is, the combination of the strategic threat coming from the Middle East and this transformative vision meant that Bush had chosen the single most recalcitrant place in the world to attempt meaningful political reform, either from the outside or from the inside, and cast it, not in terms of the need for a kind of slow, grinding movement towards a better life—no, no—but instead, in this kind of éclat of transformation.

There were lots of Middle East specialists around, including in his own administration, who could have said to him, and who did say, "Look, the Middle East, for all you say about, 'How can we deny anybody the right to freedom? People want democracy all over the world,' et cetera, et cetera—this is a place that had no prior tradition, not only of democratic rule, but even of liberal political principles, of organized political parties, of any kind of political

space, of a middle class with the kinds of political demands normally made by a middle class."

That is to say, the argument that Bush made was so devoid of any sense of the inherent difficulty of things, of the inherent intransigence of the object you are trying to work on, that it was doomed to failure.

It wasn't only Bush. Interestingly, it was Rice as well. I have more trouble understanding Rice's role, because she's such a hard-headed person—or so she is reputed to be—and yet she became the other great advocate of this in the administration.

There's a story that [Brent Scowcroft](#) told me, Scowcroft having been the national security adviser for Bush's father. Right before the war in Iraq, Rice came to him and said, "This is going to be a tremendous moment for American diplomacy, because we're going to bring democracy to this place."

He said, "Condi, that's a great vision, but it's a multigenerational task."

She said, "No, it's not. No, it's not. We succeeded in Eastern Europe. Look at these thriving democracies now. The same thing can happen in the Middle East."

He said, "Condi, that's totally ahistorical."

He meant, I suppose, "acultural," or "a-anthropological," or something—apolitical, meaning, "How can you think that the process that happened in Eastern Europe, a place that had a deep tradition of liberal government, as well as some tradition of democratic government, and a middle class and all of these things that are correlated with democracy, even if they aren't the direct causes of democracy—how can you think that it would be as easy as that?"

He was shocked. He thought, "This is not the Condoleezza Rice I knew." In fact, they didn't see each other again for a year or so after that.

So there was some complete unwillingness to grasp the nettle of the difficult. I'm sure you could say, well, this is the hallmark of the Bush Administration in all things. It's just like sending too few troops to Iraq and so forth. But it's especially true with this idea of democracy promotion, which is mostly, by its nature, a long, slow, patience-requiring, modesty-requiring, chastening effort to try to help from the outside a process that ultimately has to occur from the inside.

I think the second thing that happened was that the one end of the Bush Doctrine collided with the other end of the Bush Doctrine. So when Mubarak pushed back in late 2005 and did everything he wasn't supposed to do, and basically called the administration's bluff, he was right. In the end, the administration thought, "If we have to choose between doing something which possibly will be destabilizing to the regime—and which, in any case, the regime will see as being profoundly antithetical to its own interests—and abandoning or soft-pedaling our noble claims that we are going to support democracy everywhere, we're going to have to get rid of the democracy thing."

So the sense that the world is so perilous that we can't afford all sorts of things that we might otherwise be able to afford undermined this notion that, actually, in this new kind of perilous world, we need to do these things that we hadn't done before.

You see it much more graphically in Pakistan, where hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets—this is an Islamic country; people took to the streets—in order to protest constitutional violations.

This is George Bush's dream. This is something incredible—an Islamic country, hundreds of thousands of people peacefully demonstrating for the restoration of the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

So what do we do? We unequivocally support [Musharraf](#) against the demonstrators. Never a word is spoken on behalf of these demonstrations, which is really startling and, in the end, turned out to be wrong. The calculation that Musharraf, because he had said that he would be "our guy," in fact, could be a powerful bulwark against the spread of terrorism clearly proved to be wrong. In fact, we now know that Musharraf and the generals, broadly, were in league with the jihadists in Pakistan, had been for many years, had a series of secret understandings with them—or not so secret—and were as much part of the problem as they were a part of the solution.

Now, this goes to part 1 of my subtitle. I use this word "must"—why we must do this thing—despite the fact that I would all too readily agree that the whole idea right now feels quite discredited. The "must" part—why we must spread democracy—is that I do actually accept that one of the post-9/11 lessons is that what happens inside countries matters to us in a way that it did not matter before, that it has indeed become a matter of national security, not just a kind of humanitarian exercise or a kind of American *mission civilatrice*.



