MAKING DEMOCRACY SAFE FOR EMPIRE: A HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY
OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, UNITED STATES AGENCY
FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MEDIA
IMPERIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Cynthia Baron, Committee Chair

This dissertation explores the role of democracy promotion in US foreign intervention with a particular focus on the weaponization of media and civil society by two important US democracy promotion institutions, the National Endowment for Democracy and US Agency for International Development. Focusing on these two institutions and building on scholarship that takes a critical Gramscian Marxist perspective on US democracy promotion, this study brings media imperialism and deep political scholarship into the conversation. Delimiting the study to focus on US activities, I trace historical patterns of intellectual warfare and exceptional states of violence and lawlessness pursued by the US government in case studies of foreign intervention in which democracy promotion has played an important part since 1983. I survey the evolution of elite US Cold War conceptions of managed democracy as well as transformations of covert CIA media and civil society operations into institutionalized, pseudo-overt US democracy promotion that became a foundational pretext and method for US interventionism post-Cold War.

Case studies include the Contra War in 1980s Nicaragua, Operation Cyclone in 1980s Afghanistan, the 2000 overthrow of Yugoslavian president Slobodan Milošević, the 2002 military coup against Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, the 2004 coup against Haitian president Bertrand Aristide, and the 2014 Euromaidan Coup against Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych. I dedicate the penultimate chapter to US-led intervention in the Syrian Civil War that began in 2011, demonstrating how USAID provided instrumental monetary, media, and civil society support to primarily sectarian, theocratic, Salafi rebels against the Ba'athist government.

Throughout the dissertation, I argue that the NED and USAID represent important engines of intellectual warfare in US foreign intervention, mobilizing communications and organizational resources to reinforce elite hegemonic narratives and facilitate neoliberal and neoconservative US foreign policy across the globe.

To my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The decision to pursue this project that places a critical and surveilling eye on structures and agents of violent and obscured power in US society required a leap of bravery that I could not have made without the support of those in my academic, political, and personal life. I would like to first thank my committee members, Drs Cynthia Baron, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, and Radhika Gajjala. This project grew out of a class I took with Dr. Baron, who opened my passion for looking at the production process behind media and pushed me to pursue my political and intellectual passions. Dr. Boyd-Barrett served as a role model of intellectual bravery and blunt honesty that gave me the scholarly tools and community I needed to both start and complete my dissertation. Dr. Gajjala allowed me the freedom to pursue my interests and express my perspectives but also forced me to confront and question my assumptions and perspectives. As I pursued my research, I was welcomed into a community of brave scholars such as Drs Timothy M. Gill, Trisha Jenkins, and Matthew Alford who kindly shared their time, experiences, and even primary sources that enriched my teaching and helped me effectively and safely investigate the US national security state.

I believe that for intellectuals to remain politically useful they need to build and maintain organic relationships with social movements and political organizations that are not exclusively tied to academic institutions. I thank my best friend and fellow American culture studies cohort member, Dylan Reid Miller, for being the political partner I needed to put my beliefs into practice and be braver and stronger than I ever thought possible. I also thank all my co-organizers and allies both inside and outside Bowling Green State University for the profound kindness, solidarity, and inspiration they embodied as we struggled together to make a positive impact on our world.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACAE – Asociación Civil Asamblea de Educación (Civil Association Assembly of Education (Venezuela))

ACCF – American Committee for Cultural Freedom

AEI – American Enterprise Institute

AFL-CIO – American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

AIFLD – American Institute for Free Labor Development

AIPAC – American Israel Public Affairs Committee

AMC – Aleppo Media Center

APF – American Political Foundation

ARC – Afghanistan Relief Committee

ARK – Analysis Research Knowledge (originally Access Research Knowledge, also called ARK FZC (Free Zone Company), later ARK DMCC (Dubai Multi Commodities Centre))

ASI – Adam Smith International

BCCI – Bank of Credit and Commerce International

BIB – Board for International Broadcasting

CCF – Congress for Cultural Freedom

CDM – Coalition for a Democratic Majority

CEDICE – Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico para la Libertad (Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge for Liberty (Venezuela))

Center UA – United Action Center

CFIA (CIA before 1969) – Harvard Center for International Affairs, now called the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs

CFR – Council on Foreign Relations

CFW – Committee for a Free World

CAI – Creative Associates International

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CIPE – Center for International Private Enterprise

CPD – Committee on the Present Danger

CSIS – Center for Strategic and International Studies

CTV – Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (Confederation of Workers of Venezuela)

DAI – Development Alternatives Incorporated (now known as DAI Global, LLC or DAI Global)

DCI – Director of Central Intelligence

DIA – Defense Intelligence Agency

DoD – Department of Defense

DoS – Department of State (aka the State Department)

FCO – Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)

FEC – Free Europe Committee

FH – Freedom House

FL – Fanmi Lavalas (Flood Family (Haiti))

FOIA – Freedom of Information Act

FRAPH - Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (Front pour l'Avancement et le

Progrès Haitien)

FSA – Free Syrian Army

FSP – Free Syrian Police

FTUI – Free Trade Union Institute

HTS - Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

ICC – Idlib City Council (Syria)

InCoStrat - Innovative Communication and Strategies (Syria)

IRC – International Rescue Committee

IRI – International Republican Institute

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

MAO – Moderate Armed Opposition (Syria)

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

MI6 – Military Intelligence, Sector 6 (formally known as the Secret Intelligence Service (UK))

MICIMATT – Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think Tank

      complex

MEPI – Middle East Partnership Initiative

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDI – National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

NED – National Endowment for Democracy

NGO – nongovernmental organization

NSC – National Security Council

NSDD – National Security Decision Document

OAS – Organization of American States

ODI – Office of Democratic Initiatives (administered by USAID)

OPCW – Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

OPS – Office of Public Safety (administered by USAID)

OSOS – Office of Syrian Opposition Support

OTI – Office of Transition Initiatives (administered by USAID)

PJ – Primero Justicia (Justice First (Venezuela))

PKK – Kurdistan Workers Party

PRODEMCA – The Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America

R2P – Responsibility to Protect

RFS – Revolutionary Forces of Syria Media Office

SCAD(s) – State Crime(s) Against Democracy

SDUSA – Social Democrats, USA

SEED – Support for East European Democracy

SIN – Service d'Intelligence National (National Intelligence Service (Haiti))

S/LPD – Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean

SMART – Syria Media Action Revolution Team

SMC – Supreme Military Council

TGSN – The Global Strategy Network

TSC – The Syria Campaign

UNO – Unión Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union (Nicaragua))

USAID – US Agency for International Development

USIA – US Information Agency

YPSL – Young People's Socialist League (the youth wing of the Socialist Party of America)

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION: CONNECTING US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

AND IMPERIAL POWER

Preface

On December 17th, 2014, US President Barack Obama gave a speech announcing

prisoner swaps between the US and the Republic of Cuba, as well as plans to reestablish an

embassy in Havana and begin normalizing relations with the socialist country. He argued that the

US has proudly "supported democracy and human rights" since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, but

that over fifty years of attempts to isolate the island nation had failed to advance US interests. US

interests, he held, would be better served by a policy of engagement. For this new policy of

engagement, Obama stated that the US is "significantly increasing the amount of money that can

be sent to Cuba, and removing limits on remittances that support humanitarian projects, the

Cuban people, and the emerging Cuban private sector." He added that in promoting the "free

flow of information," he "authorized increased telecommunications connections between the

United States and Cuba," allowing businesses to sell communications equipment to Cubans.

Finally, Obama stated that "we will continue to support civil society" in Cuba, calling on Cuba to

allow workers to form unions and to invite civil society representatives to attend the Summit of

the America's, a semi-annual meeting for the heads of state throughout the western hemisphere

that Cuba had until then been barred from attending.[1]

Obama's speech touched on a decades-long policy pattern of the US national security

state. The US has supported foreign civil society institutions such as labor unions and media

groups since the beginning of the Cold War, much of it carried out covertly by the Central

Intelligence Agency (CIA). Promoting democracy and human rights abroad had been an informal

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[1] Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Cuba Policy Changes," whitehouse.gov, December 17, 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/statement-president-cuba-policy-changes.

aspect of US foreign policy since at least Woodrow Wilson, and a formal, institutionalized policy since the Reagan administration. By the time of the Obama administration, democracy promotion had grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry and represented a major arm of US foreign policy.

The details of President Obama's speech reveal how an ostensibly idealistic and benevolent topic such as democracy promotion has deep and problematic relationships with elite US economic and security interests. In the speech, Obama celebrated the return of Alan Gross, a US Agency for International Development (USAID) sub-contractor, to the US as part of a prisoner swap with Cuba. Jailed in Cuba between 2009 and 2014, Gross worked for DAI Global (formerly Development Alternatives, Inc.) to help improve internet access to citizens in Cuba. Yet USAID and its contractor DAI were not simply interested in internet infrastructure development for their twenty-million-dollar democracy initiative. The USAID-DAI program was funded through the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, a bill that explicitly called for the overthrow of the Cuban government and earmarked over $200 million for pro-democracy programs in Cuba between 1996 and 2015.[2] Through DAI, USAID paid Gross nearly $600,000 to secretly set up undetectable military-grade internet equipment in Cuban Jewish synagogues.[3]

Cuba had banned USAID and its collaborators from operating in Cuba, so Gross acted covertly. Claiming to be a member of a Jewish humanitarian group, Gross and two unwitting American Jews illegally smuggled in communications equipment and established clandestine communication sites in Cuba's largest cities, Havana, Santiago, and Camaguey, over five trips to Cuba in 2009.[4] On the fourth trip alone, Gross smuggled in eleven Blackberry Curve

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[2] John Stoehr, "The Real Story behind Alan Gross's Work in Cuba," *The Hill*, January 27, 2015, https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/230794-the-real-story-behind-alan-grosss-work-in-cuba/.
[3] Stoehr, "The Real Story behind Alan Gross's Work in Cuba."
[4] Juan O. Tamayo, "Details of Cuba's Case against U.S. Subcontractor Alan Gross Leak Out," *Miami Herald*, January 26, 2012, https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article1939391.html; Desmond Butler, "AP IMPACT:

smartphones, three MacBook laptops, twelve IPods, six external hard-drives, thirteen memory sticks, three internet satellite phones, three routers, three controllers, eighteen wireless access points, networking switches, and three more phones that could make calls over the internet.[5]

Gross's work was part of a larger USAID-led operation to foment unrest in Cuba, the centerpiece of which was a project to create a clandestine "Cuban Twitter" called ZunZuneo (slang for the tweets of Cuba's famous endemic hummingbirds). USAID contractor Creative Associates International (CAI) led the ZunZuneo project, organizing a byzantine multi-national network of front companies funded through a Cayman Islands bank account with money that was publicly earmarked for a project in Pakistan. Cuban users were unaware that the ZunZuneo platform was owned and operated by the US government or that US contractors illegally harvested private user data for political purposes.[6] USAID and its contractors planned to start with apolitical sports, informational, and cultural content targeting young people, followed by political content to spark "smart mobs" against the Cuban government once a critical mass user base was established. Activated in December 2009 around the time of Gross's arrest and offering free text messaging services, ZunZuneo got 25,000 subscribers by August 2010, and 40,000 by March 2011.[7] The project hit serious difficulties, however, when they could not make it sustainable or independent of US government funding, and Cuban authorities caught onto the operation despite restraints placed on the number of users and messages. The service suddenly closed in June 2012.[8]

USAID Contractor Work in Cuba Detailed," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, February 12, 2012, https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-ap-impact-usaid-contractor-work-in-cuba-detailed-2012feb12-story.html.

[5] Butler, "AP IMPACT: USAID Contractor Work in Cuba Detailed."

[6] Desmond Butler, Jack Gillum, and Alberto Arce, "U.S. Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest," *Miami Herald*, April 3, 2014, https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/article1962295.html.

[7] Butler, Gillum, and Arce, "U.S. Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest."

[8] Butler, Gillum, and Arce, "U.S. Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest."

Simultaneous to Alan Gross's operations and the ZunZuneo project, USAID and CAI organized another program to co-opt the Cuban hip-hop community. From early 2009 to 2012, CAI recruited dozens of Cuban artists and boosted their visibility through projects disguised as cultural initiatives. Inspired by previous multimillion-dollar US democracy promotion efforts to undermine the Yugoslavian government of Slobodan Milošević in 2000 through US-funded youth protest movements such as Otpor (Resistance), CAI hired a Serbian music promoter, Rajko Bozic, to head the project. Hiding the USAID money using a Panama front company and a bank in Lichtenstein, Bozic organized a TV program distributed through DVDs starring popular Cuban political rappers Los Aldeanos (the Villagers), and he used ZunZuneo to boost Los Aldeanos and connect them with visiting musicians from other Latin American countries.[9] After it became too risky for Bozic to operate in Cuba, one of CAI's Cuban collaborators flew a group of friendly Cuban musicians to Europe. The trip was disguised as a leadership training program that in-reality trained the musicians in polling, guerilla marketing, and conducting graffiti campaigns.[10]

Taken together, these US operations in Cuba became popularly known as the US attempt at a Cuban "Spring," named after the 2009 Persian Spring and 2010–2012 Arab Spring because of the similar roles of US-based social media and democracy promotion policies in organizing mass mobilizations. USAID documents, reported by journalists and released to the public in heavily redacted form via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), cite the precedent of cell

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[9] Matthew Weaver and Associated Press, "US Agency Infiltrated Cuban Hip-Hop Scene to Spark Youth Unrest," *The Guardian*, December 11, 2014, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/cuban-hip-hop-scene-infiltrated-us-information-youth; Desmond Butler et al., "USAID Op Undermines Cuba's Hip-Hop Protest Scene," *AP News*, December 12, 2014, https://apnews.com/article/7c275c134f1b4a0ca3428929fcece82d.
[10] Butler et al., "USAID Op Undermines Cuba's Hip-Hop Protest Scene."

phone and social media technology to organize protests and undermine governments in Iran and Arab countries as inspiration for their Cuban Twitter project.[11]

The first-term Obama administration effort to bring regime change to Cuba illustrates features of formal, institutionalized US democracy promotion since 1983 that are important for this study. The first significant components are the public-private nature of democracy promotion programs and the existence of a US-led democracy promotion industry. Though private corporations and agents like CAI, Gross, and their Cuban collaborators provided necessary labor, they did so ultimately in the pay of the US government, which approves democracy promotion efforts in alignment with US foreign policy interests. USAID, the US institution with the largest budget dedicated to democracy promotion since the Clinton administration, is a federal government agency tasked with advancing US government foreign policy. A second characteristic demonstrated in the Cuba episode is the transnational character of US democracy promotion. The Cuba programs used a Panama front company, banks in Lichtenstein and the Cayman Islands, money siphoned off from development projects in Pakistan, and a Serbian promoter who himself had been trained in previous transnational democracy promotion ventures.

A third characteristic, as laid out in Obama's speech, is that these operations are marketed as benevolent, progressive, idealistic programs to empower grassroots democratic movements and "people power" against corrupt autocrats. Gross embedding into a supposed Jewish humanitarian group and the ZunZuneo plan of drawing in young people and slowly, covertly

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[11] Anonymous. "An Investigation of Access to and use of Cellular Telephony in Cuba," USAID FOIA Library, folder *ZunZuneo - Cuban Twitter S2.2*, published October 6, 2020, page 25-26, https://foiarequest.usaid.gov/app/ReadingRoom.aspx; Butler, Gillum, and Arce, "U.S. Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest."
The connections between US democracy promotion in Latin America and the Middle East is a minor theme throughout this dissertation, and the Arab Spring is discussed in the penultimate chapter on Syria.

motivating them to become politically active against the Cuban government also speaks to this aspect of democracy promotion. The points in Obama's speech about increasing the flow of information and telecommunications technology between Cuba and the US, as well as the long lists of communications equipment and media platforms and personalities in the USAID Cuba programs, illustrate the fundamental importance of media and communications warfare in crafting these narratives.

Finally, the episode reveals the role of covert operations, and the occasional abrogation of foreign, international, and US laws, in US democracy promotion. Cuban law banned USAID and USAID-supported democracy promotion programs in the country. US law forbids the Department of State (DoS), which oversees USAID, from engaging in covert operations.[12] When Gross was arrested, he had in his possession a high-tech chip that hid satellite phone signals and could not be obtained on the open market, but was used by CIA, Department of Defense (DoD), and DoS officials.[13] USAID denied implications that they had helped Gross obtain the chip, stating, "we are a development agency, not an intelligence agency," and used euphemisms such as "discreet" to avoid labelling the work as a "covert" operation.[14] The US project also violated privacy laws in Spain, where ZunZuneo operated, because it illegally gathered personal data for political purposes and sent unsolicited emails from a Spanish platform.[15]

The US democracy promotion scheme in Cuba exists against a backdrop of over a century of US intervention and neocolonialism in Cuba since 1898. After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, US meddling in Cuba escalated into the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, hundreds of assassination attempts against Cuban leaders, especially Fidel Castro, decades of US-sponsored

[12] Stoehr, "The Real Story behind Alan Gross's Work in Cuba."
[13] Butler, "AP IMPACT: USAID Contractor Work in Cuba Detailed."
[14] Butler, "AP IMPACT: USAID Contractor Work in Cuba Detailed."
[15] Butler, Gillum, and Arce, "U.S. Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest."

terrorism via Operation Mongoose, and, most devastatingly, a US blockade of international trade with Cuba that has cost the small island nation some 144 billion US dollars in lost economic activity between 1960 and 2023. Exploring considerations such as these, this dissertation is, at its core, a study of the violence the US commits in foreign countries. More specifically, it is about how powerful US interests mask violence behind a façade of benevolence, humanitarianism, and democracy promotion. My research examines the art of turning violence and callous pursuit of imperialist, zero-sum self-interest into their opposites through the powers of money, institutions, credentials, aesthetics, and narrative.

An Overview of US Democracy Promotion and this Dissertation

During the 1980s, in the face of an increasingly globalized economy, challenges to US aligned dictatorships in Chile, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and South Africa, and the decline of Marxist threats to global capitalism, the US shifted its foreign policy strategy from stamping out communism to promoting a specific, elite US conception of democracy. To that end, the Reagan administration established the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) as a federally funded NGO in 1983 as a means of exporting neoliberal corporate- and US-friendly democracy abroad. The NED grew out of CIA covert cultural and civil society front operations from 1947 to 1967 wherein the US government influenced labor unions, student, women, and minority activist groups, intellectual discourse, and artistic expression.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has been the other main US institution for promoting democracy since the 1980s. Starting in 1961 as an official arm of US foreign policy, USAID has a decades-long history of supporting intelligence operations at the intersections of economy, government aid, and civil society. When the NED was established in 1983, USAID took on new responsibilities to promote democracy as well as international aid and

economic development, working closely with the NED and its grantees to promote US visions of democracy in alignment with US foreign policy.

By the twenty-first century, the NED and USAID, alongside other US- and Western-government-funded democracy promotion agencies and NGOs, had supported successful movements and programs that overthrew governments unfriendly to the US and facilitated controlled transitions to democracy in US-backed dictatorships. The successful programs created US- and corporate-friendly, elite managed, neoliberal representative democracies. Democracy promotion grew into a multi-billion-dollar transnational industry, and the NED and USAID became key engines of intellectual and communications warfare for US foreign intervention.

By critically engaging the history and political economy of the NED and USAID in the twenty-first century and exploring close continuities and evolutions from the Cold War, I offer a glimpse into historical and recent methods and outcomes of US foreign policy and US government influence in civil society, news, and popular media, both foreign and domestic. I argue that these so-called democracy promotion programs and institutions are soft power engines of US intervention, justifying and advancing state and corporate aligned interests in tandem with harder economic and military powers. In exploring the propaganda, exploitation, realpolitik, and violence tied up in the NED and USAID, I hope to contribute to democratic social movements both within the US and abroad that are struggling to hold power accountable and create a more just, sustainable, shared future.

This study provides a history and political economy of the NED and USAID from a critical historical materialist perspective. As chapter two illustrates, this critical historical materialist perspective is informed by Marxist, Gramscian, and Leninist theory, and media imperialism and deep politics scholarship. In chapter three I trace the history leading up to the

establishment of formal institutionalized democracy promotion under the Reagan administration,

and democracy promotion programs of the NED and USAID during the last decade of the Cold

War. I then explore the growth of US democracy promotion from a few institutions led by the

NED and USAID into a veritable democracy promotion industry, with the NED and USAID

taking more central roles in US intervention abroad through the democracy promotion paradigm

in chapter four. My penultimate chapter offers a detailed case study on the role of USAID, the

NED, and democracy promotion in US intervention in the Syrian Civil War.

A major argument of my study is that US democracy promotion is subordinated to elite,

US economic and security interests in its normal everyday functions. This is an argument that

other critical scholars have made, but I expand this to argue that the NED and USAID commit

and contribute to especially egregious, anti-democratic, and often illegal acts of aggression in

occasions of special geopolitical opportunity and significance. The NED Statement of Principles

and Objectives states that the NED and its grantees "will not pick and choose among the

democratic competitors in countries where such competition is possible or among democratic

parties where they are excluded from political competition, but rather concentrates on

strengthening the organizational skills and democratic convictions of all parties committed to the

values of democracy." It also says that "No Endowment funds, however, may be used to finance

the campaigns of candidates for public office."[16] The Code of Federal Regulations on the

formation of the NED similarly states guidelines that, for all projects funded by the NED, "The

proposing organization may not use NED funds to finance the campaigns of candidates for

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[16] National Endowment for Democracy, "Statement of Principles and Objectives" (National Endowment for Democracy), accessed October 14, 2023, https://www.ned.org/docs/Statement-of-Principles-and-Objectives.pdf?fbclid=IwAR17vl4wxm884bf8NHUc26xMPf4ah7UNZbkdX5zzTxUI4AklwFf7VJMGzdg.

public office."[17] These statutes establish a principle of nonpartisanship, that any parties committed to electoral and constitutional processes should be eligible for support, the NED should not engage in favoritism of any specific party or candidate, and must not fund electoral campaigns for any specific party or candidate. My study demonstrates that the NED, and the programs and institutions it funds, has consistently shown favoritism toward certain political forces and denied assistance to others in alignment with US elite capitalist and imperialist economic and security interests since early in the NED's existence. In addition, the NED consistently abrogates regulations against financing electoral campaigns by creating dubious exceptions and workarounds such as funneling money through third parties.

Regarding other guidelines for all projects funded by the NED, the Code of Federal Regulations states, "The proposing organization must be able to show that it is a responsible, credible organization or group that has a serious and demonstrable commitment to democratic values. (Various factors may be considered in this regard: recognized democratic orientation; established professional reputation; proven ability to perform; existence of organization charter, board of directors, regular audits, etc.)." It also states that "The proposing organization must agree that no NED funds will be used for lobbying or propaganda that is directed at influencing public policy decisions of the government of the United States or of any state or locality thereof."[18] My research shows that, while the NED may not explicitly violate the exact letter of these regulations, the institution and representatives of the NED and other democracy promotion institutions have consistently supported individuals and organizations with highly questionable democratic commitments that engage in or advocate for antidemocratic actions. This study also

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[17] Code of Federal Regulations, "22 CFR Part 67 -- Organization of the National Endowment for Democracy" (Department of State), accessed August 3, 2023, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/part-67.
[18] Code of Federal Regulations, "22 CFR Part 67 -- Organization of the National Endowment for Democracy."

suggests that the US public and US government are indeed target audiences of US democracy promotion programs despite regulations against domestic influencing.

Scholarly Contributions

This study contributes to scholarship on democracy promotion, media imperialism, and deep politics by illuminating the interdisciplinary connections between them. It also adds to existing scholarship on the NED and USAID by emphasizing their roles as media, culture, and propaganda producers. There are only a few critical studies of these institutions, and I provide an update to them as well as a new cultural and media angle on their importance as arms of US soft power. My research also provides new insight on the intricacies of US intervention since 1983. Finally, my study offers a transnational perspective on concrete ways that US soft power has evolved and adapted in the digital information age and how it synergizes with hard power military and economic programs.

A novel theoretical contribution of my research is that I bring the scholarly subfields of media imperialism and US deep state politics into the scholarly conversation around US democracy promotion. Concepts such as the deep state have been popularly misused and misconstrued in recent years by politicians such as Donald Trump, or commentators such as Alex Jones and his outlet *Info Wars*, but the term has an a longer academic history that is relevant to this study. Perhaps the earliest theorizations of a sovereign deep state existing alongside a nominally democratic state comes from Turkey's experiences during the Cold War and its aftermath. The term was first popularized in Turkey to describe "a closed network said to be more powerful than the public state."[19] In 2013 the *New York Times* defined the deep state as "a hard-to-perceive level of government or super-control that exists regardless of elections and

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[19] Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2007), 267.

may thwart popular movements or radical change."[20] Since the 1970s, the Canadian scholar and former diplomat Peter Dale Scott has researched obscured anti-democratic power in the nominally democratic US system of government, coining terms like US parapolitics and deep politics. Scott started cautiously theorizing about a US deep political system in 1993 and US deep state in 2007.[21] Critical democracy promotion scholarship and deep political scholarship should be in conversation because their insights have complementary implications for US democracy and US democracy promotion.

My interest is in how theories and histories of US deep politics and even a deep state might apply to the history and political economy of US democracy promotion. Such theories and histories are relevant for my study because the NED, USAID, and other US democracy promotion institutions have historically converged with the actors, institutions, and interventions that are explored in-depth by scholars of US deep politics. The obscured, anti-democratic, deep political characteristics of US governance and global power also offer pertinent insight to question and critique the professed open and democratic nature of US democracy promotion. Critical democracy promotion scholarship traditionally relies on Gramscian theoretical perspectives. While Gramscian perspectives provide essential foundation for understanding US democracy promotion, I believe that theories and histories of deep politics and media imperialism add important insight into US democracy promotion that should be explored more.

As Gramsci argues, bourgeois democratic hegemony rules by consent armored with the threat of coercion.[22] Apparatuses of coercion are ever present alongside consent, applying

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[20] Grant Barrett, "Opinion | A Wordnado of Words in 2013," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/opinion/sunday/a-wordnado-of-words-in-2013.html.
[21] Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, Revised edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996); Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11*.
[22] Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 235.

coercion selectively against deviance during the "normal" exercise of hegemony, but constituting itself "for the whole society in anticipation of moments of crisis" when "spontaneous consent has failed."[23] William I. Robinson applies this theory to US democracy promotion, arguing that while US democracy promotion attempts to create a system of capitalist class rule by consent, the US resorts to force when such efforts fail, citing in particular the 1991 coup against Haitian president Jean-Bertrant Aristide and subsequent repression of the popular democratic movement in Haiti.[24] These theories open important questions that my study explores.

What are the exact historical situations in which exceptional coercive armor has been applied? How should one distinguish such exceptional episodes from the unexceptional periods in which coercive armor is not applied, or at least not applied as egregiously? Who or what decides when and where such exceptional circumstances exist? Who or what orders the exceptional force that forms such coercive armor? How is such coercive force obscured, normalized, or justified when it is applied? How are hegemonic narratives and ideologies about bourgeois democracy and rule of law maintained during and after exceptional episodes of coercion? Such questions speak to foundational myths and symbols, or what Plato referred to as "noble lies," that American Studies scholars have pondered about US society since the formation of the discipline. Deep political scholarship helps answer these questions by helping researchers understand and locate the limits of hegemonic consent, and when and how coercion operates alongside, and occasionally overrides, the normal and ostensibly consensual processes of bourgeois hegemony. Similarly, media imperialism scholarship offers tools to explore the complex ways that communications, media organizations, and propaganda reinforce, reproduce,

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[23] Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 261, 287, 307.
[24] William I Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 294.

and even resist bourgeois imperialist hegemony both in normal everyday functions as well as in exceptional episodes of economic, political, electoral, and social conflict. Deep political and media imperialism scholarship helps researchers deepen the analysis and expand the applicability of critical democracy promotion scholarship.

Characterizing the NED and USAID as Institutions

Of the two key institutions of this study, USAID is fairly straightforward to understand. As a federal agency, USAID is an official arm of US foreign policy, and its programs are funded and approved by Congress. USAID has an administrator, deputy administrator, inspector general, and several assistant administrators who are nominated by the US President and confirmed by the Senate. While USAID often engages in secretive deep political efforts, the organizational structure is relatively easy to describe.

The NED is more difficult to grasp. Though it was created by an act of Congress and receives almost all of its money from Congress and the Department of State (DoS), the NED is technically a private, non-profit corporation. Its archival records at the Library of Congress are completely embargoed until 2030 and its fulfillment of FOIA law requirements are minimal.[25] The NED has a board of directors that elects or re-elects officers and directors for three-year terms. While Congress can oversee NED programs, its funding grants are voted on by the board of directors. The initial board of directors was handpicked by the Reagan administration alongside government and corporate insiders. It is difficult to establish dates that individuals have served on the NED board of directors because the NED does not publish the information, but general timelines can be inferred by comparing multiple sources.[26]

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[25] Code of Federal Regulations, "22 CFR Part 66 -- Availability of the Records of the National Endowment for Democracy" (Department of State), accessed October 14, 2023, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/part-66.
[26] The NED only publishes the current list of directors online, and that list is deleted every time a new board enters. The NED website does have a list of past directors, but does not specify when they served.

It may be useful to think of the NED as part of a revolving door of US power, where prominent members of the political establishment move between government and corporate offices and continue to have some position of influence when out of official government office. In the 1950s, C. Wright Mills described a revolving door system among the US "power elite," interlocking the realms of business, government, and military through a small number of wealthy and powerful citizens. Democracy promotion scholar Timothy M. Gill finds that Mills's criticism has been partially borne out in the corporate "interlocks," or professional connections, of presidential cabinets. Gill determines that between 1968 and 2018, US presidential cabinets heavily interlocked with the elite corporate sphere, a significant number of cabinet members came from and entered into corporate spheres following their time in office, and there was little difference between the interlocking rates of Republican and Democratic administrations.[27] Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern expands this revolving door concept as well as the popular concept of a US "military-industrial complex," arguing that US power elites operate within a Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think Tank (MICIMATT) complex.[28] The relevance of MICIMATT to the NED can be found in the NED's leadership. As of 2023, NED officers and directors include prominent current and former professionals from military contractors, business, media, academia, and think tanks in addition to labor leaders, diplomats, and federal Republican and Democratic politicians.[29]

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[27] Timothy M. Gill, "The Persistence of the Power Elite: Presidential Cabinets and Corporate Interlocks, 1968–2018," *Social Currents* 5, no. 6 (December 1, 2018): 501, https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496518797857.
[28] Ray McGovern, "Conspiracy Facts and the MICIMATT That Truly Governs the USA - with CIA Whistleblower Ray McGovern," uploaded January 14, 2021, YouTube Video, 1:43:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esreqIyQGI4&t=703s.
[29] See below for a breakdown of current NED officers, as listed on the NED website…
President – Damon Wilson, former executive vice president at the Atlantic Council, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council (NSC) under George W. Bush. Wilson also worked at the US embassy in Beijing and later served as executive secretary and chief of staff at the US embassy in Baghdad. Under W. Bush he also served as Deputy Director in the Private Office of North Atlantic

Because of the NED's position within the revolving door system of US power, some of

its most prominent figures commit their most important actions or hold their most important

positions before entering or after leaving the NED. For example, the neoconservative diplomat

Victoria Nuland had influential positions in the W. Bush and Obama administrations. She left

government and entered the NED in 2018 for a three-year term during the Trump administration,

and then returned to a high position in the Biden administration.[30] Neoconservative diplomat

Elliott Abrams joined the NED board after leaving the W. Bush administration, and served co-

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Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Lord Robertson from 2001 to 2004, and as Director for Central, Eastern, and Northern European Affairs at the NSC from 2004 to 2006, working to promote NATO enlargement and intervention in Afghanistan and the Balkans.

Chairman – Kenneth Wollack, retired 25-year president of the National Democratic Institute, former co-editor of the *Middle East Policy Survey* newsletter and foreign affairs writer at the *Los Angeles Times*, and former legislative director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Vice Chairman – Eileen Donahoe, Executive Director of the Global Digital Policy Incubator at Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law and former ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council

Vice Chairman – Peter Roskam, former Illinois Republican Congressman

Vice Chairman – David E. Skaggs, former Colorado Democratic Congressman

Treasurer – Marlene Colucci, executive director at The Business Council

Secretary – Jendayi Frazer, former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

Current NED directors may be broken down into the following categories. Directors from media and academia include: Anne Applebaum, staff writer for *the Atlantic* and Senior Fellow at the Agora Institute (founded in 2017 with $150 million from a Greek billionaire shipping tycoon) at John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies; Victor Cha, vice dean and professor of government at Georgetown University; Amaney A. Jamal, dean of Princeton School of Public and International Affairs; Minxin Pie, professor of government at Claremont Mckenna College; Scott D. Taylor, Dean of Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies and professor of international relations at Boston University. Directors from the corporate sphere include: Jessica Adelman, VP of corporate affairs and global communications at Mars Inc.; Scott Carpenter, Managing Director of Jigsaw LLC, a Google company; Dayton Ogden, global leader of CEO succession advisory services at Spencer Stuart, a consulting firm. Military contractors include Stephen Biegun, senior vice president of Boeing. NED directors from think tanks include: Rachel Kleinfeld, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and founder and CEO of the Truman National Security Project, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit; Marc Plattner, former program officer of the Century Foundation and fellow at National Humanities Center, former managing editor of *The Public Interest* and longtime founding co-editor of the NED's *Journal of Democracy*; Nadia Schadlow, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and former U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy. NED directors coming from organized labor include Stuart Appelbaum, president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and executive vice-president of United Food and Commercial Workers and Roxanne Brown, Vice President of United Steelworkers International. Professional diplomats represented on the NED board include: Liliana Ayalde, former US ambassador to Brazil and Paraguay; Kelley Currie, former head of DoS Office of Global Criminal Justice and Representative to the UN under the Trump administration; Daniel Fried, a 40-year veteran diplomat who crafted policy of NATO enlargement in Central Europe. NED directors from the Democratic Party include Virginia Senator Tim Kaine and Texas Congressman Joaquin Castro. NED directors from the Republican Party include: former Florida Senator Mel Martinez; New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik; Indiana Senator Todd Young.

[30] National Endowment for Democracy, "NED Welcomes New Board Members," National Endowment for Democracy, February 5, 2018, https://www.ned.org/ned-welcomes-new-board-members/.

terminously on the NED board while in the Trump administration, before leaving the NED board in February 2023 and being nominated for a DoS position in the Biden administration in July 2023.[31] William J. Burns, CIA director since 2021, was an NED director from 2016 to 2020 and president of the Carnegie Institute for International Peace from 2014 to 2021 as well as an ambassador to Russia from 2005 to 2008 and an advisor for Blackstone and PepsiCo between 2015 and 2019.[32] General Wesley Clark was a member of the NED board in 2004 after leaving his position as Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO in 2000.[33] Earlier figures such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Frank Carlucci, and Dante Fascell served on the NED board late in or after their government careers. This study grapples with the deepest centers of US power, but USAID and the NED are not the center of US global power. They are, however, important institutions integrated into a "power elite" network that exercises entrenched, undemocratic power in US government and society regardless of Republican or Democratic control of the executive or legislative branches. These characteristics have implications for the efforts that USAID and the NED engage in abroad under the banner of democracy promotion.

Research Questions

The beginning questions for my research were, how have US and allied media, pop culture, and civil society represented American state and corporate imperialism from the Cold

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[31] Kim Scipes, "Opinion | National Endowment for Democracy: A Tool of US Empire in Venezuela," *Common Dreams*, February 26, 2014, https://www.commondreams.org/views/2014/02/26/national-endowment-democracy-tool-us-empire-venezuela; National Endowment for Democracy, "National Endowment for Democracy Announces Appointment of New Board Members," National Endowment for Democracy, February 2, 2023, https://www.ned.org/national-endowment-for-democracy-announces-appointment-of-new-board-members/.

[32] "Nomination of William J. Burns to Be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency" (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Publishing Office, February 24, 2021), https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/CHRG-117shrg45486.pdf.
The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a major international affairs and democracy promotion think tank where major promoter authors of democracy promotion have worked, namely Thomas Carothers.

[33] Brendan Koerner, "What's the National Endowment for Democracy?," Slate, January 22, 2004, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/01/what-s-the-national-endowment-for-democracy.html.

War through the moments of 1990s US unipolarity, the 2000s War on Terror, and the 2010s transition to great power competition between the US, China, Russia, and Iran? How do US media, pop culture, and civil society reinforce and contest hegemonic interests in their everyday functions, while earning profits for elite interests, employing officially sanctioned sources of information, and setting the boundaries of acceptable public discourse? When, how, and to what extent do deeply entrenched, sometimes shadowy state agencies such as the CIA, NED, USAID, or state connected corporate interests actively collaborate with news and entertainment media such as CNN, BBC and Amazon Studios, and with digital platforms such as Google and Twitter, as well as with apparent civil society groups like the White Helmets or the Primero Justicia political party, to promote US foreign policy? How can previous scholarly explorations of the relationships between media and imperialism, including the works of Herbert Schiller and the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky, apply to twenty-first century US interventions in the unique historical contexts of Venezuela post 1998 election of Hugo Chávez, and of Syria since the re-emergence of open conflict in 2011?

As I crafted my dissertation, however, my methods and theories, as well as some difficult decisions regarding scope and length of the study, brought me further from questions of media and institutional framing and representation and toward the productive processes behind media, civil society, policy, and government institutions. I became invested in the planning, networks, and historical patterns upstream of mainstream narrative formation, of the often-obscured efforts that go into US intervention before any US journalists, editors, artists, or academics interpret them. This meant creating an inventory of historical facts and drawing out their significance rather than critiquing texts and thinkers.

My research questions thus became, how do elite interests and networks in US capitalism and government influence US democracy promotion policy? What roles do US-backed media and civil society under the policy paradigm of democracy promotion play in US foreign interventions? When, how, and to what extent do deeply entrenched, sometimes shadowy institutions such as the CIA, NED, USAID, or state-connected corporate interests actively collaborate with news and entertainment media such as CNN, BBC, and Netflix, and with digital platforms such as Google and Twitter, as well as with apparent civil society groups such as the Syrian White Helmets, to promote US foreign policy? How can scholarly theories on media, imperialism, cultural hegemony, and deep politics help researchers understand the international controversies and significance of US democracy promotion? I found these questions to be more approachable with the methodology I had developed over my project.

Methods and Methodology

I analyze primary source documents of the NED and USAID as the primary subjects of my study, particularly those relevant to NED- and USAID-supported operations in my historical case studies. I obtained these through publicly accessible archives, as well as through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests through the NED and USAID. Through close readings of the document collections and contextualizing them via relevant secondary source journalism and scholarly literature on media imperialism, deep politics, and democracy promotion, I trace the history and political economy of the NED and USAID, the evolution of their strategies and tactics, and how and why their programs functioned in the given case studies.

Synthesizing scholarship on democracy promotion, media imperialism, deep politics, and cultural Cold War historiography, I craft a critical Marxist historical and political economy analysis of the NED and USAID as soft power arms of twenty-first century US foreign

intervention. Taking inspiration from Vincent Mosco's definition of the political economy of

communication as social power relations that constitute the production, distribution, and

consumption of communication resources in society, I focus on how media is organized and

mobilized by political agents to meet their own goals.[34] Mosco stresses that communications are

socially constructed, not neutral, static, or isolated, but political, dynamic, and in dialogue with

social forces that contribute to communication channels.[35] I approach media from the US state

and capitalist democracy promotion structures that mobilize money and communications

personnel and equipment to intervene in foreign countries in pursuit of their own interests. In the

vein of Mosco's critical approach to political economy, I critique the political economies of US

democracy promotion in specific case studies within a broader historical context of US

imperialism post WWII.[36]

Using existing historiography of the cultural Cold War, I situate the NED, USAID, and

twenty-first century US democracy promotion as extensions of US strategy established during

the Cold War to advance US hegemony. Historians and journalists of the Cold War accessed

declassified archives and gathered oral histories of prominent leaders of covert culture and civil

society operations enacted by the American state. One contribution from their work has been the

extensive documentation of CIA covert operations to use ostensibly benevolent and nonpartisan

programs of civil society development, democracy promotion, and cultural initiatives to

influence, undermine, or overthrow other states abroad. These organizations funded and trained

political parties, labor unions, humanitarian groups, media outlets, journalists, art and music

creators and endeavors, philanthropic foundations, and other non-governmental activist

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[34] Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, Second edition (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).

[35] Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*.

[36] Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*.

organizations to push US state agendas in other countries as well as influence domestic

populations to support state endeavors abroad. This scholarship establishes the background from

which the NED and USAID's similar media and civil society work sprung. Cultural Cold War

historiography allows me to historicize the NED- and USAID-influenced programs and media

that I critically analyze. The archival, FOIA, and interview research of these scholars offers

guides for my study to uncover and explore the often-obscured influences government

institutions have over what is popularly understood to be private and artistic enterprises. The

media aspect of my dissertation focuses on how US democracy promotion institutions, alongside

other arms of the US government, directly or indirectly influence the (domestic and

international) media that is made about international conflicts.

While Cold War historians inform how I examine the histories and inner workings of the

NED and USAID, scholars exploring the roles of media in imperialism model my approaches to

said institutions' use of media to support foreign interventionist narratives and programs. I

explore the opaque influence and propaganda campaigns operating on the ground in my case

studies of Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Venezuela, Haiti, Ukraine, and Syria, which then

permeate through popular US and Western news and entertainment media. I put my analysis of

the production and dissemination of this media in conversation with concepts such as Herman

and Chomsky's propaganda model, Jowett and O'Donnell's deflective source propaganda, and

Piers Robinson's information imperialism.[37] These tools help me explore how hegemonic forces

and agents influence what information gets to newsrooms and how that information is then

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[37] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002); Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015); Piers Robinson, "Propaganda, Manipulaton, and the Exercise of Imperial Power: From Media Imperialism to Information Imperialism," in *Media Imperialism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Tanner Mirrlees, eds. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 105–17.

filtered to the public. Investigative studies by scholars like Oliver Boyd-Barrett for Syria and Ukraine, and Eva Golinger and Alan MacLeod for Venezuela inform my approaches to Western mainstream media reporting, intervention, propaganda warfare, and narrative battles regarding conflicts in those countries.[38] Their methodologies critiquing sources used by Western media, such as the USAID-funded Syrian White Helmets or NED-funded Venezuelan NGOs and political parties, are helpful in exploring how USAID and the NED influence both conditions on the ground as well as US and Western news and political discourse about those countries.

Lastly, understanding the inner workings, key figures, and programs of the specific institutions I am looking at is essential to the dissertation. My approach to the NED and USAID is influenced by critical democracy promotion scholarship. Early democracy promotion critics like Beth Sims, William I. Robinson, and Colin S. Cavell made the connection between the covert influence campaigns chronicled by cultural Cold War scholarship and the NED-led democracy promotion programs that they studied.[39] These authors and later writers like Neil Burron, Dionysus Markakis, and Timothy M. Gill also applied Gramscian Marxist theory on imperialism, capital accumulation, and ideological hegemony to analyses of the socio-political-economic structures and functions of transnational US democracy promotion.[40] I build on their work by bringing theories of media imperialism and deep politics into the conversation.

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[38] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2016); Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Conflict Propaganda in Syria: Narrative Battles* (London: Routledge, 2021); Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2006); Alan MacLeod, *Bad News from Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); Alan MacLeod, "Chavista 'Thugs' vs. Opposition 'Civil Society': Western Media on Venezuela," *Race & Class* 60, no. 4 (April 1, 2019): 46–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396818823639.

[39] Beth Sims, "National Endowment for Democracy (NED): A Foreign Policy Branch Gone Awry," Policy Report (Albuquerque: Council on Hemispheric Affairs and the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, March 1990); William I Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*; Colin S. Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy: The National Endowment for Democracy & U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2002).

[40] Neil Burron, *The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas* (London: Routledge, 2012); Dionysis Markakis, *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: The Pursuit of*

Beth Sims, Eva Golinger, and Timothy M. Gill made impressive use of FOIA research and leaked documents to connect democracy promotion with imperialist military, intelligence, government, and corporate ideologies and networks. I borrow from their methods when using my primary sources obtained from government leaks, FOIA, and archives. This primary source research allows me to contribute to the relevant scholarship beyond my synthesizing of secondary sources from critical scholarly theory, history, and investigative journalism.

In sum, critics of democracy promotion offer templates for how I investigate the NED and USAID and then situate them within a broader Marxist critique of US imperialism. Scholars of media imperialism allow me to explore the role of news and entertainment media and propaganda in these institutions and US foreign intervention. Meanwhile, scholarship on deep politics helps me locate powerful actors and the moments and methods of exceptional action among US foreign policy elites. Finally, historical studies of US imperialism, political culture, and particularly the Cold War allow me to situate my account of US democracy promotion in a wider context. Together, these authors inspire my approach to detail, critically theorize, and historicize the inner workings, networks, and functions of US democracy promotion, its role in supporting imperialist interventions abroad, and how it influences news and popular media to promote said interventionist projects.

Positionality

My first political memory as a working-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestant cisgender heterosexual boy from Metro Detroit suburbia was of watching US soldiers "help" Iraqis tear down the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad on Fox News, as part of their TV coverage of

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Hegemony (London: Routledge, 2016); Timothy M. Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela: The Legacy of Race, Neo-Colonialism, and Democracy Promotion* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022).

the 2003 US-Iraq War. The pro-Bush-administration, Murdoch-owned news outlet framed it as representative of the US's benevolent mission to help the weak and oppressed Iraqis overcome their supposedly backward and dictatorial past to enter a new era of freedom and democracy. As I grew historically and politically conscious, I was struck by the imperial criminality of the Iraq War, how it reflected US interventions in the Middle East and throughout the world, and how many citizens and media figures of the wealthiest country of the world were convinced to support such a war. This experience brought me to critical histories of the US, to Marxist theory, and to my study of twenty-first century US imperialism and transnational democracy promotion.

My critical Marxist position encourages me to look for critical readings of the NED, USAID, US democracy promotion generally, and the media that portrays these efforts in a favorable light. However, my position as an American studies scholar within the US academy prevents me from speaking exclusively to the social movement audiences for whom this study is most relevant and dedicated to. While I maintain a critical stance, I must indulge the hegemonic ideologies and powers enmeshed in the US university system. My goal is to be taken seriously within the academy for career reasons. Therefore, I must, to an extent, maintain a clinical approach that accommodates entrenched power. This entails intellectually valuing foreign policy establishment and scholarly sources, despite my disagreements with their funding, social positions, and political outlooks above "non-scholarly" work grounded in social movements and counter-hegemonic politics, despite how valuable I find their perspectives to be.

Limitations

I limited my study to the history and political economy of the NED, USAID and democracy promotion programming associated with them in brief case studies of Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Venezuela, Haiti, Ukraine, and Syria. This means I cannot provide a

comprehensive study of the NED and USAID, both of which have led democracy promotion programs in over 100 countries since 1983. There are also dozens more democracy promotion institutions within the US, as well as numerous and complimentary initiatives and institutions among the US's foreign state and corporate allies. The scope of evidence and subjects chosen for this project limit my analysis to two US institutions and a handful of case studies, meaning that I am unable to make claims about the methods, interests, and outcomes of international democracy promotion or US foreign policy as a whole.

Media imperialism and deep politics are not theoretically exclusive to the US. Other states, including the UK, France, Germany, Brazil, Turkey, India, Iran, Russia, and China, also have varying capacities to wield their own media and cultural soft power over weaker nations as well as shadowy oligarchic elements in their nominally democratic political systems. My critical history and political economy is restricted to a largely US perspective on US actions abroad in specific times and places. Thus, I cannot cover all the complexities and history for each case study. The US and its collaborators are not the only actors pursuing their own goals in any of the case studies. Critical studies of other individuals, factions, and governments and their own histories are necessary for a fuller understanding of each given case study and the broader geopolitical context within which US democracy promotion operates. However, given my positionality in the US with limited resources and familiarity of other countries and peoples, I chose to focus my critical eye on ruling forces of my own country, while acknowledging other powers also have agency. Other countries have their own histories, and it should not be assumed that any conflicts or problems within them are simply the result of US influences. Because my evidence cannot properly account for all the forces involved both inside and outside each country in each case study, this manuscript cannot claim to judge the social or historical causes,

meanings, or significance of each case study. Rather, I provide a window into what US soft power did or attempted to do in each case, which is one of many significant factors involved.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter two overviews the scholarship that informs this study. Research on US democracy promotion splits broadly into two political camps, those who promote the mission, policies, and institutions of US democracy promotion and those who critique them, often from a Marxist and Gramscian perspective. I review these camps and point to influences that the democracy promotion industry (which the "promoter" authors tend to have professional relationships with) has on democracy promotion scholarship. I situate my work within the critical Marxist tradition, explaining my focus on US imperialism rather than a focus on transnational capitalist globalization that authors like William I. Robinson highlight. Using relevant history, I demonstrate that the proliferation, exportation, and promotion of a particular, circumscribed form of US representative government or "democracy" has been intimately tied to US imperialist power projection and its associated racialized violence since the founding of the US. I then describe my approach, informed by Leninist and media imperialism scholarship, to media, propaganda, imperialism, and hegemony as they relate to US democracy promotion. I end the chapter explaining how I apply scholarship on US deep politics to US democracy promotion.

Chapter three establishes an early history of institutionalized US democracy promotion, beginning with its origins in US neocolonial empire building post-WWII and the deep political CIA-led covert intellectual and cultural Cold War against global anti-imperialist and communist forces from 1947 to 1967. I also trace the rise of elite neoconservative factions in US politics, connecting their involvement in the CIA-led Cultural Cold War with their later influences on US democracy promotion. In addition, I introduce USAID's early years in the 1960s as a deep

politics-adjacent imperialist precursor to the NED and US democracy promotion. I then detail US elite strategic responses to the exposures of CIA covert cultural fronts in 1967 and domestic and international crises of the 1960s and 1970s that threatened US imperialism. I trace how such crisis responses contributed to the formation of the NED in 1983, and how US foreign policy elites reconciled democracy promotion with their national security imperatives. I conclude with Cold War case studies of NED and USAID programs supporting deep political US interventions in Nicaragua with the Iran-Contra Affair and Afghanistan with the CIA-led Operation Cyclone.

Chapter four overviews NED and USAID in the post-Cold War era. I outline theoretical applications for my NED and USAID intervention case studies. I explore the "color revolution" method of regime change developed in part by US defense intellectual and democracy promotion expert Gene Sharp, Lance DeHaven-Smith's concept of State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs), Aaron Good's theory of "exceptionism," Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, Jowett and O'Donnell's concept of deflective source propaganda, and Piers Robinson's information imperialism. I discuss the post-Cold War neoconservative-shaped US foreign policy elite grand strategy for global hegemony and the importance of democracy promotion in that grand strategy. I also briefly outline the growth of NED and USAID budgets and the proliferation of democracy promotion institutions and programs into a democracy promotion industry with hundreds of career professionals dedicated to the promotion of democracy abroad. The bulk of the chapter is then dedicated to four case studies of NED and USAID democracy promotion efforts, namely Yugoslavia, Venezuela, Haiti, and Ukraine. In each case study I explore how deep political and media imperialism scholarship can help democracy promotion scholars better understand and critique both the specific institutions and policies of the NED and USAID as well as the Western democracy promotion industry as a whole.

Chapter five offers a detailed case study of intervention in Syria by the US and its NATO and Middle East allies since 2011. I place the Syrian intervention in a broader history of US intervention in Muslim-majority societies, namely Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Afghanistan, and the Arabian Peninsula, demonstrating important deep political patterns of the US weaponizing sectarian, theocratic, and extremist forces against anti-colonial nationalist and socialist forces. I focus especially on the use of media and civil society in these historical precedents to both provide pretext for US intervention and also to facilitate US and US-allied forces in said interventions. I also place the soft power of democracy promotion in the context of the hard power of weapons, fighters, and sanctions that the US and its allies employed in Syria during the Syrian Civil War, and the sectarian characteristics of that conflict. I demonstrate that in Syria the US and its allies supported sectarian Sunni Arab Salafi forces. I then detail a largely covert billion-dollar effort by the US and its allies, funded by the NED and especially USAID, to create pro-rebel anti-Assad Syrian media and civil society to both justify US intervention and facilitate anti-Syrian-government rebel forces on the ground. I focus in particular on one organization funded by USAID that is a product of Western intervention, Syrian Civil Defence, popularly known as the White Helmets. I argue that the White Helmets represent a synthesis of media and civil society projects in the Syrian intervention that create dubious narratives favoring decisive intervention and regime change in Syria. Again, I explore how US democracy promotion intersects with media imperialism and deep politics.

I conclude this dissertation with a synthesized analysis of all the democracy promotion case studies to grasp their significance in US imperialism. I reiterate my argument that the NED and USAID represent important engines of intellectual warfare and deep political power that facilitate and normalize exceptionism, which is the elite logic of abrogating rule of law to

preserve and advance elite capitalist imperialist interests. I relate this argument to the case studies, wherein US democracy promotion creates pretexts for intervention, trains intellectual and media warriors to fight geopolitical adversaries of the US, and connects the US ruling bourgeois and political class with their ideological and class allies in hard-to-reach places of the globe. Knowing that the dissertation is not the final word on the subject, I discuss additional questions and avenues for future inquiry that this study might inspire. I hope my current work contributes to a historical inventory and theoretical toolkit that aids scholars and activists in establishing what has happened with US imperialism and global geopolitics since 1983 and in efforts to intervene politically in US society, to address, with clear eyes, the challenges that institutions such as the NED and USAID create.

CHAPTER TWO – A MARXIST APPROACH TO US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AS REFLECTING MEDIA IMPERIALISM AND DEEP POLITICS

This chapter describes the debates on US democracy promotion in English-language scholarship, pertinent historical considerations, and the intellectual tools employed in this dissertation. It also introduces the conversations about media imperialism and deep politics that this study adds to US democracy promotion scholarship. Scholarly debates about US democracy promotion polarize around promoters and critics of US democracy promotion. The promoter side of the debate enjoys a dominant position in the scholarship, due in part to the state and corporate funded democracy promotion industry that has developed since the establishment of the NED in 1983, which has encouraged such perspectives. Literature on US democracy promotion offers a spectrum of critiques of democracy promotion policies, institutions, and histories, but only the critical Gramscian and Marxist oriented literature questions the foundational premises of US democracy promotion. This dissertation builds on that minority critical tradition.

The critical scholarship on US democracy promotion offers essential insight into US democracy promotion's narrow conceptions of democracy and its practical subservience to US economic and security interests, but there is substantial room for updating the literature up to the 2010s and grappling with the relationships among US democracy promotion, media imperialism, and deep politics. US democracy promotion institutions like the NED and USAID engage in profound propaganda, media, and civil society campaigns to facilitate US foreign policy agendas abroad, and there is an established body of media imperialism scholarship that explores the dialectically intertwined political economies of media, propaganda, cultural hegemony, and imperial power. Yet democracy promotion scholarship has not substantially engaged media imperialism scholarship; it leaves analysis of media and propaganda to surface inquiries,

glossing over specific media strategies and means of media production and dissemination employed in democracy promotion interventions.