This stuff matters. The fact that it matters doesn't mean we can do it. There are a lot of things that really matter that we don't seem to be able to do, whether it's global warming or something else. But what it says is that we do need to do whatever we can, to think hard and long about how to do this.

You look at Pakistan and you say, there is no easy way for us to think about how to bolster that democracy. But I think we can say that there is no good long-term solution in Pakistan that lies with the generals. The only long-term solution in a place like Pakistan is a kind of democratic opening whereby this incredibly feeble, frail, and quite corrupt government slowly, gradually gains legitimacy and spreads its rule throughout the country, meaning, above all, into the frontier areas that are now no-go areas. So it is profoundly in the interest of Pakistan and it is profoundly in the interest of us that we seek to support that democracy.

That's my premise for why I believe, in a kind of broad, general way, in this stuff, why I would use a word like "must," why we must try to support, nurture democratic institutions. But you can't be aware of the history of our attempts to do so without being profoundly chastened, both by this whole question of the inherent difficulty of altering the internal culture of another place and by the way in which some set of our interests will collide with other sets of our interests.

Even certain assumptions that one has—like, "Democracy is good for us because democracies don't sponsor terrorism the way authoritarian states do"—even that is not quite as easy to say. Yes, it's true that Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, and Pakistan have incredible factories for the production of terrorism. The Philippines has done a pretty good job, too, of fostering terrorism. That's a democratic country. China doesn't have much terrorism, besides this extremely marginal problem with the Uighurs. They crush terrorism quite effectively.

So even that—"This is in our national security interest"—is not quite so obvious as may seem to be the case.

So one needs to be very chastened about the whole thing. But I think that—at least I hope that—the next president will be willing to move beyond the kind of rhetorical theatrics that this administration engages in, and also the deeply self-righteous tone, that "God gave us this thing called democracy, and now we are going to give it to you." That doesn't play well. It's remarkably insensitive to what it means to have nationalist feelings of your own, not to mention just a sense of pride of your own. You don't want to be a baby bird who is receiving this meal from big bird America.

I think we need to engage in this thing with a sense of due modesty and a recognition, very much, of how deeply flawed all democracies are, including our own. And we can talk about what it is we would need to do in order to show people that we actually are a democracy worth respecting, which certainly is not what a lot of people feel right now.

I think there is probably no way to do this without spending more money than we are now. We have certain donor assistance programs that actually are kind of sensible, things like the [Millennium Challenge Account](#), which I'm happy to talk about. We do have instruments at our disposal. But it just takes a very, very different mentality and a great deal more humility about the enterprise in order to have any hope of making it work.

Let me stop there. I'm delighted to take questions from anyone.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Jim, one of the consequences of what you have been describing in the Middle East, to my mind—and I imagine you can agree with me—is that the United States has lost the role it has had through most of my adulthood of being the only power that could broker peace in the Middle East. All the shuttle diplomacy that went on through Republican and Democratic administrations was abandoned by this administration. Condoleezza Rice, as you said, tried to pick it up, a little belatedly, I think, and did not succeed.

My question is, can a new administration restore the role of the United States in the Middle East as that necessary and only honest broker?

**JIM TRAUB:** I would give, actually, a slightly broader answer and include the fact that the world that we are going to be re-encountering in 2009 is not the world of 2001, in a lot of ways. One of the ways it's not is that the assumption that America is the center of the world, and therefore what we do is supremely determining of the shape of that world, is just not quite as true. What percent "not quite as true" I don't know.

There is now a world of competing interlocutors and a world of alternative visions of development, things like that. So America feels a little bit more *primus inter pares* [first among equals] than it did before.

You look at the Middle East. The Qataris consider themselves to be a diplomatic force there. The Saudis are much

more of a diplomatic force than they were before; the Egyptians less so.

So part of the answer is, the world doesn't quite revolve on our axis as much as it used to.

Having said that, we are, even when we are loathed, a big force, and we are a big force in the Middle East. I think the question, certainly in terms of Israel-Palestine, is not going to be just a matter of will. It's going to be, "These are hard questions. Are we willing to push the Israelis hard enough?" [Olmert](#) just made this remarkable interview, in which he basically said, "The jig is up. If we're not willing to abandon the West Bank, then we're not going to have a democratic state pretty soon."

So I think a big part of the problem is going to be, is the next president, whoever he is, willing to make those really tough decisions—there, Lebanon, elsewhere? Do we recognize Hamas? How do we deal with Hezbollah? These are hard questions that I don't think we have heard much about in the debate so far, and so probably we will have to wait until January to find out what's really going to happen.

**QUESTION:** I was for seven years chairman of the [National Endowment for Democracy](#). Actually, that's where I first met [John McCain](#). He was on the board. That institution was founded for the precise purpose of encouraging democracy in the world. [Dante Fascell](#) of Florida was the leader in Congress to create it.

You have said nothing about NED. Have you any comment to make about its role?

**JIM TRAUB:** Sure, lots. The way it works is, you have this organization created by Congress, the National Endowment for Democracy, with a set of operational bodies beneath them, of which the two by far most important are the ones associated with the chief political parties. It's actually a model that was borrowed from West Germany.

I was just yesterday at the [National Democratic Institute](#), the one affiliated with the Democratic Party, talking about this. These guys actually do that stuff. They are the ones who train political parties. They are the ones who explain how to do get-out-the-vote things and how to talk to constituents. They do all sorts of important training programs.

There is a very good argument that it's a mistake for this kind of democracy assistance to come with the seal of the United States at all and that, in fact, all this stuff—not the diplomacy, of course, but all the on-the-ground work—should be done by organizations like the NED and the NDI and so forth, because even though they are American, they don't carry the taint of the U.S. government quite as much. And in any case, it separates out what diplomats do and prevents them, in a way, from having to deal with the tension between that and the other thing—separates out what diplomats do from this other task.

Actually, I would say—and I was just hearing this argument from them yesterday at the NDI—that, in fact, the best way to go about a lot of this stuff is to, I guess you would say, outsource it. But they are not private, profit-making companies, like the ones who are guarding the Green Zone. They are nonprofit, semi-government-connected bodies, with long expertise in doing this.

**QUESTION:** Sir, you mentioned about the spreading of democracy. I would like to mention the experience in India, followed by a question.

In India, we have had democracy for 60 years now. It was the same country—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh. We were carved out of the same part of the world, the British Empire. In this particular stretch of time, democracy consolidated and flourished. Now it is so consolidated that no party, whether they are reactionaries or whether they are conservatives, would like to revise this into some other form of government. This was not the experience in other parts of the world.

Prefacing with that, do you think that it is democracy that we consider as a set of values, and these values we sustain by a set of institutions, supported by cultural and historical precedents? Or is it just the leadership at a particular point of time which makes it possible for democracy to succeed, root, and then flower?

**JIM TRAUB:** That is a really deep question, which I'm going to have to give a kind of glancing answer to.

If you wait for the values and the habits and the reflexes and then, on top of them, the institutions to be built before you say a country is ready for democracy, then it may never come. I say this because there is an argument, and a very important argument, that, among others, [Fareed Zakaria](#), who wrote this book [The Future of Freedom](#), has made, where he says, first, you have to slowly build up these liberal institutions, a kind of more or less honest police force, a civil service, a commercial body of law, and so on, and then, and only then, do you have the political thing that comes at the end.

But that's not how life often occurs. It's hard to say in India's case what the sequence was. I think India is really unusual in a couple of respects. One, it actually does have this very ancient democratic system, the [panchayat](#) system, the village democracy system, which did give people, I think, a certain set of habits and expectations about voice and representation.

Then I would like to give a shout out for colonialism here. India, in the end, benefited enormously from having been colonized by the English, as opposed to by the Dutch or the Portuguese or the Spanish. The English, obviously, did this for their own benefit, but the fact is, their *mission civilatrice* was the creation of liberal institutions in their colonies. So in Africa, as well as in Asia, if you look at countries that are now democratic or more or less democratic, it correlates pretty strongly with having been an English colony.

Pakistan, which has its own very complicated history—but, as you said, was part of India—I think the democratic awakening you see now has a great deal to do with the rule-of-law tradition, which the Pakistanis and the Indians inherited, in part, from the British.