In addition, critical democracy promotion scholarship has not directly engaged with scholarship that explores US deep politics, or the secretive, top-down, oligarchic, and even criminal features of the nominally democratic US state. It has taken this approach even though US democracy promotion has been profoundly influenced by top-down, oligarchic elements of US society that feature prominently in deep political scholarship, including secretive institutions such as the CIA or elite networks associated with the corporate elite and neoconservatism. Some of the most exceptional interventions by US democracy promotion institutions, such as in Nicaragua and Afghanistan in the 1980s, Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Haiti, Venezuela, and Iraq in the 2000s, and Ukraine and Syria in the 2010s, were important pieces of the larger interventions detailed in deep politics scholarship. These larger interventions include the Iran-Contra affair, the CIA's Operation Cyclone in Afghanistan, NATO's carving up of Yugoslavia, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2014 Euromaidan coup in Ukraine, and the CIA's Operation Timber Sycamore in Syria. Deep political scholarship can thus help critical studies of US democracy promotion examine the connections between the numerous interventions pursued under the banner of promoting democracy and the democracy promotion industry's integration with other areas of concentrated power in US society.

The subsequent pages of this chapter describe how scholarly discourse on US democracy promotion polarized between two broad camps of promoters and critics and orients my work within the critical scholarship. I then use scholarship on democracy promotion to demonstrate the strategically circumscribed conceptualization of democracy employed by US institutions such as the NED and USAID. I also trace the deeper historical origins of US democracy promotion back

to early US westward expansion and founding elite factions that sought to restrain US democracy, articulating a longer connection between US imperialism and US democracy promotion that the critical Marxist scholarship has yet to fully explore. The chapter then provides my specific Marxist approach, inspired by Vladimir Lenin and media imperialism scholarship, to media, propaganda, imperialism, and hegemony as they relate to US democracy promotion. I conclude with a discussion of how scholarship on US deep politics contributes to my history and political economy of US democracy promotion.

Scholarly Discourse on US Democracy Promotion

A major divide exists in democracy promotion scholarship between promoters and critics (or skeptics) of democracy promotion. Timothy Gill calls these camps "neo-Tocquevillian" and "neo-Marxist" scholars, respectively.[41] Promoter or neo-Tocquevillian authors tend to take at face value the claimed purposes and missions of US democracy promotion. Their critiques are thus limited to problematic episodes, methods, and unfortunate missteps while still defending the legitimacy of the broader projects or institutions. The promoter side tends to take a liberal internationalist stance that US democracy promotion is possible, desirable, and mostly aligned with purported ideals.[42] Some of the most influential voices on this side include Thomas

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[41] Timothy M. Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela: The Legacy of Race, Neo-Colonialism, and Democracy Promotion* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022), 12.
For a brief promoter or neo-Tocquevillian perspective on the division within the scholarly discourse on democracy promotion, see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 59-64; Lincoln Abraham Mitchell, *The Democracy Promotion Paradox* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 12

[42] The term liberal or liberalism here is defined as a political philosophy that emphasized constitutional rule of law, political and legal equality, individual rights, especially the rights to private property and personal expression, and competitive, free, and fair elections to establish and legitimize governments. Liberal internationalism as a foreign policy persuasion emphasized multilateral institutions and policies to promote liberal democracy and enforcement of liberal norms, sometimes called the "rules-based international order" by US politicians and pundits. This stood in contrast to nationalists and neoconservatives who tended to decry that the US lost sovereignty by involving itself in multilateral institutions like the UN or International Criminal Court, and sought to maintain US capacity for unilateral action abroad. Both liberal internationalists and neoconservatives were generally committed to liberal norms and both could promote either a militant interventionist or pacifist anti-interventionist foreign policy,

Carothers and Tony Smith.[43] Their perspectives hold significant influence in mainstream think tanks and democracy promotion institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are largely dominated by liberal internationalist thinking.

Indeed, the promoters or neo-Tocquevillians represent a majority in the overall scholarship on the NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion, and this is due in no small part to the democracy promotion industry of the West that encouraged promoter or neo-Tocquevillian perspectives. By "democracy promotion industry," I mean the broad transnational network of government agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, think tanks, and corporations that engage in Western democracy promotion efforts in the twenty-first century.[44] "The West" or "Western" is a contested term but here it essentially refers to the US and its NATO allies plus UK-derived settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, and Israel as well as East Asian states, established with instrumental assistance from the US post-WWII, such as South Korea, Japan, and the post-Chinese Civil War Republic of China. This bloc of countries is sometimes referred to as the Global North. Many authors in the promoter camp work in or collaborate with Western institutions that engage in democracy promotion such as the NED, the NED's core grantees, USAID, Freedom House, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Chatham House, and a plethora of other think tanks, NGOs, and government agencies.[45]

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although in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries both establishment neoconservatives and liberal internationalists have advocated a militant interventionist foreign policy, especially with regards to democracy promotion.

[43] Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*; Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy*, Expanded Edition (Princeton University Press, 2012).
Shortened note - Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, 24.

[44] US democracy promotion began under Reagan with a few institutions associated with the NED. Especially after 1991 however, as the US government increased budgets for democracy promotion and more government agencies and NGOs added democracy promotion to their institutional missions and other Western countries began investing in democracy promotion efforts, democracy promotion became a veritable industry filled with professionals and institutions primarily dedicated to promoting democracy abroad.

[45] Examples of this include Thomas Carothers, Samuel P. Huntington, John Norris, Michael McFaul, Larry Diamond, Gene Sharp, Marlene Spoerri, and Lincoln Mitchell.

Lending limited credence to critiques of US imperialist influence over development and democracy promotion institutions, promoter authors treat the institutions as basically independent entities pursuing their professed ideals, hail the achievements of their programs, and direct criticism narrowly where they see the institutions being ineffectual, misappropriated, or undervalued. One of the most prominent examples of this is John Norris, the deputy director for policy and strategic insights at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and longtime government and NGO aid and development official. His books celebrate USAID, advocate for increased funding and autonomy for the institution, and receive praise from former USAID heads and humanitarian interventionists like Samantha Power.[46] Michael McFaul and Larry Diamond similarly champion the democracy promotion of US institutions, including the NED, and they also straddle the worlds of academia, NGOs, and government.[47] Scholarly advocates Jorge Heine and Brigitte Weiffen adopt the definitions of freedom and democracy by US-government funded institutions such as Freedom House, which categorizes other countries as "free," "partly free" or "unfree." Heine and Weiffen limit their critiques to arguing that the US does not commit itself enough to promoting its own view of democracy in regions such as Latin America through US-dominated multilateral institutions like the Organization of American States (OAS).[48]

Perhaps the most influential democracy promotion advocate is Thomas Carothers, the chair for democracy studies at the democracy promotion think tank, the Carnegie Endowment for

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[46] John Norris, *The Disaster Gypsies: Humanitarian Workers in the World's Deadliest Conflicts* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2007); John Norris, *The Enduring Struggle: The History of the U.S. Agency for International Development and America's Uneasy Transformation of the World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

[47] Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World*, First Edition (New York: Griffin, 2009); Michael McFaul, *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We Should and How We Can* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

[48] Jorge Heine and Brigitte Weiffen, *21st Century Democracy Promotion in the Americas: Standing up for the Polity*, (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

International Peace.[49] Carothers has authored, co-authored, or edited ten books on the topic since the early 1990s. His works target democracy promotion professionals as a major audience, providing part-liberal internationalist, part-realist strategy guides on how to better understand and operate in specific countries and how to learn from successes and failures of past programs. His monograph on US democracy promotion in Latin America reflects this approach as it analyzes political dynamics in the US and abroad to offer ostensibly detached evaluations of whether democracy promotion efforts attained their stated goals and why.[50]

Carothers exemplifies a tendency among promoter authors to couch their discussions of democracy promotion in pragmatic terms of international power, competition, and advancement of strategic goals even as they highlight the benevolent ideals of US democracy promotion. John Ikenberry finds that liberal internationalist democracy promotion was more influential in US foreign policy establishment policy since World War II than many assume, and that it represented a positive "liberal grand strategy" of establishing liberal democratic order within the West. This strategy derived from US democratic culture, democratic peace theory, and the influence of international business interests, and it came before, ran parallel to, and outlived the negative containment strategy of fighting global communism and undermining the Soviet Union.[51] Efforts to reconcile the supposed ideals of democracy promotion with pragmatic or

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[49] In 2021, the largest donors for the Carnegie Endowment included American oligarchs in the form of the Carnegie Corporation, the intelligence connected Robert and Ardis James Foundation, the Pritzker Foundation and Charles Koch Foundation, and Facebook, European oligarchs like Jörn Rausing, George Soros's Open Society Foundations, and the Robert Bosch Foundation, and the US Military's European Command. Carothers also has also served as a researcher for the NED, a fellow for the Council on Foreign Relations and guest scholar for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and an employee or consultant for the US Department of State, USAID, National Democratic Institute, and Open Society Foundations. See Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, x.

[50] Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (University of California Press, 1993), 243.

[51] G. John Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Grand Strategy: Democracy and National Security in the Post-War Era," in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108-112, 124-126.

realist foreign policy interests became important partly because these efforts facilitate the professional relationships that many democracy promotion authors have with government, corporate, and nonprofit institutions that fund and support democracy promotion programs. Such efforts and relationships are further explored in chapter three.

This dissertation sees the writings of promoter authors as disclosing insider insights and ideas for primary source investigations into the NED and USAID, but its perspective contrasts with promoter authors, employing a critical Marxist approach and building on scholarship that takes a critical approach to the democracy promotion institutions. Scholars critical of US democracy promotion show skepticism toward the assumptions and goals at the heart of US democracy promotion. They often take a Gramscian or Marxist approach, exploring the NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion not as genuine programs for human rights and democracy but as tools for advancing US geopolitical and corporate interests and for seeking neoliberal reform and even regime change of governments that do not accommodate US interests. The critical/Marxist perspective has little prestige among the world of democracy promotion NGOs and government agencies but is influential in anti-imperialist activist, alternative media, and grassroots popular civil society networks.

Perhaps the most influential authors on the critic side include William I. Robinson, Eva Golinger, Robert Pee, and Timothy Gill.[52] Robinson demonstrates how the conception of democracy in US policy has been deeply influenced by a term called "polyarchy." Coined by Yale political theorist Robert Dahl in 1956, this concept was developed in elite academic circles

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[52] See William I Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2006); Robert Pee, *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy: Foreign Policy under the Reagan Administration* (London: Routledge, 2016); Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli, eds., *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019); Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela.*

with close ties to the US policymaking community.[53] The concept emphasizes the social

conditions and electoral procedures of political representative democracy, separated from social

or economic spheres.[54] In Robinson's critique, polyarchy "refers to a system in which a small

group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice

in elections carefully managed by competing elites."[55] Robert Pee meanwhile traces the early

history of democracy promotion institutions and policies, showing that the creation of the NED

and democracy promotion under Reagan was driven by national security imperatives and

represented an evolution of early-Cold War CIA public-private political warfare fronts.[56] Other

critical scholars like Neil Burron and Timothy Gill emphasize the discourses of cultural

superiority used by agents and institutions of US democracy promotion, wherein Western states

decide what democracy means and view Global South countries as needing to follow in the

footsteps of Western societies to achieve higher levels of democratic development.[57]

    Much of the earliest critical scholarship on US democracy promotion through the NED

and USAID focuses on where post-1983 US democracy promotion started in earnest, namely,

Latin America and the Caribbean from the 1980s to early-1990s. Sociologist and Latin

Americanist William I. Robinson, drawing on his personal experiences as a journalist supporting

the Sandinista Revolution of 1980s Nicaragua, was the first English-language scholar to provide

a comprehensive theoretical and methodological model of how to approach, understand, and

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[53] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 49.

[54] Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory, Expanded Edition*, Expanded edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 83-85.

[55] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 49.

[56] Robert Pee, "Political Warfare Old and New: The State and Private Groups in the Formation of the National Endowment for Democracy," *49th Parallel*, no. 22 (Autumn 2008): 21–36; Pee, *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy*.

[57] Neil Burron, *The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas* (London: Routledge, 2012), 37; Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela*.

critique US transnational democracy promotion.[58] Robinson's first work on US electoral

intervention in Nicaragua explores connections between the CIA's Cold War cultural fronts and

the public-private NED network since 1983.[59] His 1996 book, *Promoting Polyarchy*, critiques

global US democracy promotion from a Marxist perspective and remains influential throughout

democracy promotion scholarship. He greatly expands on Barry Gills and Joel Rocamora's

theories about the US waging what they called "low-intensity democracy." This term refers to

efforts, on one side, to undermine and overthrow unfriendly regimes and replace them with US-

friendly neoliberal democracies, and efforts, on the other side, to facilitate controlled transitions

from undemocratic US-friendly administrations to US-friendly neoliberal democracies.[60]

Colin Cavell, a political scientist of US foreign policy and international relations,

expands on Robinson. He offers a Gramscian Marxist history and political economy of the NED

as an institution and tool of US foreign policy, with special attention again paid to Latin America

and the Caribbean. Whereas Robinson rooted his 1996 work in globalization studies, seeing

democracy promotion as a tool of transnational capital superseding the nation-state, Cavell

frames the NED and democracy promotion as a US imperialist effort to attain and maintain

unipolar global hegemony.[61] Cavell's history and theorization of the NED in the late twentieth

century serves as a theoretical and methodological model for my own investigation into the NED

and USAID in the twenty-first century. I generally share Cavell's perspective that the crux of the

issue is US-led state and corporate imperialism, with its allies and their transnational interests

playing a supporting role, rather than Robinson's view of global capitalism transcending the

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[58] William Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*.

[59] Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain*.

[60] Barry Gills and Joel Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1992): 501–23, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3992198.

[61] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 4; Colin S. Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy: The National Endowment for Democracy & U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), xvi.

bounds of nation-states and their empires. While Cavell's work has not been as influential as Robinson's, most critical scholars of US democracy promotion since Cavell have shared the general perspective that the heart of the problem is US imperialism. These scholars see state imperialism as primary due to US reassertion of unilateral interventionism and imperialist prerogative during the so-called War on Terror, and the continued relevance of nation-state-based conflict in global geopolitics that have accelerated into a second Cold War between the US, China, and Russia.

Robert Pee and William Schmidli provide updates on the early histories of the NED, emphasizing the Reagan administration's strategic development of democracy promotion to advance its foreign policy agenda.[62] Due in part to Pee and Schmidli's focus on the late years of the Cold War, before globalization's full historical moment in the 1990s, they emphasize US national, rather than globalized elite, security and foreign policy objectives when evaluating the NED and democracy promotion generally. While they focus on the domestic political forces that shaped the NED and late-Cold War democracy promotion, my study focuses more on how those domestic strategies and tactics played out in foreign lands and what that can say about the functions and outcomes of the US democracy promotion institutions.

As these debates within the critical or neo-Marxist scholarship show, democracy promotion literature has consistently grappled with the concept of globalization, defined here as economic, cultural, and social integration, exchange, and interdependence across the entire globe, especially in the post-Cold War era during the global dominance of neoliberal capitalism. As Robinson argued in 1996, democracy promotion advanced capitalist imperialist globalization by undermining socialist forces and pushing more countries toward neoliberal free market

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[62] Pee, *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy*; Pee and Schmidli, *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion*.

policies that opened their markets, labor, and resources to the global economy dominated by Western and especially US multinational corporations.[63] However, my study also views US democracy promotion as having contributed to a decline of globalization in the twenty-first century.

Since 1983, because the US pursued confrontation with countries perceived as unfriendly or incompatible with US security and economic interests and subordinated democracy promotion to US elite interests, democracy promotion became tied up in larger geopolitical issues such as NATO expansion and great power competition. US democracy promotion policies targeted, isolated, and undermined governments in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, North Korea, Serbia, Belarus, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, along with dozens of other countries that tended to be more aligned with other great powers like Russia and China. Because the US tied democracy promotion policy to larger geopolitical efforts like opening up foreign economies via neoliberal reforms or expanding US military reach, it contributed to the shared grievances of foreign countries that motivated them to form an anti-US, anti-Western bloc of nations. In 1997, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski described this "'antihegemonic' coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances" led by China, Russia, and Iran as potentially the most dangerous possible scenario for US power going into the twenty-first century.[64]

By 2023, these rising tensions resulted in the redivision of the world into a bipolar, and perhaps emerging multipolar, world order between those in the Western camp, and those in what may be called a counter-hegemonic camp led by China. Timothy Gill explores this dynamic in studies of US democracy promotion in Venezuela. He argues that 2010 Venezuelan anti-NGO

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[63] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*
[64] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 54.

legislation designed to curb the influence of US democracy promotion policies and institutions in Venezuelan society was motivated by US anti-Bolivarian policies as well as the existence of an alternative international community that Venezuela could align with, exemplified by nations like Russia, Belarus, Iran, and China.[65] In the era of great power competition, officially announced by US Secretary of Defense James Mattis on January 19th 2018, the world has been redivided into essentially three worlds: the US-led Western camp, the Chinese-led counter-hegemonic camp (including Russia, Belarus, Syria, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe), and the rest of the globe, which is to one extent or another aligned with one or both of the two camps.

Critical democracy promotion scholarship continued to lend special attention to Latin America in the twenty-first century. Lawyer and journalist Eva Golinger provides FOIA research into NED operations in Venezuela during the Hugo Chávez administration, including US support for an attempted 2002 anti-democratic military coup against Chávez.[66] Reflecting Cavell's focus on US empire, Golinger frames democracy promotion in Venezuela as an extension of the US's Monroe Doctrine and regime change schemes of the Cold War. Her findings and critiques provided a foundation that another critical author, Timothy Gill, built on.

The most prominent scholarly voice on US democracy promotion in Venezuela is sociologist Timothy M. Gill. His work explores how US democracy promotion in Venezuela represents a regional strategic shift from promoting neoliberal polyarchy to neutralizing social democratic and socialist participatory democracy, and that the shift is informed by racist ideas of

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[65] Timothy M. Gill, "Unpacking the World Cultural Toolkit in Socialist Venezuela: National Sovereignty, Human Rights and Anti-NGO Legislation," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2017): 621–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1199259; Timothy M. Gill, "The Venezuelan Government and the Global Field: The Legislative Battle over Foreign Funding for Nongovernmental Organizations," *Sociological Forum* 31, no. 1 (2016): 29–52.

[66] Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code*; Eva Golinger, *Bush Versus Chávez* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

American exceptionalism and the cultural and political backwardness of Latinx societies.[67] Through investigating the schemes and programs of the NED and USAID in Venezuela, Gill theorizes broader US imperial strategy evolution in Venezuela and the region from Bush Jr., to Obama, to Trump.[68] Gill's 2022 book, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, is the most comprehensive investigation of twenty-first century NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion efforts in any single Latin American country.[69] US efforts to undermine the Bolivarian forces in Venezuela illustrate the irregularities of US democracy promotion because not only was Chávez democratically elected, he and his supporters also promoted a more expansive, participatory vision of democracy. Neil Burron demonstrates similar anti-democratic US efforts in Bolivia against the expansive vision of democracy pursued by the indigenous-based Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement for Socialism, MAS).[70] As will be explored later in this chapter, the narrow definition of democracy that the US promotes through the NED and USAID reveals the economic and national security interests at the heart of US democracy promotion.

The Middle East was the last region of the globe for the US to start NED and USAID-led democracy promotion activities, which only gained substantial traction with George W. Bush's War on Terror. Perhaps the first critical study of US democracy promotion in the Middle East came from UK-based international relations scholar Dionysis Markakis, who explored US

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[67] Timothy M. Gill, "From Promoting Political Polyarchy to Defeating Participatory Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Far Left in Latin America," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 24, no. 1 (2018): 72–95, https://doi.org/10.5195/JWSR.2018.750; Timothy M. Gill, "The Civilizing Mission Persists: Racism and Justification for US Intervention into Socialist Venezuela," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 19, no. 2 (2022): 309–28, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X21000394.

[68] Timothy M. Gill, "Shifting Imperial Strategies in Contemporary Latin America: The U.S. Empire and Venezuela under Hugo Chávez," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32, no. 3 (2019): 294–310, https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12216; Timothy M Gill and Joseph Marshall Brown, "Two Decades of Imperial Failure: Theorizing U.S. Regime Change Efforts in Venezuela from Bush II to Trump," *Class, Race and Corporate Power* 8, no. 2 (2020): 16; Timothy Gill ed, *The Future of U.S. Empire in the Americas: The Trump Administration and Beyond* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

[69] Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela*.

[70] Burron, *The New Democracy Wars*.

democracy promotion in Egypt, Kuwait, and Iraq from the administrations of Bill Clinton to

George W. Bush.[71] Similar to Robinson and Cavell, Markakis applies a Gramscian critique of

US democracy promotion as a project to manufacture consent for US hegemony in the region.

His theorizations of US democracy promotion strategy for the Middle East region are

particularly informative for my case study on Syria, highlighting US priorities of oil access,

relations with undemocratic regional allies, and Israeli security.[72] These became key factors in

US approaches to Syria in the 2010s. Markakis's comparisons between US democracy

promotion in the Middle East and Latin American regions, which emphasize neoliberal

economic reforms as groundwork for later political democratic reforms, also inform the multi-

regional perspective of this dissertation.[73]

     Critical scholars of democracy promotion consistently highlight the contradictions

between the US policy of promoting political democracy while simultaneously promoting

neoliberal economic policy.[74] Scholarly advocates of democracy promotion and democracy

promotion officials historically argue that free market capitalism and democracy went hand in

hand. By comparison, critics tend to emphasize that capitalism is inherently anti-democratic

because it creates and reinforces inequality and undemocratic social relations of exploiter and

exploited. They also find that neoliberal free market capitalism, placed under the umbrella of

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[71] Dionysis Markakis, *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: The Pursuit of Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[72] Markakis, *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East*, 67.

[73] Markakis, *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East*, 77.

[74] My definition of neoliberalism borrows from the Marxist scholar David Harvey (2005), who defined neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). This transnational theory, exemplified by the Augusto Pinochet Administration in Chile during the 1970s as well as the Ronald Reagan US and Margaret Thatcher UK Administrations during the 1980s, promoted marketization, privatization, and deregulation of national and international economies, cuts to and privatization of welfare programs, and state intervention to create and preserve an institutional framework that facilitated market functions. This was opposed to the Keynesian or social democratic forms of capitalism that offered greater emphasis on meeting basic human needs and securing social cohesion.

democracy promotion, undermines the long-term viability of democracy. By making the political-economic system responsive to elites while ignoring the needs and aspirations of large underclasses, neoliberal capitalism contributes to social, economic, and political polarization and disharmony. These destabilizing tendencies manifested in NED support for what Neil Burron calls "national-security polyarchies" in early twenty-first century Colombia, Mexico, and Haiti, as more authoritarian, militarized, repressive form of elite-managed democracy developed as US and local elites reinforced crumbling social consensuses with increased coercion.[75]

Some scholars may be considered somewhere between the advocates of US and Western political aid and democracy promotion like John Norris and critics like William I. Robinson. Similar to the promoters, those in the middle tend to accept the mission of democracy promotion, and many of them have worked for democracy promotion institutions. Their main critique tends to be that these programs and institutions struggle between democracy promotion ideals and the foreign policy agendas of their donors and governments. These authors contend that, while Western powers are right to promote democracy, the foreign policy interests of state supporters occasionally conflict with democracy promotion ideals and, when that occurs, foreign policy interests always or too often take precedence.

One of the most prominent scholars of this type is Lincoln A. Mitchell, a democracy promotion consultant most associated with Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute in Eastern Europe. Mitchell's book, *The Democracy Promotion Paradox*, explores this contradiction between the theoretical ideals of democracy promotion and the complex vagaries of US foreign and domestic policy.[76] Another author, Marlene Spoerri, herself an advisor to Syrian anti-Assad groups as a director at Independent Diplomat, created impressive FOIA and

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[75] Burron, *The New Democracy Wars*, 40.
[76] Mitchell, *The Democracy Promotion Paradox*.

qualitative interview research on the NED and European democracy promotion in Serbia centered around regime change programs against Slobodan Milošević. While contending that democracy developed in Serbia despite, rather than thanks to, the NED and European democracy promotion, Spoerri makes the argument as an effort to make their democracy promotion efforts more effective against their so-called authoritarian or nondemocratic enemies.[77] Matthew Hill's book on Clinton and Bush Jr. post-war democracy promotion in Bosnia and Iraq through USAID also highlights the disharmony between, and thus critiques the application of, what US officials claim to be the practical synthesis of democracy promotion "values/idealism" and foreign policy "interests/realism."[78]

Even advocates for development aid and democracy promotion like John Norris complain that "foreign assistance as a blunt strategic instrument" has been the cause of the greatest failures of institutions like USAID to meet its purported aims.[79] He cited 1960s–1970s Vietnam, 1980s–1990s Egypt, and 2000s Afghanistan and Iraq as examples in which national security priorities gave USAID "almost unlimited" resources but yielded the most disappointing results.[80] Carothers had similar critiques of US democracy promotion that, first, officials often do not properly understand the ideas and contexts they work with, and, second, democracy promotion "is usually overridden" when it is contrary to US security or economic interests.[81] Most authors thus admit that, to one extent or another, the funding and support relationships that democracy promotion officials and institutions have with state and corporate interests problematizes the

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[77] Marlene Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution: The Paradox of Democracy Promotion in Serbia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 5-7.
Independent Diplomat is itself a NED- and northern European government-funded democracy promotion NGO.
[78] Matthew Alan Hill, *Democracy Promotion and Conflict-Based Reconstruction: The United States & Democratic Consolidation in Bosnia, Afghanistan & Iraq*, 1st edition (Routledge, 2013), 2.
[79] Norris, *The Enduring Struggle*, 241.
[80] Norris, *The Enduring Struggle*, 242.
[81] Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, 5, 16.

governmental mission of promoting democracy in a neutral, non-partisan manner. This study takes the view that there is no substantial contradiction between the purposes of democracy promotion institutions and interests of US foreign policy. Instead, I take the more critical view that institutions like the NED and USAID were created and mobilized to advance a US imperialist project and that they generally serve that function well.

Ambiguous Beginnings and Narrow Definitions of US Democracy Promotion

Scholars generally trace the roots of formalized US democracy promotion back to Woodrow Wilson, using the name "Wilsonian" as the US label for liberal internationalist policies, outlooks, and strategies.[82] Tony Smith names four stages of US liberal internationalist democracy promotion practice. These are (1) pre-classical, stretching from George Washington until 1898 and characterized by efforts to lead by example rather than export democracy by force; (2) classical, spanning the Spanish-American war to the end of World War II, characterized by interventions to promote often contradictory goals of democracy and social stability and failed early attempts at liberal international order by President Wilson; (3) hegemonic, lasting from 1945 to 9/11 and characterized by strong multilateral institutions (the UN, NATO, and Bretton Woods in particular) and a tenuous relationship with its parallel "track," namely, realist "containment" of communism together with promotion of US security and economic interests abroad; and (4), progressive imperialism, marked by the influence of neoconservative thought that combines neoliberal formulations of democratic peace theory and responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine to create a case for progressive imperialist war-making.[83]

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[82] Smith, *America's Mission*, 13.
[83] Smith, *America's Mission*, 20-27.
Democratic peace theory held that democracies are substantially less likely to go to war with other democracies, and thus having a larger community of democracies made every single democracy safer. Responsibility to protect on the other hand was a doctrine asserting that states had a responsibility to protect their populations from extreme forms of

Wilson is generally recognized as the first president to actively promote democracy through institutions other than the US military, especially through his failed League of Nations framework. The next president generally considered to promote democracy abroad as a core policy tenant through US-supported non-military institutions was John F. Kennedy, largely through new foreign development aid initiatives such as the Peace Corps, USAID, and the Latin American Alliance for Progress.[84] Carothers argues that although foreign aid became a major component of US foreign policy by the 1950s, promoting democracy did not become a priority of that aid until the Kennedy Administration.[85]

While the roots of US democracy promotion are somewhat ambiguous, the formal democracy promotion apparatus and policy set that still functions in the twenty-first century was established in the early 1980s with Reagan's self-declared "crusade for freedom" and the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy.[86] How, then, did these institutions and the officials involved in these formal democracy promotion efforts conceptualize democracy?

US democracy promotion since the creation of the NED used a narrow, minimalist, procedural definition of democracy. The consensus conception of democracy in the US democracy promotion community was largely inspired by Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* and Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy*.[87] Democracy for Schumpeter and Dahl

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violence such as genocide and ethnic cleansing, and if a state failed to do so then it was the responsibility of the international community, especially leading powers like the US, to intervene in the sovereign affairs of said state to enforce that responsibility.

[84] Jon Roper, "John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013), 109.

[85] Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, 19.

[86] Ronald Reagan, "Address to Members of the British Parliament" (Political Speech, Westminster Palace, June 8, 1982), https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-members-british-parliament.

[87] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, First Edition (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1942); Robert Alan Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Christopher Hobson and Milja Kurki, eds., *The Conceptual Politics of Democracy Promotion*, 1st edition (Routledge, 2016), 4.

"Polyarchy" for Dahl meant rule by many, not a dictatorship but not a full direct democracy either.

was viewed in procedural terms, wherein a system was considered democratic so long as it has sufficiently free, fair, and competitive elections, regardless of how responsive elected officials are to popular will or whether their policies benefit the broad masses of a society.[88] Scholar and government advisor Larry Diamond and academic-diplomat Michael McFaul add nuance to this consensus by separating purely procedural "electoral democracies" from "liberal democracies" that incorporated broad liberal culture, constitutionalism, and rights.[89] For McFaul, liberal democracy was an ideal to strive for and a set of policies that democracy promoters should pursue. He explains that "broad agreement in academia and the policy community has emerged on both a minimalist definition of democracy and the kinds of institutions and attributes needed to transform electoral democracies into more robust democratic systems of government."[90] Neither the minimalist electoral democracy nor the ideal liberal democracy framework of the policy-making and academic democracy promotion community included economic and social rights or democracy.

The elite consensus on what liberal democracy meant limited the range of acceptable debate on democracy promotion. This consensus both prevented democracy promotion officials and scholars from tackling the contested meanings of liberal democracy and devalued and delegitimized alternative forms of democracy, such as participatory democracy, social

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[88] For in-depth critiques of this vision of democracy, see Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy* and Burron, *The New Democracy Wars.*

[89] Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, 21-23; Michael McFaul, *Advancing Democracy Abroad*, 29-32. McFaul's conception of liberal democracy included a list of criteria including freedom of speech, assembly, publication, and religion, legal equality characterized by the rule of law for all citizens including minorities and historically marginalized groups, universal enfranchisement and the right to organize any (constitutionally adherent) political party and run for office, an independent and neutral judiciary, due process and freedom from violence by state and non-state actors, checks on elected officials by independent agencies, a vibrant civil society offering pluralist sources of information and organization independent of the state, and civilian control of the military.

[90] Michael McFaul, *Advancing Democracy Abroad*, 32.

democracy, and cosmopolitan democracy.[91] This minimalist consensus also put US democracy promoters at odds with the twenty-first century democratic "Pink Tide" movements and governments of Latin America, derisively labelled "populist" by their liberal opponents, that emphasized popular control over key economic resources and infrastructure and direct popular participation in policymaking.[92]

Gramscian and Marxist oriented critics of democracy promotion highlight its contributions toward building and maintaining elite capitalist hegemony. These authors also emphasize the contradictions between the claims that US democracy promotion advanced popular aspirations and its denial of more substantive, economic, and participatory democracy in theory and practice. Establishment US democracy promotion discourse separated the socioeconomic from the political, and defined universalized democracy through a specific US model, presenting it as a given beyond debate, thus ignoring or delegitimizing other definitions of democracy.[93] The neoliberal elite-managed democracies, what Gills and Rocamora call "low intensity democracies," that the US has promoted upheld procedures and political rights while ignoring, and, indeed, making it structurally impossible to address, growing socioeconomic inequalities that would seem inimical to democracy in more expansive definitions of the term.[94]

William I. Robinson goes even further in critiquing what he calls US "polyarchy promotion." Robinson contends that, far from being promoters of popular democracy that might entail greater social and economic democracy, some of the most prominent democratization theorists of the twentieth century, such as Samuel P. Huntington, explicitly argued against social

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[91] Milja Kurki, *Democratic Futures: Revisioning Democracy Promotion*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 2-3, 18.

[92] Burron, *The New Democracy Wars,* 11-12.

[93] Steve Smith, "US Democracy Promotion: Critical Questions," in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (Oxford University Press, 2000), 70-72.

[94] Gills and Rocamora, "Low Intensity Democracy," 514.

and economic democracy being compatible with political democracy and held that political democracy required the acceptance and maintenance of economic inequality and private property.[95] In addition, Robinson argues that US democratization theorists' claims to separate the socioeconomic from the political applied only when the socioeconomic concerned issues of inequality and social justice. When the promotion of global capital was the concern, both the promoter literature and US policy insisted that polyarchy requires the socioeconomic arrangement of free-market capitalism and that promoting polyarchy meant simultaneously promoting free-market capitalism.[96] In practice, the polyarchic structure entrenched elite capitalist interests to such an extent that even when anti-neoliberal or pro-social democratic governments were elected, transnational elite capitalist interests could operate through transnational networks and structures to prevent these movements and governments from challenging the broader social structure. This power was exemplified by a number of policy turns toward neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s by governments elected on explicitly anti-neoliberal platforms.[97] This dissertation takes the stance that Robinson and the Marxist or Gramscian authors were correct in their critiques of US establishment definitions of democracy. Building on that tradition, I contend that tracing democracy promotion and an establishment definition of democracy that favored political and economic elite power farther back in US history further illustrates the connection between so-called democracy promotion and US imperialism.

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[95] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy,* 45, 51, 54-56, 62, 64-65, 83-85.
[96] William Robinson, "Promoting Capitalist Polyarchy: The Case of Latin America," in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (Oxford University Press, 2000), 321.
[97] Robinson "Promoting Capitalist Polyarchy," 318-319.

Early US Democracy and Power Projection Abroad

"The United States… seems destined by Providence to plague America with miseries in the name of Freedom." – Simón Bolívar, *Letter to British Chargé d 'Affaires Patrick Campbell* (1829)

US founding elites, particularly of the Federalist faction, promoted a limited, procedural, polyarchic form of representative government early in the US republic. Federalists such as Alexander Hamilton but also Democratic-Republicans such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson exemplified this perspective. These figures advocated limits on popular participation and mass politics, were skeptical about the abilities of propertyless classes to govern themselves and others, and expressed anxiety that the American Revolution they helped launch risked degenerating into radicalism and mob rule due to too much democratic agency by the lower classes.[98] Historians Charles Beard and Woody Holton argue that in forming the new constitutional order, US elites sought to fundamentally restrain the influence of the majority (middling and lower) classes of society so democratic mobilization could not threaten elite economic and political interests.[99]

This disdain for radical popular participation threatening the interests of propertied classes could be perceived regarding US policy toward the second independent country of the Western Hemisphere, Haiti. Given that Haiti's revolution derived from a similar revolt against European colonialism and took inspiration from the Enlightenment and French Revolution, Haiti might have become a natural partner for promoting an anti-colonial, constitutional, perhaps even

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[98] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 1993).
[99] Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913); Charles Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy*, 1915; Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

democratic order in the Americas.[100] Around the turn of the 19th century under the Jefferson Administration however, white supremacist ideologies, the institution of racialized chattel slavery, and skepticism about lower class political agency had become so entrenched among US elites fearing popular mobilization, especially from their own slaves, that the US refused to even recognize Haitian independence from 1804 to 1862.[101]

Most scholars of democracy promotion limit study to lands where the US attempted to promote its own political-economic model of capitalist representative republicanism but did not attempt to incorporate such lands into the US state system itself. This has meant that most democracy promotion scholarship, especially from the advocate side, traces US democracy promotion practice only back to Woodrow Wilson's WWI crusade to "make the world safe for democracy" or, less often, to 1898 with the war against Spain and the US colonization of the Philippines.[102] Tracing democracy promotion practice back to the Spanish American War is notable because US intervention in Cuba and the Philippines is highlighted by many scholars as the defining point when the US became a true imperial power like the Spanish, French, and British empires before it.[103] Thus many scholars, even without couching their histories in terms of imperialism, originate US democracy promotion in moments of US power projection abroad to advance its economic or national-security interests.

A few scholars of US democracy promotion have traced the seed ideas of democracy promotion back to Thomas Jefferson's early articulation of a democratic peace theory, which

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[100] C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd edition (New York: Vintage, 1989).
[101] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 95.
[102] Mitchell, *The Democracy Promotion Paradox*, 32.
[103] For a discussion of the Spanish-American War's importance in scholarly conceptualizations of the US as an empire, see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

held that democratic countries were less likely to go to war with each other, and thus that an expanding community of democracies made each democracy safer.[104] However, US expansion across the North American continent and annexation of Alaska and Hawaii was not considered part of a historical *practice* of democracy promotion by promoter or neo-Tocquevillian scholars of democracy promotion. Yet there are parallels and continuities between US continental expansion and the early democracy promotion efforts that scholars ascribe to US policy in the Philippines in the 1900s or Wilson's policies toward Latin America and Europe in the 1910s. In such cases, US policy emphasized promoting civilization and constitutional order rather than democracy per se.[105] Similar language and policy patterns existed in the US conquest of the North American continent and orientation toward Indigenous groups.

From the beginning of the Republic, George Washington promoted a "civilizing" mission to remove the perceived inferiorities of Indigenous societies and cultures, and Thomas Jefferson continued that policy alongside his grand vision of building an "Empire of Liberty" spreading freedom across the North American continent and perhaps the world. Indeed, among the Indigenous groups deported west of the Mississippi River between the 1820s and 1840s were the "Five Civilized Tribes," called such because they had adopted US economic and political norms, including written constitutional law. By placing the history of US engagement with and influence toward Indigenous societies on the North American continent within the broader history of US democracy promotion, one can more clearly see how US democracy promotion has been historically tied to an imperial US project of expanding economic, military, and cultural

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[104] Smith, *America's Mission*, 7, 84.

[105] Smith, *America's Mission,* 60-62; Adam Quinn, "Theodore Roosevelt," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013); John A. Thompson, "Woodrow Wilson," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013), 53–68.

dominance abroad. This history also shows the evolution and continuity between early imperial projects and mindsets associated with Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine and the paternalistic, neocolonial, and racist mindsets observed in US democracy promotion projects and officials in places like twenty-first century Venezuela.[106]

US Democracy Promotion, Media, and Empire

Close study of US democracy promotion illuminates an uncanny ability of institutions like the NED, USAID, and related groups to create and instrumentalize media and civil society organizations. From the early days of the Cold War, the CIA played a key role in creating, supporting, or coordinating networks of journalist, student, labor, and political organizations along with physical media infrastructure for both political and entertainment media, intellectual milieus of magazines, journals, conferences, and think tanks, and even prominent pieces of US political culture. The NED and USAID in their democracy promotion programs carried on this legacy during the end of the Cold War and, as will be shown, well into the twenty-first century.

Theoretical scholarship on the relationships among US media, culture, and imperialism help illuminate the significance of NED and USAID media and civil society programs under the umbrella of US democracy promotion. For this study, media is defined simply and broadly as technologically-mediated means of communicating from the few to the many, including books, recorded music, film, radio, internet websites, social media, etc. In addition, this study defines civil society as organizations occupying the conceptual spaces between government and business, including NGOs, foundations, think tanks, social activist groups, labor unions, cooperatives, religious organizations, clubs, academia, schools, and the family. The first classical study connecting media and imperial power came from Harold Innis, who articulates the

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[106] Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, 71; Gill, "The Civilizing Mission Persists."

relationships between communications and empire across a broad history of class-stratified civilization.[107] His most relevant insight for this study is that some communication mediums favor either centralization or decentralization of power and knowledge, and empires that persisted sought to offset the bias of decentralizing mediums with the bias of centralizing mediums. This perspective remains applicable in this dissertation's digital-age Syrian case study, as the US and its corporate and state partners contended with the decentralizing tendencies of mediums like the internet and social media through centralizing institutions, relationships, and technologies of mass surveillance, algorithms, and communications infrastructure.

The expansion of US cultural and communications power has historically intertwined with the expansion and exercise of US military and economic power. Herbert Schiller provides an early study of the intimate ties between US military might and US global cultural power, highlighting the military's role in establishing monopolistic corporate and state communications infrastructure both domestically and internationally.[108] Schiller and Innis help outline the political economy of media in relation to imperial and military power.

Subsequent scholars have explored the ideological dynamics of the dialectical processes between media and empire. Edward Said illuminates the influences of European imperialism on Western European literature, entertainment, and news media.[109] Amy Kaplan applies a similar approach to the US context, noting how US imperialist power and networks provided necessary access, material, and context for significant aspects of US culture, even though this influence often went un-explored, un-acknowledged, or even actively denied in the texts that Kaplan

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[107] Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007).

[108] Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

[109] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Revised edition (New York: Vintage, 1997).

analyzed.[110] Kaplan and Said's cultural critiques guide my explorations of the perspectives, agendas, and biases among US media producers working with non-Western actors to target both Western and non-Western audiences in cases such as Syria.

My research concerns specific media and civil society producers and disseminators, namely the NED, USAID, and the various institutions they created or worked with. Such media and civil society producers and disseminators represent structures and agents of what Oliver Boyd-Barrett calls media imperialism.[111] For Boyd-Barrett, media imperialism is the subject of research "that deals with the range of relationships and interconnections between phenomena that scholars label 'imperialism' and those they label 'media,' an area that is available for empirical investigation."[112] The critical sub-field concerning what Boyd-Barrett termed media imperialism informs my study's materialist political economy approach to key questions. These questions include who owns or funds the media and its sources of information, major media figures' positionality within broader politico-economic elite milieus, the significance of the media for reproducing the dominant socioeconomic system in general, and media's military and ideological significance for facilitating US foreign intervention in particular.

Boyd-Barrett's media critiques are influenced in part by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's "propaganda model" in their famous 1988 political economy study of the mass media, *Manufacturing Consent*. Herman and Chomsky's model envisions a series of "filters" that mainstream US news journalists and their work go through before reaching the public. The five filters are (1) corporate ownership of news outlets that are themselves largely for-profit entities,

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[110] Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.
[111] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015); Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Tanner Mirrlees, eds., *Media Imperialism: Continuity and Change* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
[112] Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*, 1-2.

(2) media dependence on corporate advertising for news outlet revenue, (3) media reliance on "raw news" information sourced from "legitimate" government and NGO officials and experts that provide the main ingredients for news stories, (4) flak from official state or corporate enforcers that discipline writers and editors who endanger the outlet's relationships with advertisers and sources, and (5) a national ideology of anti-communism.[113] Herman, Chomsky, and subsequent writers demonstrate the longevity and continued value of the propaganda model over thirty years after the publishing of *Manufacturing Consent*.[114] In the wake of the Cold War, with the historic retreat of communism followed by the US's so-called War on Terror, some writers refocused the fifth filter, hegemonic anti-communism, to hegemonic Orientalism, neoliberalism, and American exceptionalism.[115] The US's War on Terror, Orientalism, and anti-Muslim chauvinism is relevant for my analysis of US interventions in Syria. Yet my broader multi-regional comparative case studies from the Cold War onward, along with the US pivot since 2010 from wars against majority Muslim countries in the Global South to great power competition against Iran, Russia, and especially communist China, shows the continued relevance of anti-communism.

While Herman and Chomsky focus almost exclusively on the passive, hegemonic, and structural filtering functions of media outlets, other scholars like Piers Robinson contribute to media imperialism theory by centering the role of active propaganda production. His work expands on Herman and Chomsky's third filter, namely, the mainstream news's reliance on

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[113] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 3, 14, 19, 26, 29.

[114] John Nichols and Robert McChesney, *Tragedy and Farce: How American Media Sells Wars, Spins Elections, and Destroys Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Rod Stoneman, *Chávez: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Case Study of Politics and the Media* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008); Florian Zollmann, *Media, Propaganda, and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017); Alan MacLeod ed, *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

[115] Jeffery Klaehn ed, *Filtering the News: Essays on Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 6.

"official" sources for their raw information. Robinson explores the ways imperialist forces create, influence, and disseminate raw information and sources of that information before anything even reaches the eyes and ears of Western journalists.[116] This "information imperialism," he argues, is a key piece of media imperialism especially during pivotal situations like the lead up to a foreign intervention. While media filters are important for my study, the emphasis on propaganda and information production is particularly relevant. This is because a key role of USAID and the NED in Syria and Venezuela is to act as the engines of intellectual warfare, to fund, train, and equip media and civil society outlets on the ground who then become the officially sanctioned sources for US and Western news media to construct their narratives from.

Boyd-Barrett's works, in collaboration with other members of the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda, and Media (WGSPM), provide broad theoretical contributions for media imperialism generally and its role in Syria specifically.[117] A major focus of Boyd-Barrett's studies on Syria center on Western government funded NGOs and their roles influencing media coverage of the Syrian War, including the production and dissemination of Western-backed rebel propaganda. He argues that Western mainstream media were consistently complicit in advancing elite, government, and intelligence agendas in the conflict and that organizations funded by USAID and the British government like the White Helmets, a major part of my Syria

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[116] Piers Robinson, "Propaganda, Manipulaton, and the Exercise of Imperial Power," in *Media Imperialism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Tanner Mirrlees, eds. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 107; Piers Robinson, "'Chemical Weapon Attacks and an Evil Dictator': Outsourcing Propaganda during the War in Syria," in *Journalism and Foreign Policy*, ed. Jesse Owen Hearns-Branaman and Tabe Bergman, 1st edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).

[117] Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*; Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Conflict Propaganda in Syria: Narrative Battles* (London: Routledge, 2021).

investigation, represented key propaganda agents in maintaining that hegemonic narrative.[118] Boyd-Barrett's explorations of deflective source propaganda in Syria, wherein a propagandist creates or uses a proxy that is made to seem more legitimate for delivering propaganda messages, are particularly useful even beyond the Syrian case study.[119] The NED, USAID, and democracy promotion institutions writ large made consistent use of deflective sources that relied on their support but appeared as independent professional and activist media outlets and civil society groups. My study adds insight to these critical investigations of Western media and Western-supported propaganda agents by taking a magnifying lens to USAID and the White Helmets and relating their interventions to the broader US democracy promotion apparatus represented by USAID and the NED.

Boyd-Barrett shows that media is relatively simple to comprehend, but imperialism is a more difficult term to pin down. Focused on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and concerned with state actions that, when approached critically, could be derisively labelled imperialist, his main subject is US interventions in the ostensibly sovereign affairs of other countries.[120] He takes what may be called a materialist view of imperialism, downplaying declared motivations that politicians use to justify intervention to instead emphasize practical and material interests to explain the "real" motivations behind the act. His approach to imperialism is substantially compatible with mine. We both emphasize the US as the primary imperialist actor since World War Two and focus on US foreign intervention, the manipulation of public opinion

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[118] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, "Deflective Source Propaganda: A Syrian Case Study," in *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Boyd-Barrett, *Conflict Propaganda in Syria.*
[119] Boyd-Barrett, "Deflective Source Propaganda."
[120] Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*, 7.

to facilitate that intervention, and the multinational US and allied corporations that assist in that manipulation and stand to gain from said intervention.[121]

Marxism and Imperialism

Capitalism has now singled out a handful (less than one-tenth of the inhabitants of the globe; less than one-fifth at a most "generous" and liberal calculation) of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world…Obviously, out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert. – Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (1914)

The white workingman has been asked to share the spoil of exploiting 'ch***s and ni***rs.' It is no longer simply the merchant prince, or the aristocratic monopoly, or even the employing class, that is exploiting the world: it is the nation; a new democratic nation composed of united capital and labor – W.E.B Du Bois, *The African Roots of War* (1915)

Differing slightly from other scholars of media imperialism however, I wish to take an explicitly Marxist approach to imperialism. My approach to imperialism is informed, first, by Vladimir Lenin, who conceived of modern imperialism as arising out of capitalism's tendencies toward globalization and capital accumulation.[122] Lenin rooted capitalist imperialism and imperialist intervention against Global South countries in the historical development of capitalist competition and profit maximalization, and the structural imperatives emergent therein. For

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[121] Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*, 7..
[122] Vladimir Il′ich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New Delhi: Leftword Books, 2000).

Lenin, imperialism is a system rather than a set of policies advanced in certain contexts by individual politicians, business leaders, or political parties. The capitalist system of competition developed into an imperialist system dominated by oligarchic finance capital that was compelled to integrate with the bourgeois state and export investment and capital abroad, continuously dividing and redividing control of labor and resources in the colonized or underdeveloped nations among those nation-states that had developed finance capital oligarchies. Thus, invasions, colonization, coups, and other actions often labelled as examples of imperialism are not isolated incidents of history but a systemic compulsion of finance capital to maintain and expand investment opportunities and profit rates. The material effect of this was that the developed and developing worlds became more unequal even as investment and capital flowed to the developing world and the developed world could give a higher standard of living to its working classes without threatening capitalist profits. The ideological implications of this theory are that such "superprofits" derived from the super-exploitation of nature and labor in the developing world nurture a "labor aristocracy" in the developed world, laboring classes that benefit from the imperialist system and thus become more inclined to identify with their ruling capitalist class and less inclined to develop revolutionary international class consciousness.[123]

Writers who built on Lenin expanded different aspects of his theory of imperialism. Kwame Nkrumah, an anticolonial revolutionary and first president of Ghana after independence from the UK, argued that by the 1960s, working-class-led anti-colonial struggles forced Western imperialism to retreat from direct colonialism, but that the imperialist powers replaced it with neocolonialism everywhere they could.[124] Under neocolonialism, domination by the imperialist

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[123] Lenin, *Imperialism*, 30-31.
[124] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1966).

world system, like imperialist powers within it, is more obscured and indirect.[125] Neocolonialism

allows the process of developed nations investing in super-exploitation abroad and muting class

conflict at home to continue.[126] Later writers conceptualized the Cold War not as an ideological

competition between the US and USSR, but as a global class war between the imperialist

bourgeoise, headquartered in and led by the US, and the global proletariat, particularly in the

Global South and Soviet Bloc, that the US and imperialist bourgeoise won by 1991.[127] In this

view, the US ruling class sought primacy for itself, neocolonial relationships for the Global

South favorable to international capital, and destruction of politico-economic alternatives to

capitalism and radical popular forces, especially the Marxist-Leninist communists, that

threatened international capital. As will be explored later, US democracy promotion since 1983

represented a new offensive in US efforts to entrench neocolonial capitalist order, marginalize or

defang popular democratic forces, and secure Global South labor, resources, and markets for an

increasingly globalized US-led capitalist class.

Christian Fuchs explores the applicability of media imperialism to a Leninist concept of

imperialism, specifically to gauge the importance of Western information industries within the

global capitalist imperialist system as theorized by Lenin. Focusing on industries that represent

"the most important features of capital concentration, capital export, world trade and warfare" in

the twenty-first century, Fuchs argues that information industries are among the top 3 or 4 factors

in contemporary imperialism. This makes information industries, dominated internationally by

Western corporations, almost as important for global capitalist imperialism as fossil fuels and

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[125] Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, ix-x.
[126] Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, xii-xiv.
[127] Ben Becker, ed., *Imperialism in the 21st Century: Updating Lenin's Theory a Century Later* (San Francisco: Liberation Media, 2015).

transportation, but finance is still the dominant factor by far.[128] My study is not interested in whether media and information industries can supplant finance as the primary driver of capitalist imperialism, but rather how media and information industries function as a pillar of global, and particularly US, capitalist imperialism. Leninist insights help to explain some of the reasons why and to what extent US and allied multinational corporations, particularly media companies, play the role that they do in US intervention.

Marxism and Cultural Hegemony

Marxist cultural theory, as developed by figures like Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, is also relevant for critical explorations of US democracy promotion policies and institutions. The connections among media, civil society, and imperial power played a key role in building and maintaining US ruling class power and legitimacy or the "consensual domination" that Gramsci defined as hegemony.[129] Taking inspiration from Marx's conceptualization of the interdependence between the economic, material "base" and legal, political, and cultural "superstructure" of society, Gramsci theorizes the historical development of the superstructure and the role it plays in reinforcing and maintaining social hierarchies. Gramsci argues that, thanks in large part to their access to capital, education, and tight knit social circles, the capitalist class is able to cohere into not just an economic force but an ideological one that staffs the highest offices of civil society. Having a dominant seat at the table in debating laws, establishing school curriculums, and editing media and entertainment output, they naturally shape these institutions in their own image.[130] Economic and social elites who largely own and hold high

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[128] Christian Fuchs, "New Imperialism: Information and Media Imperialism?," *Global Media and Communication* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 50, 56, https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766510362018.

[129] Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

[130] Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* 181, 191.

position in media and civil society institutions reproduce and disseminate their own cultural and ideological perspectives as universal, what Gramsci calls the "common sense" perspective, muting class divisions and the conflicts that arise from them.[131] My dissertation contributes to this conversation by examining how the process of building cultural hegemony plays out in US state and corporate efforts promote democracy, exporting their own self-interested, "common sense" politico-economic perspectives, policies, and systems to other peoples.

Althusser builds on Gramsci by exploring the relationships between ideological and repressive structures in the reproduction of class society. The interplay among what Althusser called "ideological state apparatuses" that include media and civil society, the "repressive state apparatuses" that include the police and military, and the wealthy bourgeois class reinforce ruling class cultural and ideological hegemony.[132] For Althusser, repressive state apparatuses function predominately through repression, while ideological state apparatuses function predominately through ideology, but repression and ideology function within both apparatuses to some extent.[133] Echoing the popular feminist notion that "the personal is political," Althusser and Gramsci reject the separation in capitalist society between the public realm of law, military, and policing and the "private" domains of religion, political parties, labor unions, families, corporate news media, and cultural ventures.[134] My dissertation seeks to synthesize these intellectual traditions by exploring the symbiotic interplay between hard and soft power (that is, between public repressive government, economic, and military structures and supposedly private

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[131] Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader,* 342-349.
[132] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
[133] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* 208.
[134] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* 208.

civil society, media, and cultural milieus) in advancing a US-led and Western imperialist-dominated capitalist world order.

Critical scholars of democracy promotion explore how, in an imperialist-dominated international capitalist system that increasingly globalized world trade, the tendency of capitalist elites to establish cultural hegemony expanded past their native nation-state borders. Robinson argues that transnational polyarchy promotion in the late twentieth century through institutions like the NED and USAID represented a project of the "core regions of the capitalist system," namely the US, shifting their domination over the "peripheral and semi-peripheral regions" from coercive mechanisms to consensual mechanisms.[135] US democracy promotion mobilizes repressive and ideological state apparatuses simultaneously to advance US political and corporate elite security and economic interests by effecting transitions toward neoliberal economic order backed by hegemonic elite-managed polyarchic political systems in targeted nations.

Global trade, competition, and capital accumulation also helps explain the close relationships between the corporate and state sectors represented by the public-private partnerships and networks of US democracy promotion. Lenin argues that the process of competition, capital accumulation, and capitalist investment cycles compelled capitalist firms to seek new markets, labor, and resources abroad and to further integrate with other capitalist firms and even the state to form powerful monopolies. The leading force in this process became finance capital, namely banks. These financiers grew from mere middle-men among different capitalist sectors to having such a concentration of credit, financial information, and capital vital to the functions of all manner of small and large capitalist firms that finance capital became the

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[135] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy,* 6-7.

dominant power governing capitalist economies in Europe and the US, increasingly connecting and commanding capitalist sectors in relation to other sectors and the bourgeois state.[136]

US media firms experienced a similar process of concentration into a handful of massive corporate conglomerates that increasingly merged with other capitalist sectors via finance capital that tended to subordinate even these large conglomerates to the financier's wider investment interests.[137] This process is particularly relevant for cases in which US democracy promotion programs sought confrontation and regime change with the targeted government, such as 1980s Nicaragua and Poland, 1990s Yugoslavia, and twenty-first century Venezuela, Ukraine, and Syria. These countries limited US and Western exploitation of their national markets, labor, and resources through organizing their economies on a socialistic basis or protecting their own national bourgeois class and industries, or a mix of both. Dislodging these governments thus represented opportunities for Western capitalist interests to secure and expand returns on investments abroad, especially for the increasingly monopolistic, financialized, and transnational corporations that integrated themselves into the intellectual and policy-making arms of the US state by the mid- to late-twentieth century.