So, yes, for democracy to be consolidated, you need to have, as you said, I think absolutely rightly, a bedrock of values and expectations, institutions built upon those, and then the political leadership that will lead things in the right way. But since in real life you rarely get all those three things in the right sequence, it's really messy, and most democracies don't look at all like India, because they often have the charismatic leader before they have the institutions or they have elections that surprisingly elect a Democrat. So in the real world, what you have to deal with is—in effect, this is how the patient presents their problems, and you have to do whatever you can with that patient.

**QUESTION:** As you point out in talking about George Bush in 2000, you can't necessarily judge a presidency on the basis of what that person said or did during his campaign. Given that limitation, which of the two presidential candidates today do you think could best promote the kind of freedom agenda you are speaking of?

**JIM TRAUB:** As the first questioner said, John McCain is the chairman of the Republican branch of these two things. He is a big believer in democracy promotion. But I would fear that he would be too much of the Bushian magical transformation school.

Now, Obama speaks kind of in the language that I do here. He's very chastened. I have had this conversation with Obama, about a year ago when I wrote about him. He is very careful to not use the word "democracy," because he feels that it's a tainted brand. It's like Coca-Cola. It's this American brand, and people reject it out of national pride.

But what he does talk about—or rather, I should say, what he used to talk about—he would say there are 60 failed or failing states in the world, and a very important part of our foreign policy has to be to help build those states up. So he would talk about issues of governance. He would talk about issues of foreign aid, things like that. So I think he is really conscious of this new dynamic, that we have to figure out ways of doing something about the insides of countries, but we have to do it in a way that doesn't create so much anger at us that it makes it impossible for us to actually do anything very useful.

So I would say, probably, at this point, Obama has a more nuanced grasp of this problem than McCain does.

**QUESTION:** Before I address the book, I just want to make one point. You said that Bush's vision, which I think elevates his view of the world in a way that I would not—

**JIM TRAUB:** I mean in the sense that [St. Theresa](#) had a vision. That kind of vision.

**QUESTIONER:** All right. Actually, according to Treasury Secretary [O'Neill](#)—you said this vision, whatever it is, occurred after 9/11—O'Neill said he was appalled because at the very first cabinet meeting, which occurred long before September 11, Bush introduced the possibility of overthrowing Saddam.

I don't think all of this spread as a result of 9/11 and what occurs in other countries affects us and so forth. I think this occurred from deep psychological things that we don't quite understand. It has become pop psychology—the rivalry with the father.

But anyhow, I didn't want to address that. I wanted to address your book, which sounds fascinating. I intend to read it. I understand your reviews are coming out this week in the *Times*.

**JIM TRAUB:** Thank you—an unsolicited testimonial.

**QUESTIONER:** Which I haven't read, but rumor is that they are very good reviews.



**JIM TRAUB:** I'm the source of that rumor.

**QUESTIONER:** You use the words "spread democracy." In your talk you used it interchangeably with "support." There is an enormous difference.

**JIM TRAUB:** Yes, there is.

**QUESTIONER:** I think one of the things that has really alienated a good part of the world is that we are "spreading," which is really, in my view and a number of people's views in the world, a form of imperialism. What right do we have to say, "This is the best structure in which you should live, and therefore live it our way"? There are other cultures that perhaps are not receptive to this structure of government or could impose their own cultures on a form of democracy that would work for them, but we would not perceive as a true democracy.

Also it has to be an indigenous movement to be successful. You referred to what we did in Eastern Europe. We didn't do it. They were indigenous movements, whether it was [Solidarity](#) or the [Velvet Revolution](#) and so forth. In Pakistan, that uprising—we had nothing to do with that.

So, yes, support, absolutely, if we see that it's ready for support. But spread? I think we should stay away from that.

**JIM TRAUB:** That's a totally fair point. If my title was *Why America Must Support Democracy*, it wouldn't really sound terribly controversial, because, of course, everybody supports democracy. So I agree. "Spread" is almost worse than "promote." "Promote" has this kind of "Attention, K-Mart shoppers" quality, which is even worse.