American Deep Politics and US Democracy Promotion

> On the fifteenth of March 1945, when I ascended to the presidency of the nation, I was
> possessed by a romantic fire… I still believed, besides, and with reason, that the Republic
> of Guatemala could rule itself, without submission to external forces, free from mandates
> that did not emanate from the popular will of the majority… It was then, with the deepest
> despondency and pain that I felt, with consequent indignation, the pressure of that
> anonymous force that rules, without laws or morals, international relations and the

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[136] Lenin, *Imperialism*, 111, 116, 119-121.
[137] Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*, 13.

relationships of men… The war that began in 1939 ended, but in the ideological dialogue

between the two worlds and two leaders, [President Franklin] Roosevelt lost the war. The

real victor was Hitler. Little caricatures of Hitler sprang up and multiplied in Europe and

here in the Americas. It is my personal opinion that the contemporary world is moved by

the ideas that served as the foundation on which Hitler rose to power. – Juan José

Arévalo, in a farewell address at the presidential inauguration of Jacobo Árbenz (March

15, 1951)[138]

Closely related to Marxist and media imperialism theory that explores the interplay

between media, culture, civil society, and hegemonic socio-economic power is scholarship on

US deep politics or the American deep state. The deep state might be thought of as security state

connected milieus of formal and informal elite networks inside and outside of government that

exert influence on state policy regardless of whether the Democratic or Republican party controls

the nominally democratic state. It is similar to what Saunders called the "invisible government"

that organized the CIA's covert Cold War cultural fronts.[139] Literature on US deep politics is

influenced by the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty as the people or person

who decides the exception to the law.[140] Early conceptualizations locating sovereignty in places

other than the democratic US state include Hans Morgenthau's dual state theory and C. Wright

Mills's corporate, state, and military "power elite" triumvirate model of entrenched oligarchic

power in the industrialized capitalist US.[141]

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[138] Mario Rosenthal, *Guatemala: The Story of an Emergent Latin-American Democracy* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), 235-237.
[139] Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, Second (New York: New Press, 2013), 127.
[140] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[141] Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Impact of the Loyalty-Security Measures on the State Department," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 11, no. 4 (April 1, 1955); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

Scholarly literature that questions the democratic nature of the US state are helpful for a study of US democracy promotion because the NED and USAID historically converged with elite networks that feature prominently in published works on deep politics or the deep state. Political scientist Lance DeHaven-Smith coined the term State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs), defined as "concerted actions or inactions by public officials that are intended to weaken or subvert popular control of their government."[142] As this study will show, the NED and USAID have been implicated in some prominent historical SCADs such as the Iran-Contra affair, calling into question the commitment of these institutions to their narrow democratic ideals and disclosing the influence of forces with material interests unrelated to or even against democracy. What binds these writers together is a concern that elements of the US state can commit anti-democratic, even illegal acts at the direction of actors inside or outside formal government structures that are unaccountable to the rule of law, public will, or even public knowledge.

The most prolific academic theorist of a US deep state is Peter Dale Scott. He first developed theories of US parapolitics in the 1970s as a "system or practice of politics in which accountability is consciously diminished." [143] By the 1990s, Scott developed a broader theory he called deep politics, or "all those political practices and arrangements, deliberate or not, which

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[142] Lance deHaven-Smith, "When Political Crimes Are Inside Jobs: Detecting State Crimes against Democracy," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 28, no. 3 (2006): , 333.

[143] Scott's conceptualizations developed over time starting with his discussions of parapolitics in Peter Dale Scott, *The War Conspiracy: The Secret Road to the Second Indochina War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972). Scott then started using the terms "deep politics" and US "deep political system" in Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, Revised edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996). Finally, in the twenty-first century, Scott began to deploy the term US "deep state," which described essentially the same phenomenon as the US "deep political system" in Peter Dale Scott, *American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection, and the Road to Afghanistan*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010) and Peter Dale Scott, *The American Deep State: Big Money, Big Oil, and the Struggle for U.S. Democracy,* Updated edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017).

are usually repressed rather than acknowledged."[144] Finally, in the twenty-first century, Scott started writing about a US deep state, which entails networks of state and non-state actors, individuals and institutions, with the "power to steer the history of the public state and sometimes redirect it."[145] Scott's theories about US parapolitics, deep politics, and a deep state help make sense of how the US, as a nominally democratic country, could have such entrenched state power in unaccountable, undemocratic, and oligarchic institutions such as the CIA.

A relatively small cadre of elite figures in business, intellectual, NGO, and government circles have recurringly participated in US democracy promotion institutions and policy work. These figures have exerted profound influence on US democracy promotion and US foreign and domestic policy, despite rarely if ever doing so in the capacity of elected office. Many of the individuals that influenced US democracy promotion have been connected to the CIA. The CIA is historically linked with broader US elite milieus: prominent CIA leaders of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s had ties to Wall Street and key monopolistic transnational business interests like oil and banks, both directly or through the "white shoe" law firms that many early CIA leaders first made their careers in, or elite political forums like the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) or the Trilateral Commission.[146] Peter Dale Scott describes elite social networks of the CFR, Trilateral Commission, and more obscure intelligence networks like the Safari Club and ostensibly retired or fired CIA officials who continued to influence the US public state as indications of US deep politics and a US deep political system or deep state.[147] The NED and USAID's democracy

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[144] Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, 7.
[145] Scott, *The American Deep State*, 199-200, n. 63.
[146] Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, First edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2007).
[147] Scott, *The American Deep State,* 26, 124, 159.
While the CFR and Trilateral Commission were both publicly known, if exclusive and opaque, organizations for elite consensus making and planning, the Safari Club was more secretive. The Safari Club was a covert informal alliance of intelligence agencies from the US, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Iran, Egypt, South Africa, Rhodesia, Israel, and France set up to coordinate transnational covert operations, especially on the African continent.

promotion efforts linked up with elite, democratically unaccountable deep political forces

described by Scott.

From its beginnings the NED integrated into the Washington DC foreign policy

establishment. Endowment directors included former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and

Madeleine Albright (Albright had also been vice-chair of the NDI since its 1983 founding, left

for the Secretary of State job under Clinton from 1997 to 2001, and returned to chair the NDI

until her death in 2022), former Reagan Defense Secretary "Spooky" Frank Carlucci, former

National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe of

NATO Wesley Clark, American diplomat Sally Shelton-Colby (wife of former CIA director

William Colby), and World Bank President and 2003 Iraq War architect Paul Wolfowitz.[148]

Political scientist Aaron Good expands on Scott as well as the "power elite" concept of C.

Wright Mills and the "dual state" or "double government" frameworks of Morgenthau,

Tunander, and Glennon to develop a tripartite state theory.[149] Good interprets what he saw as

consistent anti-democratic US foreign policy and interventions across liberal and conservative

US governments and the corrosive influences that the rise of US global dominance has had on

US democracy. To explain this process, Good coined the term American "exceptionism."

Borrowing from Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as "he who decides the exception to

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[148] Beth Sims, "National Endowment for Democracy (NED): A Foreign Policy Branch Gone Awry," Policy Report (Albuquerque: Council on Hemispheric Affairs and the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, March 1990), 76; Burron, *The New Democracy Wars,* 29.

[149] Aaron Good, *American Exception: Empire and the Deep State* (New York: Skyhorse, 2022); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*; Morgenthau, "The Impact of the Loyalty-Security Measures on the State Department,"; Ola Tunander, "Democratic State vs. Deep State: Approaching the Dual State of the West," in *Government of the Shadows: Parapolitics and Criminal Sovereignty*, ed. Eric Wilson (New York: Pluto Press, 2009); Michael J. Glennon, *National Security and Double Government*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).
Good's tripartite framework described a nexus of powerful actors among the corporate overworld, the underworld of organized crime, and public and private intelligence outlets that mediated between them. Representative cases of this included CIA involvement in various underworld connected business and financial institutions such as Air America, Castle Bank and Trust, Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), and Nugan Hand Bank.

the law," exceptionism means "institutionalization of the interminable state of exception" that entails "the institutionalization of securitized supra-sovereignty or Lockean "prerogative" although not to a fixed or determinate source."[150]

The outline of powerful elite social milieus described above should not give the impression that US elite foreign policy actors are always unified, or that they have complete control over the institutions they exert influence upon. Even during the first two decades after WWII, when the US was at the peak of its economic and military power relative to the rest of the world and secrecy and control were paramount, the CIA did not have absolute mastery over its legion Cultural Cold War fronts.[151] Within the foreign policy establishment, there is always some disagreement. When writing about the Vietnam War and contemporary US establishment from WWII up to the Carter Administration, Michael Klare broadly divided US foreign policy elites into militarist "Prussians," often associated with oil and arms manufacturing interests, and internationalist commercial "traders," often associated with high finance and other more transnational firms.[152] Subsequent writers would identify the Prussian faction with the ascendant neoconservatives of the Reagan and later Bush years and the traders faction with the later neoliberals or those who sought a global capitalist world order subordinating national interests and secured by multilateral institutions as well as US power.[153] This factional division undermined the power of the trader-dominated CFR and opened opportunity for the Prussian- or neoconservative-oriented Washington DC-based American Enterprise Institute (AEI) think tank to gain influence in the Nixon and especially Reagan administrations and National Endowment

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[150] Aaron Good, "American Exception: Hegemony and the Dissimulation of the State," *Administration & Society* 50, no. 1 (2015), 19.
[151] Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[152] Michael Klare, "The Traders and the Prussians," *Seven Days*, March 28, 1977.
[153] Good, *American Exception,* Chapter 7, 8.

for Democracy.[154] As subsequent chapters will show, the NED was crafted in part to facilitate negotiation between liberals and conservatives, organized labor and capital, traders and Prussians, and neoliberals and neoconservatives, all to reinforce an elite consensus on US foreign policy.

As detailed in chapter three, one of the first democracy promotion ventures under Reagan that the NED and USAID supported was the Iran-Contra affair, led by the CIA and National Security Council (NSC). DeHaven-Smith names the Iran-Contra scandal as a prominent example of a SCAD. Scott labels Iran-Contra as an example of "Structural Deep Events" or mysterious events embedded in deep politics that repeatedly involve lawbreaking or violence and are "large enough to affect the whole fabric of society, with consequences that enlarge covert government, and are subsequently covered up by systematic falsifications in media and internal government records."[155] Good similarly refers to Iran-Contra as an exemplary episode of "exceptionism."[156] The case of Iran-Contra demonstrates that the NED and USAID has operated in states of exception, acting outside of official regulations and prerogatives to assist initiatives of dubious legality led by democratically unaccountable deep political forces.

My study and scholars that question the supposed democratic character of the US political system explore institutions influenced by publicly unaccountable organizations like the CIA, their roles in exceptional campaigns of obscured aggression by the US abroad, and implications for civil society, democracy, and democracy promotion in the US and abroad. Evidence indicates that US democracy promotion institutions such as the NED and USAID interlink with elite milieus and occasionally advance exceptional programs against their own

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[154] Scott, *The Road to 9/11,* 21.
[155] Scott, *The American Deep State,* 121.
[156] Good, *American Exception.*

charters and principles as well as US and international law. These exceptional episodes are often

repressed rather than acknowledged in mainstream discourse even as they become models for

subsequent interventions. From its inception under Reagan, democracy promotion has served as

a vehicle for the US to advance elite capitalist goals of global supremacy. That fact has important

implications for how, and for what purposes, democracy promotion institutions conceptualize

democracy and how they influence foreign political-economic systems abroad.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that scholarship on US democracy promotion is polarized between a

large cohort of promoters or neo-Tocquevillians, who are integrated into the broader state and

NGO democracy promotion industry, and a smaller group of critics or neo-Marxists in more

marginalized academic, independent media, and social activist circles. This dissertation takes a

critical Marxist approach to US democracy promotion, building on scholarship that critiques the

NED and USAID conceptions of democracy as strategically truncated to favor capitalist elites.

Like other critical scholars, I connect the historical spread and exportation of US establishment

models of political and economic governance ("promoting democracy") to broader capitalist

imperialist outlooks and agendas among US elites. Unlike critical scholars such as William I.

Robinson, who approaches democracy promotion as a problem of transnational capitalism

transcending nation-state paradigms, my study aligns with authors such as Collin Cavell and

Timothy Gill, who approach democracy promotion more as a problem of US imperialism.

Instead of using democracy promotion as a lens to understand global capitalism, I use democracy

promotion as a lens to understand the US state, US elites, and their foreign interventions. My

research adds to the conversation by explicitly engaging with scholarship on media imperialism

and deep politics to explore the roles of elite media, propaganda, and civil society associated

with democracy promotion in facilitating US foreign intervention and maintaining capitalist imperialist hegemony.

Critical or neo-Marxist scholars have often employed Gramscian and Marxist theories of hegemony in their studies of US democracy promotion, and these perspectives remain invaluable for any critical study of US democracy promotion. However, this dissertation proposes that a Leninist political economy approach to the media, civil society, and propaganda aspects of the NED and USAID, informed by scholarship on media imperialism and deep politics, provides relevant insights for how US democracy promotion fits into a US-led capitalist imperialist history and geopolitics. The next chapters provide a historical overview of the security state precedents and inter-elite negotiations that led to the creation and particular interventions of the Reagan administration-designed democracy promotion apparatus, which has evolved into the twenty-first century Western democracy promotion industry. This history provides the necessary background leading up to the twenty-first century case studies and demonstrates the relevance of scholarship on media imperialism, deep politics, and Leninist critiques of imperialism for understanding the political economy of the NED and USAID.

CHAPTER THREE – WEAPONIZING DEMOCRACY: INTER-ELITE NEGOTIATION ABOUT IMPERIAL STRATEGY, THE DEVELOPMENT OF US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION, AND THE FORMATION OF USAID AND THE NED

"A lot of what we do today was done covertly twenty-five years ago by the CIA." – Allen Weinstein, NED Cofounder (1991)[157]

The formation of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), together with the rise of US democracy promotion since 1983, was a top-down and often secretive process of imperial management in US history. The institutions of the NED and USAID, and the policy orientation of democracy promotion abroad did not come about because of bottom-up popular democratic mobilization. Rather, they resulted from negotiation and planning among economic, political, and social elites, meaning those who held high position or influence in intelligence, corporate, executive, foreign policy, legislative, organized labor, media, academic, think tank, and philanthropic institutions.

US elites formed democracy promotion policies and institutions in response to growing Global South (also called the "Third World," "developing world," or "colonized world") nationalist and socialist challenges to elite interests and the erosion of elite capitalist cultural hegemony and consensus during the 1960s and 1970s in the fallout of political scandals. These scandals included the exposures of national security state criminality during the "Year of Intelligence" in 1975, and social mobilizations, such as the Civil Rights and antiwar movements. Inspired by the covert operations and bipartisan elite consensus making efforts of the early-Cold War, US elites responded to these late-Cold War challenges with a foreign policy recalibration

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[157] David Ignatius, "Innocence Abroad: The New World of Spyless Coups," *Washington Post*, September 22, 1991, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1991/09/22/innocence-abroad-the-new-world-of-spyless-coups/92bb989a-de6e-4bb8-99b9-462c76b59a16/.

toward promoting a narrowly defined, neoliberal, elite-managed conception of democracy and human rights. This new policy paradigm reconciled democracy promotion with US elite economic and security interests and provided plausibly benevolent pretext and modus operandi for US intervention to reinforce oligarchic, imperialist-capitalist relations between the US and the Global South.

This chapter confirms previous studies that critique US democracy promotion as an imperialist construction aimed at advancing elite US economic and security interests through consensual domination, or Gramscian cultural hegemony. This chapter also contributes to critical scholarship by arguing for the importance of deep political forces in the Reagan administration's development and implementation of US democracy promotion, with a special focus on two flagship democracy promotion institutions, the NED and USAID. In exploring late-Cold War NED and USAID democracy promotion initiatives within such interventions as Iran-Contra and Operation Cyclone as well as early-Cold War precedents such as the CIA's covert cultural fronts, I also highlight their instrumentalization of media and civil society to facilitate and create pretext for US intervention. This chapter illustrates the historical intersections of US democracy promotion, deep politics, civil society, media, and imperialism that inform my study of twenty-first century NED and USAID media and civil society operations in subsequent chapters.

Cold War Origins of the National Endowment for Democracy and Institutional Democracy Promotion

US Foreign Policy Establishment Approaches to Democracy in the Global South

During the Cold War of 1947 to 1991, anti-Soviet foreign policy elites that advocated containment or rollback of global communist movements simplified the categorization of democracies and democracy promotion by equating the terms with anticommunism. From

President Truman in the 1940s to influential neoconservatives like Jeane Kirkpatrick in the 1970s and 1980s, policymakers and officials argued that communism was the greatest threat to democracy in the world, and that democracy was least likely to develop under a communist administration.[158] It followed that combating communism was simultaneously and necessarily promoting democracy. Even if US anti-communist efforts created or entrenched non-democratic (but pro-Western and pro-capitalist) governments, in their view, the country or society in question was better positioned to become democratic because the autocratic regime drove out the greatest threats to democracy, communism and Marxism. They believed that even if a government was democratic, any favorable or even neutralist stance toward domestic communist forces and foreign socialist countries made it susceptible to communist subversion and ultimately the end of democracy.[159]

By equating the protection or promotion of democracy with anti-communism, the US foreign policy establishment justified not just support for dictatorial capitalist governments around the world but also the undermining of democratic systems, governments, and movements in key contexts. This included rigging elections in 1940s southern Korea and 1950s southern Vietnam to establish anti-communist capitalist dictatorships, manipulating elections in 1940s and 1950s Japan and Italy against democratic socialist forces, and the broader Operation Gladio-style insurgency and counter-insurgency operations across Europe throughout the Cold War involving

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[158] Martin H. Folly, "Harry S. Truman," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013); Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships & Double Standards," *Commentary Magazine*, November 1, 1979.

[159] Despite this prevalent view during the Cold War and into the twenty-first century, the Marxist-Leninist administrations of the USSR and Eastern Bloc countries in fact gave up power with minimal bloodshed, and most became multiparty liberal democracies. Meanwhile, anti-communist undemocratic Cold War allies of the US such as Apartheid South Africa, Guatemala, and Indonesia committed greater violence in their struggles against democratic forces before transitioning to democracy, and US allies like Apartheid Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Brunei, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have as of 2023 not met even the narrow US standards of democracy despite the removal of the communist threat.

anti-democratic activities. Other undemocratic actions included US-backed armed coups against democratic governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Brazil (1964), Greece (1967), Chile (1973), and Cyprus (1974), and support for a constitutional coup against the Australian Labor government in 1975. The US also facilitated the assassination of Congolese President Patrice Lumumba in 1961 and a political genocide against the democratic Communist Party of Indonesia in 1965.[160]

Early Cold War anti-communist US foreign policy establishment elites were skeptical that democracy was possible or even desirable in the Global South. George Kennan, the architect of US containment strategy toward the USSR, wrote about East Asia in 1948 that,

> We should dispense with the aspiration to "be liked" or to be regarded as the repository of a high-minded international altruism. We should stop putting ourselves in the position of being our brothers' keeper and refrain from offering moral and ideological advice. We should cease to talk about vague and—for the Far East—unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization.[161]

Indeed, until shifting to a polyarchic democracy promotion strategy under the Reagan administration, US foreign policy toward the Third World during the Cold War was oriented toward reinforcing anti-communist, capitalist global supremacy via anti-democratic dictatorial coercion.[162] Kennan also argued for a realpolitik approach toward Latin American democracy stating that, if democratic systems were too weak to keep communists out of power, then

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[160] For more on US and particularly CIA involvement in anti-democratic actions against democratic forces abroad listed above, see Gliejeses (1992), Grandin (2011), Blum (2014), Rabe (2016), Prashad (2020), Bevins (2020), Poulgrain (2020)

[161] George Kennan, "Document 4. Review of Current Trends: US Foreign Policy" (Policy Planning Staff, PPS/23, February 24, 1948), Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, General; the United Nations, Volume I, Part 2 - Office of the Historian.

[162] William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer; that these measures may have to proceed from regimes whose origins and methods would not stand the test of American concepts of democratic procedure; and that such regimes and such methods may be preferable alternatives, and indeed the only alternatives, to further communist successes.[163]

In laying out this strategy, Kennan cited precedent uses of the Monroe Doctrine to argue for a paternalistic control over Latin American governance while also arguing that the US provided a beacon of democracy for Latin America to aspire to. The 1823 Monroe Doctrine declared US opposition to European intervention and colonialism in the Western Hemisphere, and that the US had special prerogative enforce such opposition and pursue its own interests in the Western Hemisphere. The 1904 Theodore Roosevelt Corollary later formalized unilateral US interventionism in Latin America to enforce the Monroe Doctrine, asserting the right to intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American countries to keep European powers out of the hemisphere when said Latin American countries committed offenses against European powers, such as the refusal or inability to pay foreign debts. Quoting President James Monroe's Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, who wrote of Latin America that "arbitrary power, military and ecclesiastical is stamped upon their education, upon their habits, and upon all their institutions," Kennan argued that Latin American peoples would naturally tolerate undemocratic rule anyway.[164]

Timothy Gill demonstrated that, even well into the twenty-first century, US foreign policy officials who worked on democracy promotion in Venezuela continued to express a

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[163] George Kennan, "Document 330. Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department (Kennan) to the Secretary of State" (Policy Planning Staff, PPS Files, Lot 64 D 563, March 29, 1950), Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere, Volume II - Office of the Historian.
[164] George Kennan, "Document 330. Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department (Kennan) to the Secretary of State."

paternalist and chauvinistic disposition toward Latin American peoples whom they regarded as uncritical, unthinking masses led astray by supposedly demagogic populist leaders like Hugo Chávez.[165] Imperialist paternalism and American Exceptionalist presumptions of superiority thus represents a prominent strain of thinking in US foreign policy approaches to the Global South from the nineteenth into the twenty-first century. From the 1823 proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine to the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to twenty-first-century democracy promotion, there was a common thinking and rhetoric among influential US officials when it came to promoting US-style political culture abroad, particularly in Latin America, that the US was the pinnacle of social, economic, and political development, whether couched in the language of civilization, democracy, human rights, or otherwise.[166] In this view, all peoples of the world could and should strive to be politically, economically, and even socially and culturally like the US. Attempts by other national governments and movements to have alternative systems, especially economic or political ones, were treated as aberrations resulting from either naivety or malevolence. Prominent US officials framed US values and institutions as universal, and any perceived attempt to limit them could result in US abrogation of a country's sovereignty if the US saw fit to do so.

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[165] Timothy M. Gill, "The Civilizing Mission Persists: Racism and Justification for US Intervention into Socialist Venezuela," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 19, no. 2 (2022): 309–28, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X21000394.

[166] Adam Quinn, "Theodore Roosevelt," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013); Timothy M. Gill, *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela: The Legacy of Race, Neo-Colonialism, and Democracy Promotion* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022).

The Cultural Cold War: Public-Private Networks of Media and Civil Society

"The most effective kind of propaganda" is that in which "the subject moves in the direction you desire, for reasons he believes to be his own." – National Security Council Directive, (July 10, 1950)[167]

While US officials like George Kennan dismissed the national sovereignty of formerly colonized peoples and took a chauvinistic stance toward their potential for even limited polyarchic forms of democracy, the CIA turned media and civil society into ideological weapons of the Cold War. From the late-1940s to the 1960s, the agency sought to undermine neutralist and pro-communist intellectual and political forces abroad and promoted moderate and non-communist Left forces as part of a governing coalition for a liberal international order, what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called the "vital center" between communism and fascism.[168] The CIA and its allies in the US government and private philanthropic world funded groups including the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF) and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) that founded or sponsored journals such as *Encounter*, *Der Monat*, and *Partisan Review*. The CIA and its collaborators also published and promoted anti-communist Left intellectuals including Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer.[169] In addition, the CIA supported musicians, writers, artists, and filmmakers associated with high Modernist trends like abstract expressionism; organized non-communist student, African American, Catholic, and women's

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[167] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 4.
[168] Arthur Meier Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949).
[169] Gabriel Rockhill, "The CIA & the Frankfurt School's Anti-Communism," *The Philosophical Salon*, June 27, 2022, https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-the-frankfurt-schools-anti-communism/.

activist groups; and planted or cultivated hundreds of friendly journalists in major news outlets.[170]

One of the most widespread and long-lasting CIA soft power efforts involved supporting non-communist organized labor. Alongside CIA partnerships with Eastern European social democrat and Menshevik emigres, these programs targeting unions were some of the first cases of the CIA mobilizing the non-communist left to counter communist forces in the early Cold War battle for hearts and minds.[171] CIA officer Tom Braden, who was deeply involved in CIA CCF efforts, arranged $1 million a year to Irving Brown (another CCF founder) and Jay Lovestone's anti-communist union organizing from 1951 to 1954. In 1961, Brown and Lovestone would found the AFL-CIO-affiliated American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which also received support from the CIA and the newly created USAID. In the 1980s, the AIFLD became a core grantee of the NED, changing its name to the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, colloquially known as the Solidarity Center, in 1997. USAID remains the other primary source of funding for the Solidarity Center.

The Neoconservatives: Their Rise and Influence on Democracy Promotion

The CIA cultural fronts and competing strategies of containment and rollback helped connect a coterie of hawkish, anti-communist, liberal interventionists, who became known as "neoconservatives," to the US intelligence and foreign policy establishment. Many early neoconservative figures came out of the 1930–1940s Trotskyist and anti-Soviet Left. The most prominent network was that of the "New York intellectuals" associated with the City College of

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[170] Carl Bernstein, "The CIA And The Media," *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 1977, https://www.carlbernstein.com/the-cia-and-the-media-rolling-stone-10-20-1977; Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, Second (New York: New Press, 2013); Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[171] Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer,* 51-55.

New York, the youth wing of the Socialist Party of America called the Young People's Socialist

League (YPSL), the formerly Communist Party USA-affiliated journal *Partisan Review*, and

later the political and intellectual periodicals of *Commentary* and *Dissent*.[172]

Irving Kristol, a New York intellectual, journalist, and publisher known as the "godfather

of neoconservatism" was a leader of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and cofounder of its

flagship journal *Encounter*.[173] Another New York intellectual and CCF affiliate who became an

influential neoconservative figure was Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell. In the early 1950s, Bell

lobbied media magnate Henry Luce to fund *Partisan Review* and the CCF's US branch, the

ACCF.[174] Bell also acted as advisory editor of the CCF funded journal *Censorship* from 1964 to

1967, corresponded with CCF leader and CIA officer Michael Josselson, and knew of covert

CIA funding of the CCF.[175] Kristol and Bell founded *The Public Interest* in 1965 with a $10,000

grant from Michael Josselson.[176] *The Public Interest* was one of two journals that built the "first

age of neoconservatism."[177] Kristol, Bell, and other early neoconservative New York

intellectuals such as Nathan Glazer, Sydney Hook, and James Burnham all participated in the

ACCF.

[172] Jean-François Drolet, *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism*, 1st edition (Oxford University Press, 2011), 19-20; Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement: With a New Foreword, From Dissent to Political Power*, Reissue edition (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 85-86.

[173] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War,* 142.

[174] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War,* 135.
Like the CCF, the ACCF was led by moderate and center-left figures like historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Socialist Party chairman Norman Thomas, and *Partisan Review* editor Philip Rahv. However, it was also more polarized than the CCF due to the participation of right-wing and militant anti-communist hardliners like philosopher and *National Review* editor James Burnham and Irving Kristol, who alternated between the moderate and hardline factions before becoming a staunch Reaganite in the 1980s. See Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War,* 131-133.

[175] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War,* 1, 281, 332.

[176] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War,* 339.