But I think that's right. I think where that comes up, is exactly where you said, which is to say, the best that outsiders can do is to help to nurture a thing that already exists in some form. It's a seedling and we will help it sprout.

That goes to a couple of different questions:

- 1) How should one talk about this, with the kind of modesty that involves the word "support" as opposed to "spread"?
- 2) What kinds of instruments do you have at your disposal?
- 3) Where is it even possible for outsiders—and especially the kind of outsider we are—to make a difference?

I think it's a very hard question about the Middle East, for example. We may say the Middle East is the most important place, but it is also true that these are extremely deeply rooted authoritarian states, and the interlocutors for us are relatively modest.

I think, when it comes, for example, to Egypt, a country where I spend a fair amount of time—and there is a long chapter about it in my book—there is the very hard question, what do you do about Islamic movements? What do you do about the Muslim Brotherhood?

So that goes just to your question, which is, yes, there is a really popular movement which seeks democratic reform in Egypt, but it's the Muslim Brotherhood. What should we do about them?

Mubarak, in effect, said to the administration, "That's off-limits, because those guys are illegal," which they technically are in Egyptian terms. The political party is not legal. The organization itself is illegal. So we said okay. Of course, after Hamas won the elections in the Palestinian territories in early 2006, then it made all Islamists seem off-limits.

But I think that was a mistake. I think, if you are going to say that you really do believe in indigenous forms of a democratic movement, and if the only form which has been allowed to develop in much of the Middle East is through Islamist parties, then I think we have to carefully distinguish between the ones that we think are unacceptable—Hezbollah; the ones which are obviously acceptable—Turkey, Morocco, I would say; and the ones that are hard calls, like Egypt, though I would kind of err on the side of giving them some credibility.

**QUESTION:** We have been talking mostly about what the state can do and what NGOs can do in this realm. I wonder if there isn't a practical role that the private sector can play in pursuing this agenda. Maybe you have some thoughts about this.

One avenue, of course, that comes to mind is free trade; free, unfettered trade. Yet one of the candidates, Mr. Obama, is less than enthusiastic about that idea as it stands now.

**JIM TRAUB:** I guess one could ask, how much influence can the private sector have on trade negotiations, given that the private sector, if you had to characterize it, would be more in favor of free trade and yet the Doha trade talks collapsed?

I would distinguish between two aspects of your question.

One is, yes, when you are thinking about the economic development of impoverished countries, the inflows of capital from trade will dwarf whatever donor assistance we are talking about. Yet, clearly, at some political level, that has failed. So yes to free trade.

On the question of what the private sector can do, obviously the answer is investment, at some level. But investment is a rational decision that's going to be made by investors. The government's role here is to incentivize investors, which we have various means of doing.

That's about the only answer I have. I don't have any other good answers on that one.

**QUESTION:** First of all, thank you very much for today and all your other articles.

The Singapore foreign minister, in his speech to the General Assembly a week or so ago, really questioned whether the United States should be involved in promoting democracy, partly because the nature of the world has changed and we are in this multipolar world, partly because of the behavior of the Bush Administration.

He suggests that the real magic word, one you already used a few moments ago, is "governance." But as he makes clear in his speech, to him, governance is not democracy. Governance is having no corruption, and encouraging economic development. He cites a number of Asian countries, including China, which is making huge strides, but not necessarily moving toward democracy.

Maybe the most we can do is what [George Kennan](#) said: We should get our own house in order, rather than trying to spread it, as a previous questioner said, or even—I'm not quite sure what "supporting" is. I do understand NDI and NRI. But I think it's more limited now, given what has happened in the world over these last years.

I wonder if you want to distinguish more.

**JIM TRAUB:** Yes. Let me address the Singapore thing. The world's greatest example of the liberal non-democratic country which offers itself as a model is Singapore. Singapore is often kind of thrown in the face of people who do argue for this democracy thing.

I would say, listen, if Zambia can become Singapore, fantastic. Forget this election nonsense; become Singapore. But people don't become Singapore. You don't buy a certain amount of Singapore. You don't infuse yourself with Singapore.

Countries do develop according to a whole set of internal dynamics that they have. This is also, of course, a limiting factor on what outsiders can do. But what seems to work in East Asia doesn't seem to work in too many other places.