[177] Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2011), 7.

Neoconservatism developed in part as a reaction to the Democratic Party's turn toward economic democracy with its New Deal and later Great Society programs. Early neoconservatives were initially supporters of post-WWII mainstream liberalism, as envisioned in Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s 1949 book, *The Vital Center*, which promoted anti-communism abroad and social progress at home. However, the fledgling neoconservative movement reacted negatively to the further leftward turn in American liberalism represented by the counterculture, the Johnson administration's Great Society, and the civil rights and second wave feminist movements. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s neoconservatives became a political force that coalesced behind the domestically moderate and internationally hawkish Henry "Scoop" Jackson wing of the Democratic Party in opposition to the progressive McGovernite wing, and was fiercely opposed to Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's policies of détente toward the Soviet Union.[178] After George McGovern won the Democratic presidential primary in 1972, neoconservative figures like Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and YPSL leaders Joshua Muravchic and Penn Kemble teamed up with future CIA director James Woolsey, future UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, and senators Scoop Jackson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Hubert Humphrey to form the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM).[179] Future NED cofounder Allan Weinstein also served on the CDM board.[180] The CDM became an elite interest group designed to promote hawkish neoconservative foreign policy to other US elites.[181]

Perhaps the most influential neoconservative organization of the era was the 1976 Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a bipartisan association of politicians, intellectuals,

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[178] Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism,* 9.

[179] Jesús Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush: Voices behind the Throne* (Washington, D.C.: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 41-47.

[180] Beth Sims, "National Endowment for Democracy (NED): A Foreign Policy Branch Gone Awry," Policy Report (Albuquerque: Council on Hemispheric Affairs and the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, March 1990), 19.

[181] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 45.

and organized labor and business leaders. The CPD grew directly out of the work of Team B, a project commissioned by President Gerald Ford through the CIA under George H. W. Bush to analyze national security threats posed by the USSR. Team B's outside experts argued that yearly CIA National Intelligence Estimates had chronically underestimated Soviet military capability, although many scholars today criticize Team B's conclusions for grossly, and perhaps knowingly, overemphasizing the military and economic buildup of the Soviets.[182] Both Team B and the CPD included Paul Nitze, the principal author of the first official US Cold War grand strategy document of communist containment and rollback, the United States Objectives and Programs for National Security of 1950, popularly known as NSC-68. Neoconservative intellectuals like Jeane Kirkpatrick, Midge Dector, Norman Podhoretz (Midge Dector's Husband), Seymour Martin Lipset, and Nathan Glazer who participated in the CPD gave it intellectual capital and influence in the academic world.[183]

Some of the same intellectuals created the Committee for a Free World (CFW) in February 1981, shortly after Reagan's inauguration. Jesús Velasco identified the CFW as "an unequivocally neoconservative institution."[184] Led by Midge Dector, this self-described intellectual association included future NED president Carl Gershman alongside Jeane Kirkpatrick, Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Norman Podhoretz on its Board of Directors.[185] Both the CPD and CFW represented an attempt to reforge 1950s style anti-communist foreign policy consensus in US politics after its breakdown in the wake of the Vietnam War. Both organizations also reflected the historical continuity between the CIA-led Cultural Cold War and what would become Reagan's new democracy promotion agenda: the

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[182] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 56.
[183] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 61.
[184] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 64.
[185] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 64.

1970s CPD borrowed the name and goals of the original Committee on the Present Danger of 1950, the CFW tried to revive the "basic principles and aspirations" of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.[186] The CFW received seed money from CIA-connected private foundations and committed itself to Cold War cultural warfare with the same goals and methods as the CCF.[187] Peter Coleman describes the organization as "a sort of partial regrouping of Congress intellectuals."[188]

The radicals turned liberal anti-communist thinkers and writers of the first neoconservative generation associated with the New York Intellectuals and the Congress for Cultural Freedom found common cause with Scoop Jackson foreign policy establishment hawks and foreign policy realists under the Reagan presidency. Scoop Jackson Democrats like Jeane Kirkpatrick, Paul Wolfowitz, and Elliot Abrams became leading figures in Republican Party foreign policy, while former YPSL leaders like Carl Gershman and Seymour Martin Lipset and realists like Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski became involved directly in the National Endowment for Democracy.[189]

Neoconservatives played influential roles in the NED and Reagan's democracy crusade from the outset. Beyond Gershman and Lipset, other neoconservative figures associated with the CFW or CDM who became part of the NED network included Penn Kemble, Roy Godson, Albert Shanker, and NED cofounder Allen Weinstein.[190] From 1984 to 1988, the NED was a major funder of Freedom House, a federal-funded research institute, which by the 1980s became

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[186] Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, 64.

[187] John S Friedman, "Culture War II," *The Nation*, April 18, 1981, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90-00845r000201030013-8.

[188] Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy* (New York : London: Free Press, 1989), 247.

[189] Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism,* 11; Neil Burron, *The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[190] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 15, 19.

an intellectual home for neoconservatives and foreign policy hawks.[191] Figures associated with Freedom House such as John Richardson, Sol Chaikin, Penn Kemble, and Max M. Kampelman also became part of NED networks.[192] In addition, NED president Gershman was a resident scholar at Freedom House before joining the NED.[193]

The NED and its core grantee network were led by a small group of long-time political actors, many of whom had substantial neoconservative histories and connections. Carl Gershman, President of the NED from 1983 until 2021, was Vice-Chairman, co-Chairman, and then Chairman of the YPSL, an assistant to neoconservative union leader Bayard Rustin, and senior aide to UN ambassador and CDM Chair Jeane Kirkpatrick. In 1972 Gershman led a successful right-wing revolt in the Socialist Party of America that aligned the SPA more firmly with US Cold War global anticommunism and rebranded it as the Social Democrats, USA (SDUSA), of which Gershman became Executive Director.[194] Neoconservative labor leader Eugenia Kemble served as director of an NED core grantee, the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), from 1984 to 1989. Penn Kemble (Eugenia Kemble's brother), served as board member of another core grantee, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

[191] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 13, 67.
Freedom House is an NGO that researches and promotes democracy, human rights, and political and economic freedom. Freedom House today is mostly funded by USAID and the State Department. Former Freedom House directors included neoconservatives or close neoconservative allies like Bayard Rustin, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Samuel P. Huntington, Otto Reich, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz as well as foreign policy elites that held prominent roles in US propaganda and public diplomacy efforts abroad like Zbigniew Brzezinski and Steve Forbes. Some of these figures like Forbes, Rustin, and Brzezinski were directly involved in promoting and implementing CIA covert operations, cultural, media, and civil society influence campaigns, and even the creation of the NED.
[192] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 15, 19.
[193] Freedom House, "Freedom House to Present Annual Awards to Cuban Activists, Founding President of the National Endowment for Democracy," Freedom House, accessed February 26, 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/article/freedom-house-present-annual-awards-cuban-activists-founding-president-national-endowment.
[194] Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History*, Illustrated edition (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2015).

(NDI). Penn Kemble was, like Gershman, a neoconservative YPSL, SPA, and SDUSA leader as well as a CDM founder and aid to neoconservative senator Daniel P. Moynihan.

USAID as a Precursor to the NED

Since 1983, USAID has had a similar or complementary role to the NED, and it operates with a bigger budget. The US Agency for International Development is an independent agency of the US federal government tasked primarily with administering foreign aid and development assistance in line with US foreign policy and national security and economic interests. It is split into numerous bureaus organized by administrative function, foundational mission priorities (such as global health, humanitarian assistance, and development, democracy, and innovation), and geographic region that all report directly to the head Administrator, who is nominated by the US President and confirmed by the US Senate. USAID currently operates in over 100 countries with most of its aid and assistance work organized on a case-by-case basis through assistance and development plans for specific countries.

Established in November 1961 with the passage of the Foreign Assistance Act by Congress, USAID policy, alongside other institutions championed by the JFK administration in 1961 like the Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress, was heavily influenced by modernization theory. Modernization theory became a dominant paradigm of social sciences by 1960 and a great influence on the JFK and LBJ administration's foreign policy. The theory posited a teleological view wherein poorer nations needed to advance through stages of economic, social, cultural, and finally democratic development modeled after the Western European capitalist nations that professedly represented the culmination of development and modernity. Modernization theory was in some ways a revision of older imperialist ideologies for the Cold War. It echoed earlier frameworks of the civilizing mission that justified Western imperialism as

a benevolent effort to help other nations overcome their backward deficiencies. Modernization Theory also echoed the US's own imperialist ideological mission of Manifest Destiny to spread America's assumedly superior political-economic system and democratic culture.[195] Especially important for modernization theory in the Cold War context was steering the decolonizing Global South nations away from communism by demonstrating that capitalism and alignment with the West could develop their countries into stable, wealthy, and, eventually, democratic societies.[196]

During the 1990s, USAID became the largest funder of democracy aid in the world, devoting more resources than the NED by a factor of more than ten to one.[197] However, USAID's role in US democracy promotion has not been as much a focus of study in democracy promotion literature. This is partly because USAID's main field was and remains foreign aid and development assistance, which are relevant but outside the scope of this study; USAID democracy programs accounted for about 5 percent of US development assistance in the 1990s.

Development institutions like USAID approached foreign development aid in economic, technocratic, and apolitical terms for most of the Cold War. USAID maintained a perspective that anticommunism was more important than democratization, that economic growth was the primary way of reducing a country's susceptibility to communist subversion, and that democratic development would inevitably follow economic development.[198] Democracy aid did gain traction in USAID in the second half of the 1980s with the creation of the NED, as USAID

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[195] Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*, New edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 59-68.
[196] For a particularly influential example of Modernization Theory as a direct counter to the developmentalism of Marxist communism, see Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
[197] Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution* (Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for Int'l Peace, 2013), 64.
[198] Carothers and Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics*, 23-24, 31.

opened a special office for strengthening democracy in its Latin American bureau and carried out some minor democratic institution-building activities through its Asia and Near East bureau.[199]

Political aid and political development, under which fell the promotion of democracy, suddenly and rapidly became a foundational part of North American and Western European development aid institutions beginning in 1990–1991, right at the end of the Cold War.[200] USAID established a new policy in 1991 that political development "is central to," rather than follows from, economic and social development, and added democracy to its primary agenda.[201] When looking at the early core policies and public priorities of USAID, the institution may not appear to be a precursor to the NED. Yet Thomas Carothers traces the root of US democracy promotion to the modernization theory that influenced the aid approach of the Kennedy administration and USAID because their economically-centered developmentalism had a horizon of creating, if indirectly, eventual democratization in the Third World.[202] Approaching USAID as progenitor to the NED becomes more salient when considering both institutions as instruments of imperialism.

Moreover, from its establishment, USAID was closely involved with deep political forces of the CIA and the national security state.[203] A 1962 National Security Action Memo illustrated USAID's role. This document established a "Special Group" in charge of international counterinsurgency and political warfare that included USAID alongside the CIA, US Information

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[199] Carothers and Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics*, 49.

[200] Carothers and Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics*, 55.

[201] Carothers and Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics*, 56, 64, 66.

[202] Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

[203] National security state here means the unelected institutions of government, intelligence, military, and foreign policy that had influential roles in defining, planning, or carrying out US national security interests and policy. The concept became especially relevant to US politics after the 1947 National Security Act that established key institutions of the national security state, such as the CIA, National Security Council, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Department of Defense.

Agency (created under Eisenhower to advance propaganda, psychological, and political warfare), State Department, and Pentagon.[204] USAID had a significant role in the global strategy of supporting and even creating private, pro-US civil society organizations to counter and compete with more radical, neutralist, or anti-US organizations in foreign countries (what the NED would do post-1983).[205]

USAID's approach to organized labor in particular connected it to both the CIA and the early US-supported public-private foreign civil society networks that the NED would later head. Established alongside USAID was the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and Free Trade Union Committee, renamed the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI) in 1977. The Free Trade Union Committee/Institute supported anti- and non-communist labor unions in foreign countries. USAID funded AIFLD programs and the AIFLD had deep ties to the CIA and its Cultural Cold War fronts through the AIFLD leadership.[206]

USAID collaborated in CIA operations from the early years of USAID. The CIA and USAID spent approximately $20 million to support candidates in the 1962 Brazilian gubernatorial election against left-wing president João Goulart and funneled money to influence Brazilian labor unions through the AIFLD.[207] USAID also supported the CIA's "Secret War" in Laos during the 1960s, aiding programs to support anti-communist CIA-backed forces, especially the Hmong tribespeople and refugees. USAID support for the secret war was led by

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[204] McGeorge Bundy, "National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 124, Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) | JFK Library," January 18, 1962, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/333/JFKNSF-333-016.

[205] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 11

[206] Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer,* 185-186.

[207] Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 21.

USAID area coordinator Edgar "Pop" Buell, and it facilitated regional CIA-backed opium and heroin trafficking networks.[208]

Beginning in November 1962, USAID also ran the Office of Public Safety (OPS), a program to provide training, equipment, and other assistance to police and security forces in US allied countries. CIA officer Byron Engle led the OPS from 1962 to his retirement in 1973.[209] The OPS provided $200 million from the CIA and USAID in weapons and communications and tactical equipment and operated across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[210] The OPS planted CIA operatives in foreign security forces, found and recruited foreign candidates for CIA programs, and used CIA personnel and manuals to train foreign security forces in counterinsurgency techniques, including torture and bomb making.[211] USAID's coordination with secretive Cold War military, propaganda, and covert action efforts went well beyond the apolitical foreign aid, humanitarian relief, and development assistance publicly advertised as USAID's main mission.

Exposure and Recalibration of US Covert Public Diplomacy

Covert CIA public-private networks suffered a blow when the New Left flagship *Ramparts* magazine published an exposé in 1967 revealing CIA funding of the National Student Association, established in Madison, WI in 1947. What followed was a troubled time of recalibration by the CIA and national security state. CIA officials had already begun contemplating the creation of an overt endowment to replace CIA funding of private groups.

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[208] Don Schanche, "The Yankee 'King' of Laos," *New York Daily News*, April 5, 1970, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp88-01350r000200100003-0; Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, 2nd revised (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), xvi, 306-308, 318-319, 327.

[209] Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*, 2019, 5, 57.

[210] Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 28.

[211] Arthur J Langguth, *Hidden Terrors: The Truth About U.S. Police Operations in Latin America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Schrader, *Badges Without Borders,* 230.

Cord Meyer, the chief of CIA International Organizations Division and highest-ranking state official with direct oversight of the state-private networks, suggested as much at a 303 Committee meeting in 1966, months before the *Ramparts* story broke.[212] Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms, who was present at the meeting, had previously spoken with founding CIA officer Frank Wisner on several occasions about the need to "replace our secret under-writing with open funding from private organizations and perhaps some semi-official government sources" but "more urgent problems" prevented them from following through.[213]

Other fledgling efforts to create overt political operations (officially called "political development") and democracy promotion programs predated the NED. In the 1950s, the US Congress discussed several bills to create a "Freedom Academy" to conduct party-building in the Third World, but none passed. In the 1960s, the Brookings Institution, a centrist think tank, created extensive research on political development programs in collaboration with USAID and other state agencies.[214]

To help with damage control in the wake of the *Ramparts* story, the Johnson administration organized the Katzenbach Committee, with Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare John Gardner, and DCI Richard Helms, with Cord Meyer as his principal assistant.[215] The committee recommended the creation of a public-private mechanism to support overseas activities of organizations deemed to be "in the national interest" and cited a particular recommendation by Eugene Black, former World

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[212] The 303 Committee, known as the Special Group from 1957 to 1964, was a committee of high White House officials tasked by the US President with ensuring executive oversight of US covert operations. This group made sure that the CIA kept the President and other high officials informed about covert operations and that covert operations stayed consistent with broader US foreign policy.

[213] Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder : A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York : Random House, 2003), 345-346.

[214] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 89.

[215] Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer,* 242-243; Robert Pee, *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy: Foreign Policy under the Reagan Administration* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 18.

Bank President and then-Chairman of the Brookings Institution, to create a "publicly funded but privately administered body patterned on the British Council."[216] The UK government established the British Council in 1934 as a soft power tool to promote British language, culture, and foreign policy across the world using educational and media programs. The British Council was and remains a state-owned enterprise governed by Royal Charter and funded by the UK Foreign Office. The NED is similar in that it also relies on government funds to promote national foreign policy and culture through media, civil society, and educational programs. Unlike the British Council however, the NED is technically an NGO and not a government agency or state-owned enterprise, although in practice the NED is regulated and overseen by the US government. Black's suggestion also pointed to the many British roots of US approaches to imperial management.

Despite the official public conclusions of the Katzenbach Committee, the CIA was not ready to sever itself from supporting media and civil society activities. In January 1968, Richard Bissell, who had ostensibly retired from the CIA in 1962 after his Deputy Directorate of Plans division failed at the Bay of Pigs, led a secret meeting at the Council on Foreign Relations' (CFR) mansion in New York City. The meeting rapporteur whose documents recorded the meeting was a representative from the Center for International Affairs at Harvard (CIA, later re-acronymized as the CFIA in 1969), an international relations research institute founded by diplomats Robert Bowie and Henry Kissinger, which was influential in high US foreign policy circles.[217] Bissell's topic for discussion was CIA strategy reorientation after the *Ramparts* story,

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[216] John Gardner, Richard Helms, and Nicholas Katzenbach, "Report by Katzenbach Committee," Memorandum (Central Intelligence Agency, March 31, 1967), https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79M00467A000200120015-1.pdf . .

[217] Marcie Smith, "Change Agent: Gene Sharp's Neoliberal Nonviolence (Part One)," *Nonsite.Org*, no. 28 (May 10, 2019), https://nonsite.org/change-agent-gene-sharps-neoliberal-nonviolence-part-one/.

stating "the Central Intelligence Agency will have to make use of private institutions on an expanding scale, though those relations which have been 'blown' cannot be resurrected. We need to operate under deeper cover, with increased attention to the use of 'cut-outs' [i.e. intermediaries]. CIA's interface with the rest of the world needs to be better protected."[218] This signaled an unofficial intent to circumvent even the limited oversight and restrictions recommended by the official Katzenbach Committee.

In the 1970s, scandals and exposés associated with crimes and failures in Vietnam and abrogation of domestic US law created a national backlash against the CIA and the secretive, democratically unaccountable national security state more broadly, and the objections motivated Congress to impose restrictions on covert operations. Exposés covered the My Lai Massacre in 1969, the Pentagon Papers in 1971, the Watergate Scandal beginning in 1972, and partial exposure of the CIA's "Family Jewels" operations in December 1974. These controversies led to federal investigations of the CIA and national security state in the form of the Church Senate, Pike House, and Rockefeller Executive Committees of 1975, and a revisiting of the JFK and MLK Jr. assassinations in the form of the 1976 House Select Committee on Assassinations. In the wake of the controversies and investigations came congressional restrictions like the 1973 War Powers Resolution and the 1976 Clark Amendment and the ouster of major CIA figures like Richard Helms in 1973 and James Angleton in 1975.

Key CIA officers resisted the restrictions. Richard Helms, Ed Wilson, Tom Clines, Ted Shackley, and George H. W. Bush became involved in the Safari Club, established in 1976. This transnational intelligence network involving the criminal Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) coordinated covert operations in Angola, the Congo, Somalia, and

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[218] Smith, "Change Agent."

Ethiopia,, and eventually Operation Cyclone in Afghanistan beginning in 1979 and the Iran-Contra affair beginning in 1980.[219]

Shortly before the Safari Club subverted federal restrictions on CIA operations and covertly coordinated transnational capitalist ruling class interests, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Chase Manhattan Bank CEO and Council on Foreign Relations Chairman David Rockefeller created the Trilateral Commission in 1973. Similar to the CFR, the Trilateral Commission was an elite forum that sought to build consensus among corporate, government, and intellectual elites. Rockefeller and Brzezinski created the Trilateral Commission to address the popular challenges to ruling class hegemony as well as the inter-elite divisions that developed during the economic and social crises of the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike the national- and Anglosphere-centered CFR however, the Trilateral Commission included the entire US-led Western alliance, bringing together elite government officials, business interests, and academics from North America, Western Europe, and Japan.

Similar to the Safari Club and Trilateral Commission, the NED and its grantees helped bring together elite interests and coordinate action across a range of public and private groups engaged in democracy promotion. The NED integrated into a system of interlocking leadership directorates among its core grantees, ostensibly private groups like Freedom House, and US government agencies. This interlocking leadership and communication network among high corporate, government, and civil society circles, what Thomas Dye refers to as an "oligarchic system" that encompassed broader US elite society during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, facilitated elite consensus-making and elite influence in US policy formation.[220] US democracy promotion programs recreated this dynamic in intervened countries, coordinating

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[219] Aaron Good, *American Exception: Empire and the Deep State* (New York: Skyhorse, 2022).
[220] Thomas R. Dye, *Who's Running America?: The Obama Reign*, 8th edition (Boulder: Routledge, 2014).

not just US elites but also the foreign elites who often became the primary local agents of US democracy promotion.[221]

Trilateral Commission discussions and conclusions had significant implications for US democracy, the NED, and US democracy promotion policy. Perhaps the commission's most famous publication was the 1975 report, *The Crisis of Democracy*. Samuel P. Huntington, a neoconservative political scientist and future director of Harvard's CFIA, wrote the chapter on problems of democracy in the US. Echoing elitist skeptics of democracy of the early US Republic like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, Huntington and the Trilateral Commission expressed distrust of popular, participatory, or mass democracy and a preference for management of society by intellectual, political, and economic elites largely insulated from popular pressures. Huntington decried that an "excess of democracy" and a "democratic surge" of popular mobilization and criticism of authority threatened US governability. Huntington argued that US political culture lacked "traditional and aristocratic values" that balanced out democracy in other places and that the declining marginality of minority groups like African Americans threatened to overload "the political system with demands which extend its functions and undermine its authority."[222] Huntington thus recommended a "moderation in democracy" and greater "self-restraint" of popular democratic forces.[223] Other neoconservatives of the time like Irving Kristol or Senator Daniel P. Moynihan expressed similar distrust of democratic mobilization by the masses of society and preference for intra-elite negotiation and management in governing the political system.[224] These examples represented elite debates among the US and

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[221] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 97.
[222] Michel Crozier, Samuel P Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 114.
[223] Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy,* 113-114.
[224] Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives,* 264-276.

its allies on how to best regulate democratic aspirations of non-elites. They also illustrated the limited polyarchic form of democracy that the US would promote abroad to reform undemocratic political arrangements without endangering the economic and security interests of US and allied elites.

The National Endowment for Democracy is Born

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) institutionalized the elite-managed polyarchic model of democracy to regulate the democratic aspirations of non-elites abroad. The NED is a non-profit private corporation established in 1983 by an act of the US Congress, funded almost entirely by Congress, and is subject to congressional oversight. Its own Board of Directors elects the NED president, chairman, and new directors for three-year terms. It functions mainly as a grant-making foundation. About half of NED award funds regularly go to its so-called "core grantees," the Democratic-Party-affiliated National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), Republican-Party-affiliated International Republican Institute (IRI), US-Chamber-of-Commerce-affiliated Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), and the AFL-CIO-affiliated Solidarity Center (formerly called the Free Trade Union Institute). The remaining grants go to hundreds of NGOs operating in over 100 countries across the world. The Board of Directors decides on applications for awards usually worth tens of thousands of dollars. A similar dynamic holds in the core grantees, where each Board of Directors elects new or re-elects incumbent directors, chairs, and presidents.

Some of the leaders of the NED and its core grantees served for decades. This included Carl Gershman, president of the NED from 1984 to 2021, Madeleine Albright, Chair of the NDI from 1983 to 1997 and again from 2001 to her death in 2022, John McCain, Chair of the IRI from 1993 to his death in 2018, and Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO of the US Chamber

of Commerce from 1997 to 2019 and President Emeritus of CIPE as of 2023. Another example was Philip Trulluck, the founding Director of CIPE in 1983 and a member of its board of directors until his death in 2022, who also served over thirty years as Executive Vice President and COO at the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation.

A critical analysis of the NED by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in 1990 provides a summation of the complex string of events and elite circles that directly led to the creation and unique structure of the NED. It states that "the NED represented the culmination of efforts by a tightly woven group of intelligence experts, neoconservative ideologues, and representatives from the national committees of the two political parties, the AFL-CIO, and the US Chamber of Commerce" alongside intellectual support from a small circle of academics and funding and logistical support from government agencies and officials to plan and initiate the NED.[225] A detailed account of this culmination of efforts illustrates the truth of that summation.

In 1977, a group of political consultants, scholars, state officials, and union, business, and political leaders created the American Political Foundation (APF) with funding from the US Information Agency (USIA) and private foundations.[226] APF leaders included future NED cofounder Allen Weinstein, former National Security Advisors Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and Richard Allen, and high-ranking officials of the AFL-CIO, Chamber of Commerce, and Republican and Democratic Parties. Florida Democrat congressman Dante Fascell, who tried unsuccessfully in 1967 to create an organization similar to the NED called the Institute for International Affairs and later became the chief sponsor of the legislation that established the NED, played a leading role in the APF.[227] In early June 1982, the APF requested

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[225] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 9.
[226] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 9.
[227] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 90.

that President Reagan commission a study for it to examine how the US could better promote

democracy overseas. Specifically, it wanted to investigate how a bipartisan program could

maintain relations with friendly non-democratic governments while sowing the seeds of

democratic successors, and how it could encourage pluralistic domestic forces in so-called

"totalitarian" countries.[228] On June 8, 1982, Ronald Reagan delivered his famous "Westminster

Speech" to Britain's Parliament announcing his administration's fervent support for democracy

promotion abroad and naming the APF as the body studying how to best go about this

mission.[229] That study was funded with $300,000 by USAID and became known as "the

Democracy Program."[230] While operating under that USAID grant, members of the APF study

group lobbied Congress to pass the legislation that produced the NED, effectively using

executive branch funds to lobby the legislative branch on behalf of this new public-private,

executive-legislative venture.[231]

Beyond the bipartisan and tripartite (labor-business-government) actors involved, the

APF Democracy Program study included members of the National Security Council, two think

tanks, the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Center for Strategic and

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This included AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, who served on the board of the APF. Kirkland also became a founding board member of the NED and also served on the board of the USIA controlled Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Atlantic Council, the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), served as member on the Reagan Administration's 12-member Kissinger Commission on policy toward Central America, and Kirkland was also a founder of the 1970s Committee on the Present Danger. Kirkland's wife, Irena, was also a board member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the International Rescue Committee (Sims 1990, 19).

[228] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 9.

[229] Reagan had a longer history with covert and overt anti-communist intellectual warfare. He was a leading publisher and spokesman for the Crusade for Freedom, the fundraising arm of the Free Europe Committee (also known as the National Committee for a Free Europe), a CIA front propaganda organization targeted at European audiences that was founded by CIA spymaster Allen Dulles and staffed by US military, political, CIA, and corporate media elites. The FEC created the CIA-funded public broadcasting outlets, Radio Free Europe, in 1949, and Radio Liberty, in 1953. Bill Casey, the future CIA director under the Reagan Administration used funds laundered from the Crusade for Freedom (as well as grants from the CIA connected Ford Foundation) to fund anti-communist immigrant and refugee programs through the International Rescue Committee. See Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 110, 118-119.

[230] David Lowe, "Idea to Reality: NED at 30," National Endowment for Democracy, 2013, https://www.ned.org/about/history/.

[231] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 26.

International Studies (CSIS), and state propaganda outlets like USIA and the Board for

International Broadcasting (BIB).[232] Their final report proposals laid out the structure that the

NED would take: a private corporation funded by Congress; governed by a board of directors

from business, both political parties, and labor; that would pass funds to and carry out programs

with overseas groups through three new "core grantees" representing the two political parties and

business, and the reinvigoration of a fourth, the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute.[233] The

three new core grantees became the Democrats' NDI, the Republicans' IRI, and the Chamber of

Commerce's CIPE. The NED synthesized into one organization the old CIA cultural Cold War

public-private network, ongoing work of the largely USAID-funded AFL-CIO foreign labor

programs abroad, and the West German model of international political foundations

("Stiftungen" in German) affiliated with political parties.[234]

The Reagan administration took the APF's recommendations and created Project

Democracy under the National Security Council. DCI Bill Casey handpicked Walter Raymond

Jr., a high-ranking CIA propaganda expert, in 1982 to sit on the NSC board and engineer what

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[232] NED cofounder Allen Weinstein was also the editor of CSIS's public journal. The BIB was a privately incorporated organization established in October 1973 to take over management of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which had formerly been funded by the CIA. The BIB was disbanded in 1994 with the International Broadcasting Act, which put the by-then merged RFE/RL and other US state broadcasters under the control of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, an independent agency of the US government under the US Information Agency.

[233] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 10.

[234] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 11.
The Germans had pioneered the use of political foundations associated with, but technically independent of, specific political parties decades before the NED. The first, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Foundation) was established by the Social Democratic Party in 1925. The Christian Democratic Union founded the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in 1955, while the Free Democratic Party established the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in 1958 and the Christian Social Union of Bavaria established the Hanns Seidel Stiftung in 1966. Samuel P. Huntington noted that the West German Stiftungen, particularly the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of the Social Democratic Party, alongside US ambassador to Portugal "Spooky" Frank Carlucci, were instrumental in transitioning Portugal from a fascist dictatorship to a Western-European style democracy in the wake of the 1974 Carnation Revolution. They did so by supporting the moderate Portuguese socialists and marginalizing the communists. Huntington noted the inspiration this gave to US officials, stating that Carlucci and the West Germans "provided a model, an incentive, and a means for the United States to become similarly engaged and to funnel substantial sums to the forces fighting for democracy." See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1991), 89, 93.

would become Project Democracy. Raymond officially left the CIA in 1983 but unofficially reported to Casey until 1986.[235] While trying to avoid tainting the NED by associating it with the CIA, behind the scenes, Bill Casey promoted the NED and made sure the CIA could covertly influence it. As the bill establishing the NED was about to go to the House floor, Casey sent a CIA congressional liaison to congressman Dante Fascell, the chief sponsor of the bill, to remove the original language in the law that would have banned any current or former CIA official from participating in the NED. Fascell consented to remove the language and also to appoint Carl Gershman as NED president, a confidant of Raymond who then coordinated NED grants with Raymond throughout the mid-1980s.[236]

The National Endowment for Democracy was initiated by National Security Decision Document (NSDD) 77, signed on January 14, 1983, and Public Laws 98-164 and 98-166 of November 22 and 28, 1983 respectively.[237] NSDD 77 created a Special Planning Group under the National Security Council to strengthen and coordinate public diplomacy relative to national security, laying out guidance for inter-agency working groups involved in domestic and international information dissemination. Through Public Law 98-164, Congress enacted a two-year authorization for the NED to be created by the USIA, BIB, the Inter-American Foundation, and the Asia Foundation, one of the CIA-founded cultural fronts exposed in a 1966 *Ramparts* investigation.[238] The NED was funded mostly by annual appropriations from USAID (which also

[235] Robert Parry, "Reagan Documents Shed Light on U.S. 'Meddling,'" *Consortium News*, September 13, 2017, https://consortiumnews.com/2017/09/13/reagan-documents-shed-light-on-u-s-meddling/.
[236] Robert Parry, "Reagan Documents Shed Light,".
[237] Colin S. Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy: The National Endowment for Democracy & U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lanham, Md: UPA, 2002), 87.
[238] For facts on the Asia Foundation, see CIA, "Memorandum From the Central Intelligence Agency to the 303 Committee," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume X, National Security Policy (Office of the Historian, June 22, 1966), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v10/d132.

regularly funded the four core NED grantees directly), the Department of State (DoS), and the USIA until USIA was integrated into DOS in October 1999.[239]

Reconciling National Security and Democracy Promotion

During the Carter and Reagan administrations, foreign policy establishment officials debated how to reconcile national security imperatives with the promotion of US-style democratic political culture. Historian Robert Pee argues that the discrediting of previous modes of political intervention of the 1960s and 70s along with perceived growing instability and communist threat in the Third World among foreign policy elites spurred private actors to conceptualize democracy promotion. The new form of democracy promotion they drafted avoided the vulnerability of the covert state-private networks by operating overtly, and it would break through the limits of modernization theory by working with sub-state political actors that could bypass uncooperative authoritarian US allies.[240] The NED represented a compromise wherein democracy promotion could be implemented on a case-by-case basis so as not to threaten what officials deemed US vital interests. This meant that, while the NED and US democracy promotion could operate nearly everywhere, significant resources and effort would be mobilized only in areas where the NED's mission and functions aligned with US security and economic concerns. The US and NED consistently targeted enemy states, but US-backed dictatorial governments would be marked for democratic change only if officials were confident that a transition would result in a US-friendly, stable, polyarchic system.

Like the limited, procedural, elite-managed, polyarchic conception of democracy, the Reagan administration made a similar ideological sleight of hand with its conceptualization of human rights. Samuel P. Huntington argues that the most significant action by the US for

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[239] Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy*, 94.
[240] Pee, *Democracy Promotion,, National Security, and Strategy*, 32-33.

international democratization from 1975 to 1990 was making human rights under Carter and democracy under Reagan major issues in international relations.[241] William I. Robinson also points to Carter's human rights policy as a precursor to Reagan democracy promotion policies, but he treats both as strategies of intervention and manufacturing consent for pro-US, pro-elite, pro-capitalist status quos rather than as a concern for human rights.[242] Instrumentalizing human rights became a significant piece of imperial strategy in US democracy promotion under Reagan and became even more relevant post-Cold War when the US began framing its violent actions overseas as humanitarian interventions.

Rasmus Søndergaard argues that, when articulating its policy and conceptualization of human rights, the Reagan administration stressed political and civil rights, downgrading economic and social rights as merely ideals for society to strive for rather than innate human rights. This conceptualization went against mainstream international human rights law and even the Carter administration, which, at least rhetorically, conceived economic and social rights to be of equal standing with political and civil rights.[243] The Reagan administration narrowed human rights in a strategic way that reinforced its neoliberal democracy promotion agenda. It contended that polyarchic democratic regimes are the greatest guarantors of political and civil rights and equated democracy promotion with fostering human rights. Importantly, the Reagan administration devalued socialist and social democratic models of human rights that emphasized social and economic rights.[244]

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[241] Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 94.

[242] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 214.

[243] Rasmus Søndergaard, "'A Positive Track of Human Rights Policy': Elliott Abrams, the Human Rights Bureau, and the Conceptualization of Democracy Promotion, 1981–1984," in *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion*, ed. Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 32, 43.

[244] Søndergaard, "A Positive Track of Human Rights Policy," 32.

The NED and Reagan's new democracy promotion crusade was bipartisan, which became essential for maintaining and increasing congressional support for presidential foreign policy. Robert Pee and Michael Schmidli argue that Democracy promotion under Reagan was a successful attempt to re-establish the bipartisan foreign policy consensus that had been savaged by the Vietnam War.[245] The rising neoconservatives who found a home in the Reagan administration became important for establishing this new foreign policy consensus as they came to their own consensus about democracy promotion through debates of the 1970s and 1980s.

Mattias Fibiger demonstrates that, Until the 1980s, neoconservatives were largely against democracy promotion, but they grew to embrace it once the Reagan administration had successfully merged it with US national security imperatives and, perhaps most importantly, the rollback of international communism.[246] Neoconservatives had been fierce defenders of Western democracy, but they prided themselves on their realism versus what they saw as the naïve idealism of Wilsonian liberal internationalists who wanted to spread democracy as a value in and of itself.[247] They were anti-communists first, embracing dictatorial regimes so long as they served US anti-communist security interests. This dominant view among neoconservatives was perhaps best encapsulated in Jeane Kirkpatrick's 1979 *Commentary* article "Dictators and Double Standards," which lambasted Carter's supposedly naïve idealist human rights policy. Neoconservative support for a democratic crusade required reconciling democracy promotion with national security. The Reagan administration and the NED did much to achieve that reconciliation by using a narrow conception of democracy that (1) excluded more direct and

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[245] Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli, eds., *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 23, 76.
[246] Mattias Fibiger, "The Pivot: Neoconservatives, the Philippines, and the Democracy Agenda," in *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion*, ed. Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019)
[247] Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 138, 220; Fibiger, "The Pivot," 211.

participatory economic and social democracy that could threaten US interests and (2) promoted democracy selectively in democratic transitions that would not threaten US interests. Thus, by the mid-1980s, major neoconservative thinkers like Charles Krauthammer at *The Washington Post* and Elliot Abrams and Paul Wolfowitz at the State Department became vocal supporters of promoting democracy.[248]

US neoconservative thinkers and foreign policy elites knew that dictatorial regimes brought political problems, and US efforts to reform dictatorial regimes for strategic reasons, such as with the JFK and LBJ administration policies inspired by modernization theory, predated the NED. Dictatorships were useful for destroying Left-nationalist and socialist threats to US elite economic and security interests, as in Iran, Guatemala, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, and Chile. However, anti-democratic governments also suppressed moderate liberal democratic forces that sought to establish a state with greater popular legitimacy without threatening US and domestic elite interests. Dictatorships thus risked helping radical factions to gain legitimacy and even hegemony in popular movements opposing the undemocratic state.[249] With the NED and fledgling democracy promotion industry, the US developed a new formal institutional framework and method for both fighting against Left-nationalist and socialist adversaries and also reforming dictatorial allies abroad that operated under a deeper cover of benevolence and democracy compared to older policies informed by modernization theory.

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[248] Fibiger, "The Pivot," 219, 220, 227.
[249] Pee, *Democracy Promotion,, National Security, and Strategy*, 15. When successful, as in China (1949), Cuba (1959), Angola (1975), and Nicaragua (1979), these radical forces created serious threats to US interests and hegemony.

NED and USAID Imperial Democracy Promotion, 1983–1991

Iran-Contra

The NED and USAID's 1980s democracy promotion programs extended globally, taking

a country-specific approach. In South Africa, the Philippines, and Chile, where the US sought a

controlled transition from an un-democratic allied government to a US-friendly democracy, the

organizations took a counter-insurgency approach. A democratic transition with moderate

reforms was meant to isolate radical revolutionary elements and maintain the power of local

elites that protected American interests. In socialist Nicaragua or Poland, where the US sought

regime change to replace an unfriendly government with a friendly one, the US took an

insurgency approach.[250] US policies supporting economic deprivation, diplomatic isolation, and

opposition groups ranging from moderate to insurrectionary aimed to dislodge the targeted

administration violently or electorally.[251]

For the first years of the NED about half of its funding went to programs in Latin

America. The NED shifted focus to Europe in the late 1980s to consolidate US interests during

the collapse of the socialist Eastern Bloc. NED and USAID democracy promotion efforts in both

regions were in close alignment with the economic and security imperatives of the Reagan

administration. They also echoed earlier CIA Cultural Cold War fronts by taking over media and

civil society tasks previously managed by the CIA and exerting, as a top imperative, influence

over organized labor. NED funding to the CIA-backed Polish trade union Solidarność

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[250] Robinson, who framed democracy promotion in terms of capitalist globalization, described these two tracks of intervention in terms of convergences of transnational forces. In Chile or the Philippines, he identified a "circumstantial convergence" of interests between dominant US groups and majoritarian groups (including both elites and popular sectors). The popular democratic sectors had a real shared interest with US elites to remove the local undemocratic regime. In Nicaragua and Haiti, US and local elites developed a conspiratorial convergence *against* majoritarian groups.

[251] Because the focus of this study is on Syria and Venezuela, two countries governed by administrations unfriendly to the US, this dissertation focuses more on the NED and USAID's strategies *for* insurgency, and particularly the evolving tactics of media and civil society within that strategy.

(Solidarity) reached $10 million in the 1980s. From the beginning of the NED until the ouster of Lane Kirkland from the AFL-CIO Presidency in 1995, AFL-CIO organizations like the AIFLD and Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI) made up forty to fifty percent of all annual NED funds.[252] During the 1984 Panamanian presidential election, an FTUI grant went to a union that used the money to support the candidate endorsed by the Panamanian military, Nicolas Barletta, violating both NED principles of nonpartisanship and US neutrality laws.[253] That same year, the FTUI awarded secret grants to a CIA-connected anti-communist labor union called Force Ouvriere and a right-wing French group that organized demonstrations against President Francois Mitterand.[254]

Perhaps the largest early project of the NED in the Reagan administration's crusade for democracy was in the US-backed Contra War in Nicaragua. The CIA under President Carter gave political aid to conservative elements in Nicaraguan politics, media, and civil society as part of an unsuccessful effort to make a controlled transition away from the crumbling Somoza dictatorship to an elite-managed polyarchic democracy.[255] When that failed to prevent the Sandinistas from seizing state power, the CIA supported the insurgent right-wing, drug smuggling Contras under a doctrine of low-intensity warfare. The NED supported CIA-led efforts to oust Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government. The Contra terror campaign failed to unseat the Sandinistas, who won the 1984 Nicaraguan election deemed free and fair by most of the international community, excluding the US. The US then recalibrated its efforts to combine an armed Contra insurgency, diplomatic and economic isolation, and a NED-led media, civil society, and electoral campaign to beat the Sandinistas in the 1990 election.

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[252] Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy*, 94.
[253] Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy*, 104.
[254] Cavell, *Exporting "Made in America" Democracy*, 104.
[255] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 222.

Through the Democratic and Republican party core grantees, the NDI and IRI, the NED coordinated elite anti-Sandinista political parties and civil society groups to unify into one coalition to contest the 1990 general election.[256] To facilitate this effort, the NED contracted the Delphi International Group, which had experience unifying and coordinating the elite-democratic opposition in Chile to control the transition away from the Pinochet dictatorship. Throughout 1989, US government and NED officials like Carl Gershman and previously NED-backed Panamanian and Chilean leaders flew to Managua to midwife and advise the new coalition, the National Opposition Union (UNO).[257] Ten candidates ran for the 1990 presidency, but the NED supported only the Reagan approved and backed UNO, headed by Violeta Chamorro of the oligarchic Chamorro dynasty.[258]

The NED also supplemented CIA financing of Nicaragua's largest newspaper, *La Prensa,* which opposed the Sandinistas, and spent at least $220,000 to create a voter mobilization non-profit targeting students, Vía Cívica, led by anti-Sandinista opposition figures.[259] Carlos Andrés Pérez's US-friendly government in Venezuela and Venezuela's largest union (also supported by the NED and AFL-CIO), the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV), funneled US money and support to the Nicaraguan opposition.[260] Direct campaign support for a partisan organization is prohibited by the NED charter. So, to support the UNO, the US needed to go through intermediaries like the Venezuelan government or seemingly non- or multi-

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[256] Golinger, *The Chávez Code,* 18.
[257] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 223-224.
[258] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 46.
During the campaign the US even arranged meetings in Washington between Chamorro, President Bush, Pope John Paul II, Margaret Thatcher and other European leaders, and the previously NED-backed candidate, then president of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, to lend Chamorro greater international legitimacy as an effective and moral leader. See Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 225.
[259] Revista Envío, "Revista Envío - Election Watch: Opposing the Sandinistas the 'Civic' Way," *Revista Envío*, December 1989, https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2759; Golinger, *The Chávez Code,* 18, 20.
[260] Golinger, *The Chávez Code,* 18, 20.

partisan conduits like the Institute for Electoral Promotion and Training, set up by US officials in

Washington who handpicked leaders from UNO to head it.[261]

USAID simultaneously made its first major foray into democracy promotion in Latin

America. Through a new Office of Democratic Initiatives (ODI), USAID funneled $25 million

from 1984 to 1987 to influence electoral processes in Latin America.[262] The ODI resulted from

recommendations by foreign policy elites organized as the National Bipartisan Commission on

Central America (also known as the Kissinger Commission). Like the NED, the ODI targeted the

Sandinista government.[263] Throughout the 1980s USAID gave millions of dollars to Cardinal

Miguel Obando y Bravo of the archdiocese of Managua, whom Robinson describes as the

"premier anti-Sandinista symbol," and awarded him another $4.166 million during the 1990

electoral campaign.[264] Besides financing NED grants to Chile and Nicaragua in the 1980s,

USAID's democracy initiatives included the Central American Journalism Project, wherein

USAID established a network of rural radio journalists, sponsoring training and visits to the

US.[265] The NED and USAID also funded the Delphi International Group, which supported civic

and media training programs in Nicaragua.[266]

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[261] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 226-227.
Pérez's embezzlement of presidential funds for the purposes of supporting Chamorro's 1990 candidacy ended up causing his downfall in an impeachment process in 1993 that contributed to paving the way for the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez.
[262] Golinger, *The Chávez Code,* 22.
[263] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 76.
[264] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 225.
[265] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 76.
Although not carried out by USAID itself, the Reagan Administration created a Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office funded and ostensibly operated by the State Department to adhere to congressional restrictions imposed on the Department of Defense and CIA by the Boland Amendment. The amendment banned military assistance to the contras. However, $27 million in congressionally approved humanitarian aid entrusted to the NHAO was actually used by Oliver North, Assistant Secretary of State and neoconservative lawyer Elliot Abrams, and CIA Central American Task Force chief Alan Fiers (with the help of Major General Richard Secord, a veteran agent of the CIA's secret war in Laos) to covertly and illegally smuggle weapons to the Contras. One recorded humanitarian flight alone carried seven tons of weapons to Contra forces. See Doyle McManus, "Use of Humanitarian Aid Flights to Arm Contras Told," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1987, sec. World & Nation, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-05-19-mn-1157-story.html.
[266] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 77.

The US led a years-long project building up anti-Sandinista political parties, media, religious institutions, and labor unions. However, the US, through its contractor Delphi, also started new anti-Sandinista women's and student movements from scratch.[267] This established a consistent pattern for US democracy promotion policy. When interfering in a foreign country, the US would link up with capitalist-oriented, anti-communist media and civil society groups. Where such groups did not exist or where existing civil society groups were too influenced by radical, anti-imperialist, or anti-capitalist forces, the US invented new groups that were compatible with US policy. The US spent $12.5 million on the 1990 Nicaraguan election through the NED and about $30 million total, adding up to about $20 per voter, compared to $4 per voter spent by the George H. W. Bush campaign for the 1988 US election.[268]

NED and USAID investment in the anti-Sandinista campaign also connected them to Colonel Oliver North's secretive network that operated under the cover of Reagan's "Project Democracy," which became infamous as the Iran-Contra Affair.[269] North and the NSC organized this network to circumvent congressional bans on lethal aid to the Contras. It involved a top-secret Doomsday communications system known as Flashboard, the underworld-connected Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), shell companies such as the National Endowment for the Preservation of Liberty, the Nazi- and Latin American death squad-linked World Anti-Communist League, and a lobbying group established by Reagan's "Kitchen Cabinet" of right-wing oligarchs, the Citizens for America.[270]

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[267] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 228-229.
[268] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 226.
[269] North saw great value in propaganda and information warfare in international conflict, subscribing to the belief that US failures in Vietnam were driven not by losses on the battlefield, but losses in the streets of the US, and he sought to ensure that subsequent US endeavors abroad would not be endangered by dissent at home (Scott 2007, 9).
[270] Robert Parry and Peter Kornbluh, "Iran-Contra's Untold Story," *Foreign Policy*, no. 72 (1988): 3–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/1148818; Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 76.

USAID assistant administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean, Otto Reich, became

the director of the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean (S/LPD), an

intra-agency body created in 1983 that secretly reported to Oliver North. The Department of

State's (DoS) Public Affairs Bureau is formally tasked with public diplomacy, but the S/LPD

operated as a kind of DoS within the DoS, drawing select personnel from USAID, including

Reich, the Department of Defense (DoD), USIA, and the DoS.[271] Operating with a yearly budget

of over $1 million, the S/LPD targeted domestic as well as Central American and international

audiences, arranging 1,570 speaking engagements and television, radio, and editorial board

interviews in more than one thousand US cities.[272] John A. Bushnell, a DoS Public Affairs

Bureau officer, leaned on the anticommunism of senior editors at major news agencies to

pressure their junior editors who were covering Central American issues to take firmer

anticommunist positions. Bushnell said, "Soon the junior editors would be defending themselves

from questioning by senior editors… In many cases editorials would appear fairly soon after my

visit which were favorable to US policy."[273] Reich also personally cajoled and intimidated

journalists and news outlets, and claimed that the S/LPD "killed' erroneous news stories" by

providing quick information about developing events to news outlets. Indeed, the S/LPD, with

the help of the National Security Agency (NSA), CIA, FBI, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)

Flashboard was the term for the 1980s Continuity of Government plan, a broader framework that included the top-secret global communications and computer system and allowed North and his collaborators to communicate without the knowledge of those outside the network (Scott 2017, 117-118). Continuity of Government was a top-secret contingency plan that existed since the Eisenhower Administration and was meant to prepare the US government to continue vital operations in the aftermath of a catastrophic event such as a nuclear war.

A presidential Kitchen Cabinet is a colloquial term for trusted associates and confidants of US presidents who serve as unofficial advisors. For the Reagan administration, it consisted of ten to twelve men, mostly conservative California businessmen such as Alfred S. Bloomingdale of Bloomingdale's department stores and Joseph Coors of Coors Brewing Company.

[271] William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and US Interventionism in the Late Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 155.

[272] Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive*, 157, 159.

[273] Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive*, 159.

US Southern Command, USIA, and the DoS's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, flooded the news industry with publications supporting Reagan's policies, providing more than 2,000 background briefings on Central America to newspaper, magazine, and TV reporters.[274] Reich's S/LPD office planted stories and intelligence leaks in US media to support Reagan's anti-Sandinista efforts in a massive psychological operation aimed at the US public that was later declared illegal by the US Comptroller General.[275]

The NED funneled aid to the Contras through North's network, including the International Youth Commission and the Institute for North-South Issues.[276] The Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America (PRODEMCA), headed by neoconservative SDUSA leader Penn Kemble, received funds from North's National Endowment for the Preservation of Liberty to place full-page ads in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Times* urging congress to approve Reagan's request for $100 million in lethal and non-lethal aid to the Contras. PRODEMCA received about $400,000 in NED grants, using them to support an anti-Sandinista human rights group and the CIA-backed opposition newspaper *La Prensa*.[277]

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[274] Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive*, 159.
[275] Parry and Kornbluh, "Iran-Contra's Untold Story."
Parry and Kornbluh reported that in its first year alone, S/LPD booked more than 1,500 speaking engagements on radio, television, and editorial board interviews; published three booklets on Nicaragua; and distributed materials to 1,600 college libraries, 520 political science faculties, 162 area studies faculties, 130 foreign affairs organizations, 122 editorial writers, and 107 religious organizations, with special attention to prominent journalists. See Parry and Kornbluh, "Iran-Contra's Untold Story," 17.
[276] Larry Margasak, "Obscure Endowment Thrust Into Limelight by Oliver North's Notes," *AP News*, March 16, 1987; Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 76.
Directed by neoconservative Roy Godson, the International Youth Commission represented an early weaponization of students in US democracy promotion. This tactic would play a prominent role in US efforts to create an anti-socialist youth opposition movement in Venezuela in the twenty-first century.
[277] Sidney Blumenthal, "Grantee of U.S. Endowment Funds Sandinista Opponents," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1986.
PRODEMCA later merged with Freedom House in 1988 and Penn Kemble became Freedom House's Washington D.C. representative.

Operation Cyclone

USAID and the NED also supported the CIA's Operation Cyclone backing the Mujahideen insurgency in Afghanistan. Operation Cyclone and Iran-Contra had many similarities. Both involved CIA and NSC covert operations to support undemocratic, drug trafficking, right-wing armed insurgents. Both also involved BCCI and Saudi Arabian business and government elites, namely Adnan Khashoggi and Prince Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud.[278] In fact, Peter Dale Scott argues that the Iran-Contra affair should be better understood as the Iran-Afghan-Contra affair.[279] Operation Cyclone was significantly more expensive however and likely had the greater historical significance, contributing to the creation of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the events of 9/11, and the US's longest war, in Afghanistan.

In part because the US had so many undemocratic allies in the Middle East and Muslim world, these areas received little funding and intervention from the US democracy promotion apparatus. Yet the NED and USAID did support the Afghan Mujahideen, establishing a precedent for interventions in twenty-first century Syria. From 1986 to 1994, Thomas Gouttierre, a Unocal oil company consultant and director of the University of Nebraska Omaha's Center for Afghanistan Studies, received more than $60 million from USAID for educational programs in Afghan and Pakistani schools and refugee camps.[280] Funneled through USAID but sponsored by the CIA, these education programs produced millions of children's textbooks filled with explicit

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[278] Peter Dale Scott, *The American Deep State: Big Money, Big Oil, and the Struggle for U.S. Democracy*, Updated edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 129-130.
Adnan Khashoggi, known as the richest man in the world in the early 1980s, was also the owner of the Mt. Kenya Safari Club, the ranch and club frequented by wealthy internationals that became the meeting place for the unofficial alliance of US and allied intelligence agencies known as the Safari Club. Operation Cyclone had its roots in Safari Club operations in Afghanistan beginning in 1978. See Scott, *The American Deep State*, 129.
[279] Scott, *The American Deep State*, 116.
[280] Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 328; Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Afghanistan and the Genesis of Global Jihad," *Peace Research* 37, no. 1 (2005), 23.

Islamic fundamentalist rhetoric.[281] Professor of international education Dana Burde (2014)

argues that these textbooks had a "major influence" on a "normative acceptance of Jihad and

violence in Afghan Society," being used in Taliban-administered schools into the 2010s.[282]

The NED also helped weaponize media, education, refugees, and humanitarian concerns

for the US-sponsored insurgency in Afghanistan. The NED and US Information Service

cosponsored a pro-Mujahideen lecture on Afghanistan by Thomas Gouttiere.[283] The NED also

supported pro-Mujahideen media organizations like the Writers Union of Free Afghanistan, the

Afghan Information Center (created by Freedom House), and the Cultural Council of the Afghan

Resistance, the last of which was directly linked to rebel forces.[284] The NED funneled the money

through supposedly humanitarian organizations, including the American Friends of Afghanistan

and the Afghanistan Relief Committee (ARC), an organization created in 1980 by John Train,

the founding managing editor of the CIA-backed literary journal, *The Paris Review*.[285] Train

corresponded with the president of Freedom House to coordinate fundraising and media

operations in Afghanistan, including the creation of a pro-Mujahideen film broadcast on US and

European public and Christian television networks.[286] Train, Freedom House, and Cold Warrior

Harvard physicist Russell Seitz concocted a plan to have Pakistani intelligence agents and

Western journalists use Mujahideen fighters to attack Soviet positions and incite violent Soviet

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[281] Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 328; Dana Burde, *Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 56.

[282] Burde, *Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan*, 56-57
USAID's Office of Democratic Initiatives also spent $12.5 million on culturally conservative, Catholic fundamentalist textbooks in Nicaragua in the 1990s, but this was to support the Chamorro government's counterrevolutionary reforms. See Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 243).

[283] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 24.

[284] Diana Barahona, "The Freedom House Files," MR Online, January 3, 2007, https://mronline.org/2007/01/03/the-freedom-house-files/; Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 56.

[285] Thomas Gouttiere was also an advisor to ARC. See Joel Whitney, *Finks: How the CIA Tricked the World's Best Writers* (New York: OR Books, 2016), 263.