So the argument for what Fareed Zakaria called "liberal authoritarian states" tends to run aground on the shortage of liberal authoritarian states. You have some in East Asia. You also have a whole bunch in East Asia which have stopped being liberal authoritarian states and are now growing quite successfully.

I have heard Koreans say, "Until we became a democratic state, the economic constraints were really powerful. Democracy has been a tremendous force for economic development."

But, again in the real world, what do you say when the Malians are having an election? Do you say, "You're not ready for elections. No, no, don't do that"? Of course you don't say that. And so the practical question is, what do you do? You are a policymaker. You are faced with a set of choices. Things present themselves to you the way they present themselves to you.

Yes, of course, all these issues of good governance are really central, and without them, no democracy will be a consolidated democracy that will last. But at the same time, in the real world, you have to make decisions: Are you going to stand up for democratic forces in non-democratic countries? Are you going to try to bolster really frail democracies? Or are you going to focus more only on the institution-building aspect?

I think that to make that choice is really consequential. To say no because we don't think it works that way—that's not what our models say and it's not what happened in Singapore—I think would be a mistake.

**QUESTION:** Democracy promotion was not a big issue during the Cold War. But as we see, it's becoming an issue of the post-Cold War era. Why? Is it about the role of the United States? There is a view or expectation in our part of the world to see the United States as a great power of the post-Cold War era that has a big responsibility, not only towards stabilization and order, but also democracy promotion. Why is this issue here now?

**JIM TRAUB:** Afghanistan is one way of answering that question. That is, I think, just as a kind of national security calculation, that Islamism, jihadism, because it feels viral and emboldened and aggressive, perhaps, in a way that clearly, in the latter stages especially of the Cold War, Communism did not, there is a greater sense now of the imperative of trying to do something about the political culture of those countries where that happens than there was in the case of the Cold War.

But I would say about a couple of things about the Cold War.

One is that this democracy-promotion thing really develops during the Reagan years. These organizations like NED and so on are created by Reagan as a very conscious way of saying, "There is this battle between two systems. Those guys are really conscious of the war of ideas and we're not. We're losing. We have to do something," and thus these organizations come into being.

Certainly in the Clinton years, the completely failed attempt to engage in democratic reform in Russia was an absolutely central axis—it really was kind of the chief axis of Clinton foreign policy, at least until Bosnia overtook that and, later, Israel.

I argue in this book that this is this thing that Americans tend to do. It doesn't mean that it works. It is just this thing we do and have done since our strange colonial experience in the Philippines.

In part, I would say what we are doing now is this same thing in a new key. But it has taken on a kind of urgency that it didn't have before because of the rise of terrorism. But at the same time, it's a terrible misfortune that the only administration we have had and the only set of policies we have had since 9/11 is the Bush Administration.

There would have been, I think, a deep attempt to make political reform in other countries an important issue from some other administration, but it would have taken a different, and perhaps less broadly unpalatable, form.

**QUESTION:** How, if at all, do you think that the policies of the next administration will be constrained by the global economic situation?

**JIM TRAUB:** To me, one of the most depressing moments in the vice presidential debate was when [Biden](#) was asked, "What are you going to cut because of the bailout? What priority are you going to have to forgo because you won't have the money?"

Obama had been asked the same question and didn't have an answer. Obviously, they had prepared Biden to give an answer and he had one ready to hand: "All that donor assistance we had promised? Can't do it."

It was really striking. Why did they choose that? Because every other dollar they were going to spend would have benefited American citizens—that is, voters—and they would have been mad.

So they said, "Okay, we have to say something. We have to give them something or we're going to seem disingenuous. What can we say that will cause us no political harm whatsoever?"

Answer: "We're going to cut donor assistance."

It tells you how far we are from having any internalized sense that this stuff is good for us. In the end, it won't work unless you can convince the American people that it is good for us. It just will not work as a kind of moral imperative—"too bad it's not good for us, but it's really good for them." You can't get there from here.

Therefore, it's cost-free to say that this hugely ambitious program that Obama had laid out, which I thought sounded quite admirable and thoughtful, is road kill. That's kind of discouraging.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Jim, I knew you would have all the answers. I thank you very much.

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