[286] Whitney, *Finks*, 259.

reprisals against Afghans that would then be filmed and turned into atrocity propaganda against the Soviets and their Afghan allies.[287]

Perhaps the most prominent example of weaponized humanitarianism for deep political interests during the Reagan administration involved the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a global humanitarian aid NGO that intertwined with the CIA, NED, and USAID. During the Cold War, the IRC developed a close relationship with the CIA directly and through CIA-connected foundations such as the Ford Foundation, which funded the IRC.[288] During the 1980s, USAID funneled a million dollars through the NED to the IRC for Solidarity-sponsored medical clinics in Poland.[289] NED president Carl Gershman served on the board of directors of the IRC. IRC president and director John Richardson was chairperson of the NED from 1984 to 1988, and IRC board member Irena Kirkland's husband, Lane Kirkland, served on the board of both the NED and NED-funded FTUI.[290] Leo Cherne headed the IRC for forty years (1951–1991) and was honorary chair of the NED- and USAID-funded Freedom House.[291] The IRC played a key role in CIA- and USAID-supported programs in Afghanistan. The IRC's relationship to the CIA represented an early stage of US weaponization of refugees and defectors in its foreign policy agendas. US use of humanitarian pretexts to justify intervention became more relevant for US imperialism in the twenty-first century.

The above cases demonstrate key aspects of NED and USAID democracy promotion. First, these institutions were not the only, or even necessarily the primary, institutions involved in policies under the umbrella of democracy promotion but were part of a greater network of

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[287] Whitney, *Finks*, 263-266.
[288] Eric Thomas Chester, *Covert Network: Progressives, the International Rescue Committee and the CIA*, (Armonk, N.Y: Routledge, 1995), 101, 124-125, 202-205.
[289] Chester, *Covert Network*, 192.
[290] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 18-19.
[291] Sims, *The National Endowment for Democracy*, 69.

intervention involving deep political forces. Although dedicated to democracy promotion, the NED operated with a much lower budget than USAID or the US State Department. While USAID had a sizeable budget and opened its Office of Democratic Initiatives under Reagan, democracy promotion never became its primary directive. The NED was more of a symbol for the reconfigured style of intervention and a clearinghouse for democracy promotion among officials and intellectuals.[292] The National Security Council and CIA led US regime change policy in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. However, the NED and USAID's democracy promotion work (on top of USAIDs broader development and aid programs) provided media and civil society soft power support to US-backed opposition groups. These programs were especially significant in the case of Nicaragua because the Sandinistas were forced out electorally, although it was impossible to separate that electoral outcome from US-backed violence that threatened to continue indefinitely if the Sandinistas stayed in government.

Second, the new dedication of the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations to promoting democracy and human rights globally did not preclude the US from using its democracy promotion institutions and funds to support allies who had poor records of democracy and human rights, such as the Nicaraguan Contras or the Afghan Mujahideen. Simultaneously however, the US backed media and civil society groups that had enough legitimacy regarding democracy and human rights to create plausible deniability and justifiable pretext in US and US-friendly foreign media to undermine their socialist adversaries. These media and civil society groups included the Nicaraguan UNO alliance and *La Prensa* newspaper as well as the IRC, Afghan Information Center, and the Cultural Council of the Afghan Resistance in Afghanistan. The bulk of US money and resources went to violent and undemocratic forces through secretive

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[292] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 99.

and often illegal (under US and international law) programs. However, the NED and USAID supported both violent and non-violent opposition groups, provided cover for what the US was doing in each country, and offered plausible reasons for American intervention to the US legislature and press and domestic and international publics.

Conclusion

US democracy promotion under Reagan represented an evolution and continuation of early Cold War anti-communist figures, institutions, and strategies. The elite activists and officials who developed and staffed democracy promotion institutions during the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations came out of a soft power, media, and civil society Cultural Cold War milieu led by the CIA, anti-communist liberals, and early neoconservatives. Elite thinkers organized with elite corporate and government figures to develop a top-down, neoliberal, polyarchic conception of democratic governance and an institutional approach to promote it. The NED and USAID interlocked with deep political forces in US society to advance elite economic and security interests abroad, at the expense of popular, bottom-up democratic forces in targeted countries. These institutions reconstituted and refined formerly CIA-led soft power propaganda and civil society efforts and more effectively covered them in a façade of benevolent, democratic, and humanitarian politics.

Elite liberal thinkers that popularized modernization theory among the Kennedy and LBJ administrations inspired the creation of USAID as a means of waging a global political campaign against socialism and to ensure that the Global South followed a capitalist path of development modeled after, and led by, the United States. USAID supported covert actions led by the intelligence community to subvert geopolitical enemies, although this important aspect of

USAID's work was obfuscated in the mainstream press and public discourse by its professedly apolitical prime directives of economic development and humanitarian assistance.

The neoconservative-influenced Reagan administration formed the NED to revive a unilateral interventionist bipartisan foreign policy consensus that had faltered due to the failures of modernization theory and US reliance on undemocratic repressive allies in its global quest against communism and for US primacy. To facilitate that consensus, foreign policy elites reconciled the negative strategies of anti-communism and neutralizing threats to US security and economic interests with a positive emphasis on promoting capitalism and democracy. This combination of anti-communist realism and ostensibly progressive democratic idealism was essential in building support among the rising neoliberal and neoconservative factions in business, labor, and the Democratic and Republican parties. Led by liberal, neoconservative, and realist foreign policy elites and operating under a narrow conception of political but not economic democracy, the NED allowed the US to continue interventionist policies that garnered legitimacy at home and abroad without threatening the US-led capitalist order. This new foreign policy paradigm and the mechanisms for implementing it also lent stronger ideological cover to US programs abroad, cultivating friendly media and civil society groups without the liabilities of having them directly connected to the CIA or other notorious US government institutions. The next chapter will explore how the NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion policy evolved after the Cold War and into the twenty-first century, with a continued focus on their weaponization of media and civil society to advance regime change goals against foreign state adversaries.

CHAPTER FOUR – AN EMPIRE FOR DEMOCRACY?: THE NED, USAID, AND US MEDIA IMPERIALISM SINCE THE COLD WAR

After the Cold War, US foreign policy elites made democracy promotion into a primary justification for and method of intervention. The US government expanded the democracy promotion budgets of the NED and USAID, and USAID became the primary institution for carrying out democracy promotion policy in terms of funding. The NED and USAID continue to subordinate narrow polyarchic democracy promotion ideals to US foreign policy interests. Special democracy promotion attention and money is dedicated to countries where and when US policy becomes oriented toward regime change. In these cases, US democracy promotion institutions violate institutional ethics standards like nonpartisanship and denying support to individuals and organizations that engage in or advocate political violence. Like their involvement in the Iran-Contra affair in Nicaragua during the last decade of the Cold War, the NED and USAID continue to almost exclusively back forces favored by Washington, including some individuals and groups with dubious democratic and human rights records, to the detriment of other democratic forces in targeted countries.

This chapter explores how the NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion intersect with deep political forces and mobilizes media and civil society to advance US imperialist economic and security interests at the expense of democratic procedures and accountability. Case studies here include Yugoslavia (2000), Venezuela (2002), Haiti (2004) and Ukraine (2014). I chose them because they represent periods of intense tension and conflict in each country as well as times when US democracy promotion institutions and US government interventions, in general, were particularly active in each country. Using critical case studies of US democracy promotion as well as leaked documents that offer insight into the agendas and perspectives of US

foreign policy establishment elites, I argue that the case studies represent examples of deep political State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs) and what Aaron Good refers to as exceptionism (interminably operating as if the economic interests of US elites warrant an exception to the rule of law and the institutionalization of this logic). NED and USAID campaigns ostensibly aimed at openly fostering pluralist democratic development show a pattern of intersecting with shadowy US military, political, intelligence, and diplomatic forces that exacerbate NED and USAID support for partisan and even antidemocratic forces. I also argue for the case studies as examples of deflective source propaganda and news reliance on official sources as explored in scholarship on media imperialism. The NED, USAID, and other democracy promotion agencies and NGOs create deflective source propaganda (wherein sources of information are made to seem more official, legitimate, neutral, unbiased, or credible that they are) by funding, supplying, and training activists, media organizations, and other things that are then promoted as legitimate sources of information by US elites and news outlets. These aspects make democracy promotion a significant instrument for US grand strategy for global hegemony that emerged in the wake of the dissolution of the USSR.

Elite Grand Strategy for a Unipolar Era

> Lesley Stahl: We have heard that a half a million children have died [from US sanctions on Iraq]. I mean that's more children than died when, in in Hiroshima. And and, you know, is the price worth it?
>
> Madeleine Albright: I think this is a very hard choice, but the price, we think the price is worth it. It is a moral question, but the moral question is even a larger one. Don't we owe to the American people and to the American military and to the other countries in the region that this man [Saddam Hussein] not be a threat? – *60 Minutes* "Punishing

Saddam," interview between CBS journalist Lesley Stahl and US ambassador to the UN

and National Democratic Institute Chairperson Madeleine Albright (May 1996)[293]

In February 1992, the neoconservative Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul

Wolfowitz had his neoconservative deputies Scooter Libby and Zalmay Khalilzad draft a

military planning document for the fiscal years of 1994–1999 called "Defense Planning

Guidance." Meant for internal military and civilian leaders at the Department of Defense (DoD)

to outline general geopolitical frameworks from which to plan military development and

strategy, the document was leaked to the *New York Times* in March 1992.[294] This paper clearly

and forcefully articulates a connection between the US policy of democracy promotion and a

greater US capitalist imperialist project. The document lays out an aggressive foreign policy

strategy for an era of US unipolar global hegemony. The second "national security policy goal"

at the top of the planning document, after ensuring the survival of the US itself, was that "We

will seek to promote those positive trends which serve to support and reinforce our national

interests, principally, promotion, establishment and expansion of democracy and free market

institutions worldwide."[295]

This goal of promoting both democracy and free markets was connected to a geopolitical

strategy of expanding and entrenching US global primacy. Arguing for the construction of a

global US power, particularly military, apparatus, the document contended that to achieve the

key national security goals,

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[293] *60 Minutes - Punishing Saddam: Too Good to Be True | 1997 DuPont-Columbia Award Winner*, 2013, https://vimeo.com/63097068.

[294] Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1992, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html.

[295] Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Defense Planning Guidance for the 1994–1999 Fiscal Years (Draft)" (Department of Defense, February 18, 1992), 1 https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb245/doc03_full.pdf.

> Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on
> the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat
> on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a
> dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and
> requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a
> region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to
> generate global power.[296]

It argues that, to maintain global hegemony, the US would need to play a leading activist role in international affairs and ensure its global order sufficiently accommodates advanced capitalist powers while maintaining the coercive mechanisms to deter potential competitors.[297] The leaked document, which became known as the "Wolfowitz Doctrine," generated significant backlash even among supporters of US foreign policy in the media and policymaking communities. The backlash compelled the H. W. Bush administration and Wolfowitz himself to disavow the plan and enlist the help of then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell to rewrite it with less stridently imperialist rhetoric.[298] However, the essential vision of perpetual, global US military and economic primacy laid out in the February 1992

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[296] Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Defense Planning Guidance for the 1994–1999 Fiscal Years (Draft)," 2.

[297] Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Defense Planning Guidance for the 1994–1999 Fiscal Years (Draft)," 2.

[298] Cheney actually praised the DPG, telling Khalilzad that "you've discovered a new rationale for our role in the world." See James Mann, "The True Rationale? It's a Decade Old," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2004, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2004/03/07/the-true-rationale-its-a-decade-old/81f7247b-bc7b-4750-94c6-e9896dabdaa5/.
In the new planning document the goal of promoting both democracy and free market systems remained, although it was moved down to goal four and connected it to reducing regional instabilities and violence by "encouraging the spread and consolidation of democratic government and open economic systems" while discouraging the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Defense Planning Guidance for the 1994–1999 Fiscal Years (Revised Draft)" (National Security Council, April 16, 1992), 2, https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2008-003-docs1-12.pdf.

document remained the basic strategy of the US government going into the George Bush Jr. administration.

As articulated in both versions of the "Defense Planning Guidance" document for fiscal years 1994–1999, democracy promotion policy became even more central to US foreign policy post-Cold War. Democracy promotion budgets for the NED and especially USAID expanded significantly. The US adopted greater confidence in promoting democracy around the world, especially in the emerging liberal capitalist regimes of Eastern Europe. Though there were fewer threats or alternatives to capitalist polyarchy, and the US could focus on entrenching its preferred political-economic system globally, the US accelerated its investment in quashing any potential competing powers or democratic models.

Unipolar Democracy: The NED and USAID Since the Cold War

Most large-funded NGOs are financed and patronized by aid and development agencies, which are, in turn, funded by Western governments, the World Bank, the UN and some multinational corporations. Though they may not be the very same agencies, they are certainly part of the same loose, political formation that oversees the neoliberal project and demands the slash in government spending in the first place.

Why should these agencies fund NGOs?... NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by a retreating state. And they are, but in a materially inconsequential way. Their real contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. NGOs alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance. They form a sort of buffer between the sarkar [government] and public. Between Empire and its

subjects. They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators. – Arundhati

Roy, Indian writer and activist[299]

US budgets allocated to democracy promotion increased dramatically after the end of the

Cold War, creating a cross-agency, cross-NGO, transnational Western democracy promotion

industry by the twenty-first century. During the 1980s, the NED received between $15 and $18

million annually but that number increased to $25–30 million per year between 1991 and

1993.[300] The Bush administration accelerated NED funding during the War on Terror, with the

NED obtaining a budget of $135.5 million by 2008.[301] In 2022, the NED received over $321

million.[302]

During and after the Clinton years, USAID became the main channel for US democracy

assistance, although democracy never became USAID's prime directive.[303] In 1994, USAID

received $400 million for democracy assistance programs.[304] USAID added democracy

promotion to its core pillars in 1995, creating the Centre for Democracy and Governance

alongside the Office of Transition Initiatives. A further signal of democracy promotion's

importance for USAID was that Brian Atwood, former president of the National Democratic

Institute (NDI), was appointed USAID administrator.[305] USAID democracy funding in Eastern

Europe alone went from $21.6 million in 1992 to $93.9 million in 2000, about half of which

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[299] Arundhati Roy, "The NGO-Ization of Resistance, Arundhati Roy, August 16 2004," uploaded March 21, 2019, YouTube Video, 5:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTFC9OSGL34.
[300] Thomas Carothers, "The NED at 10," *Foreign Policy*, no. 95 (1994): 126, https://doi.org/10.2307/1149427.
[301] National Endowment for Democracy, "Independent Auditors' Report," Financial Report (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, January 15, 2009), https://www.ned.org/docs/08annual/PDFs/AR_Financials08.pdf.
[302] National Endowment for Democracy, "Independent Auditor's Report," Financial Report (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, September 30, 2022), https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NED_22-FS_Final.pdf.
[303] Nicolas Bouchet, "Bill Clinton," in *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, ed. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (Routledge, 2013), 165.
[304] Carothers, "The NED at 10," 124.
[305] Bouchet, "Bill Clinton," 165.

went to the Balkan countries, with the largest and most sustained democracy assistance going to Ukraine.[306] Democracy was declared a concern for NATO at its 1997 summit.[307] Obama increased overall US spending on democracy, governance, and human rights from $2.24 billion in 2008 to $2.48 billion in 2010 and also upgraded the place of democracy and governance within the USAID bureaucratic structures.[308]

Such numbers are significant, but pale in comparison to the broader expansions of the US military and national security state, especially after September 11, 2001, with direct military spending rising from $320 billion in 2000 to $877 billion by 2022. Democracy promotion became more important in propagandizing and organizing electoral and militant oppositions against US geopolitical adversaries, as well as keeping US allies in check, but it continues to play a backseat role to more hard-power tools, such as military action and economic sanctions.

Yugoslavia/Serbia: The Color Revolution Method of Regime Change

"They are disgusting Serbs, get out!" – Madeleine Albright, former founding vice-Chair (1983–1991) and Chair (2001–2022) of the National Democratic Institute, National Endowment for Democracy director (1991–1993), and Secretary of State (1997–2001), at a 2012 book signing event in Prague responding to people protesting her support for the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia[309]

Twenty-first century US democracy promotion campaigns became associated with a method of regime change popularly referred to as "color revolutions." This method uses street and electoral mobilizations, often led by NGOs, around electoral conflicts to dissolve popular

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[306] Bouchet, "Bill Clinton," 167.
[307] Bouchet, "Bill Clinton," 168.
[308] Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution* (Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for Int'l Peace, 2013), 203.
[309] Madeleine Albright. "Madeleine Albright in Prague: "Disgusting Serbs!,"" Uploaded October 25, 2012, YouTube Video, 1:34, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FaPuBUY558.

consent for the target government. These color revolutions took guidance from the works of US political scientist Gene Sharp.[310] Sharp developed theories for effecting regime change through strategic civil disobedience over a thirty-year career at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard (CFIA). The CFIA became notorious during the Vietnam War era as an imperialist foreign policy think tank affiliated with the CIA, DoD, and foreign policy elites like Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Robert Bowie, Samuel P. Huntington, and McGeorge Bundy. Marcie Smith demonstrates that Sharp's work at the CFIA, funded by the DoD, and at his own democracy promotion NGO, the Albert Einstein Institute, funded by the NED and libertarian billionaire venture capitalist Peter Ackerman, was in theory and in practice aligned with neoliberal politics and US foreign policy.[311] Romanticized in US mainstream media as spontaneous grassroots movements for freedom, democracy, and good governance, the color revolutions began in the electoral disputes of Yugoslavia under Slobodan Milošević.

The US became particularly active promoting democracy in Eastern Europe during the fall of the communist Eastern Bloc from 1989 to 1991. In 1989 the H. W. Bush administration established the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) program that invested $300 million a year into democracy assistance programs in Eastern Europe.[312] However, a robust democracy promotion program in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the Yugoslav successor state that after 1992 included only Serbia and Montenegro) did not develop until the late 1990s. US SEED money to Yugoslavia (which also included humanitarian aid and economic assistance)

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[310] See Mark R. Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (June 2007): 259–76, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707070776 and Lincoln Abraham Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 206-208, for an overview of color revolutions and the importance of Gene Sharp's works in them, particularly in the case studies of Serbia and Ukraine which will be explored in this chapter.

[311] Marcie Smith, "Change Agent: Gene Sharp's Neoliberal Nonviolence (Part One)," *Nonsite.Org*, no. 28 (May 10, 2019), https://nonsite.org/change-agent-gene-sharps-neoliberal-nonviolence-part-one/.

[312] Marlene Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution: The Paradox of Democracy Promotion in Serbia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 51.

went from zero before 1995 to less than $1 million in 1996, nearly $13 million in 1998 and about

$27 million in 2000.[313] From 1999 through 2000, the US and European governments and NGOs

spent about $80 million on overt democracy assistance initiatives in Yugoslavia.[314] The US

developed a strategy for the 2000 Yugoslavian election to unify about eighteen anti-Milošević

political parties to back a single coalition and presidential candidate. The US also provided

support for a youth protest organization called Otpor (Resistance).

Marlene Spoerri argues that, despite the general consensus among authoritarian leaders

and Western governments, aid practitioners, media, and scholars about Serbia's democracy

promotion success, "democracy took root in Serbia not because of but, in large part, *in spite of*,

Western intervention" (emphasis in original).[315] Spoerri also argues that European and US

democracy promotion institutions like the NED and USAID continuously violated common

principles that democracy assistance in foreign countries be nonpartisan, meaning to not work

toward the victory or defeat of any particular candidates, parties, or coalitions committed to the

democratic process, regardless of their platforms or programs.[316] Spoerri and Lincoln Mitchell

show that democracy assistance to the opposition in Serbia was part of a multipronged campaign

to effect regime change against President Slobodan Milošević in the 2000 elections.[317] This

partisanship continued to be apparent even after Milošević's ouster, as the NED and USAID

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[313] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 43.

[314] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 75.

[315] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 5-6. Though Spoerri is highly critical in this case of Western intervention, and democracy promotion and political party aid specifically, she is not an outside critic of democracy promotion. She herself worked at the US embassy in Croatia, the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, and the USAID- and Western corporate- and state-funded Balkan Trust for Democracy. As Director of Inclusive Diplomacy and Systems Change at the NED- and northern European government-funded Independent Diplomat, she advised the anti-Assad Syrian opposition during the Syrian Civil War. Her criticism is thus aimed at improving the effectiveness and ethics of Western democracy promotion and does not substantially engage the literature that critiques the greater history of or reasons for the endeavor.

[316] Spoerri, 182-183.

[317] Lincoln Abraham Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 80, 84; Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 6.

continued to pick favorite factions to the electoral detriment of democratic parties that had differing policy platforms.[318] Case studies of US color revolution attempts in places such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia show a similar pattern of partisanship in assistance offered to political parties.[319] Another principle of foreign democracy assistance that Spoerri calls into question is that it be nongovernmental, that is, not beholden to the national foreign policies of any given states. However, US government funding of institutions like the NED and USAID, which provide critical funding to and even set up foreign NGOs, show the supposedly nongovernmental quality of Western democracy promotion programs to be misleading and inaccurate. This problem is further evidenced by admissions from officials like the former USAID mission director to Serbia who said that "Foreign assistance is an instrument of . . . national policy, and an instrument of national security."[320] These facts suggest that, similar to the cases of Nicaragua and Haiti in the 1990s, US democracy assistance had a consistent problem of crossing the line into electoral meddling to advance US foreign policy.[321]

The political aid that the NED and USAID gave to Serbia in the lead up to the 2000 election consisted of media and communications training and equipment so that funded organizations could better refine and distribute their messaging to target audiences. In Serbia political aid to specific parties became foundational to US democracy assistance, as opposed to the non- or multi-partisan interest and activist groups, and especially organized labor, in civil society that had formed the focus of previous Cold War interventions.[322]

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[318] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 181.
[319] See Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions*, 84; and Sarah E. Mendelson, "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia: Between Success and Failure," International Security 25, no. 4 (2001): 68–106.
[320] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 183.
[321] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 165-168; For more on the cases of Nicaragua and Haiti in the 1990s, see Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*.
[322] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 4.

Much of the political aid was especially tailored to opposition media coverage and strategic communications. The NED gave the International Republican Institute (IRI) $74,276 for Alliance for Change office rentals, utilities, furniture, and communications supplies including promotional flags, leaflets, and posters, mobile phones, desktop computers, fax machines, photocopiers, and printers.[323] The NED also gave the National Democratic Institute (NDI) $38,414 for an Alliance for Change media van, commercial broadcast and newspaper ad fees, sound and light rentals for rallies, one satellite and five mobile phones, a portable fax machine with portable generator, along with laptops and printers. The NED started media and communications support for opposition parties and then USAID bolstered them with more substantial funds.[324] At the same time, the CIA and Department of State (DoS) covertly provided direct and indirect cash infusions to the opposition, while US and European embassies provided direct small grants to opposition activists and worked out schemes to circumvent international sanctions and Serbian regulations to get money to the opposition.[325]

Media support to Serbian opposition did not just mean equipping and training opposition groups and activists in strategic communications, it also meant supporting and creating a Serbian opposition media infrastructure. The NED, USAID, and other organizations use the benevolent, non-partisan term of supporting "independent" media, but in practice they supported only anti-government and pro-opposition media. US support for Serbian media went from $600,000 in 1990–1995 to $23 million in 1996–2000; EU support increased tenfold, from €1.7 million to €17 million in the respective periods.[326] The US and EU spent millions of dollars creating a "ring around Serbia" of FM radio transmitters in states neighboring Serbia to broadcast Serbian

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[323] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 77.
[324] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 77-78.
[325] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 78-79.
[326] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 82.

opposition media as well as Western state media, including Voice of America, the BBC,
Deutsche Welle, and Radio France International, into Serbia. This was one of the most expensive
programs in the democracy aid campaign against Milošević and was praised by donors at the
time, although some of them later argued that the ring took too long to set up to be effective for
the 2000 elections and those that were set up mostly penetrated the northern areas of Serbia that
were already more pro-opposition.[327] Perhaps most significant, the US and its European allies
had invested as well in an election observer system that immediately announced election results
before the official government election count, which US-aligned civil society, media, and vote
counters denounced as fraudulent. With the explosive accusation of electoral fraud backed by the
US, its Western allies, and the Yugoslavian media and opposition they had built, Otpor and other
anti-Milošević demonstrators barricaded roads and occupied state media and government
buildings as state security forces largely stood by.[328] In what became termed the Bulldozer
Revolution, Milošević resigned about seven months before his term was set to constitutionally
expire.

    US democracy promotion media and civil society programs leveraged real discontent
over violence, privation, corruption, and repression under the Milošević regime, exacerbated by
US sanctions and the 1999 NATO bombing campaign under future NED director General
Wesley Clark, until the final incitement of an electoral dispute. US democracy promotion efforts
resulted in a significant media advantage for the US-backed opposition, which was able to
broadcast itself to Serbian and international audiences as a credible and popular alternative to
Milošević while obfuscating the biased sources of their funding and other forms of support. US-

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[327] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 101.
[328] *Bringing Down a Dictator (English)*, Digital, Documentary, 2002, https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/bringing-dictator-english/.

funded training programs and civil society groups also helped create credible professionals and experts that become part of the "official" sources of raw news that Herman and Chomsky identify as mainstream media's key suppliers of information.

These developments make US democracy promotion efforts in Yugoslavia in the lead up to Milošević's loss of political power a good example of deflective source conflict propaganda. The NED and USAID provided substantial support to opposition media outlets, and these outlets advertised themselves and were treated by US mainstream media and the political establishment as "independent" media, despite evidence that the NED and USAID consistently funded foreign media and civil society to advance US foreign policy interests. Here and elsewhere, NED and USAID funding and the media outlets they support are made to seem professional, credible, and objective. Yet audience knowledge of the history of the NED and USAID and the groups they tend to support is likely to make audiences more skeptical of the "independent" media they are exposed to.

Among elites in Western media, democracy promotion, and government, the successful regime-change effort legitimated this type of intervention as an effective, ethical, humanitarian means of supporting democratic aspirations around the world. Protest movements romanticized in US-aligned media such as Otpor offered exciting aesthetics of grassroots youthful rebellion for freedom and democracy, and US democracy promotion would weaponize youth and student organizations in other interventions, particularly Venezuela. The Serbian model of democracy promotion known as "color revolution" was exported to other countries across the former Eastern Bloc, first unsuccessfully in Belarus in 2001, then successfully in Georgia in 2003 and Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine in 2005.[329] Otpor activists, still funded by the US and its European

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[329] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 5.

allies, traveled across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (particularly Tunisia, Egypt, and Iraq) to export the Serbian model of political revolution.[330] The success of the Western democracy promotion project in Serbia, real and perceived, was so great that it became what Sarah Mendelson calls a "democracy promotion legend."[331] Yet the episode, like the 1990 Nicaraguan election, shows how US democracy promotion institutions such as the NED make exceptions to their principles of election nonpartisanship to advance the regime change agendas of the US government, which are supposed to be separate from democracy promotion policies. The next case study further demonstrates this exceptionist and partisan tendency, but against an elected government and social movement with far more democratic legitimacy than Milošević had.

Venezuela: Combating a Competing Vision of Democracy

> [the] objective was that you had thousands of youth, high school, and college kids … [of the] middle-class that were horrified of this Indian-looking guy [Hugo Chávez] in power. They were idealistic. We wanted to help them to build a civic organization, so that they could mobilize and organize. – High-ranking USAID and Department of State Official on democracy promotion programs in Venezuela.[332]
>
> USAID/DAI funds all these white people… that were not democratic at all… They were led by elitist conduction. I'd say, "I'm not saying you're racist, but you need to do something about it." They didn't want to talk about it. The reaction was so brutal they accused me of supporting Chávez… I remember in a meeting with [Julio] Borges [of the opposition party Primero Justicia], and he wouldn't shake hands with people and so forth.

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[330] Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 5.

[331] Sarah E. Mendelson, "The Seven Ingredients: When Democracy Promotion Works," *Harvard International Review* 26, no. 2 (July 1, 2004), 88.

[332] Timothy Gill, "The Enduring Global Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, U.S. Empire, and Structural and Individual-Level Racism in the Modern World-System," in *Data and Its Discontents* (Social Science History Association 2019 Annual Meeting, Chicago: Social Science History Association, 2019), 1–32.

Chávez would allow people to hug him, and he would listen to them. They were so

detached and didn't get close to the poor. When they choose [Manuel] Rosales [as the

opposition presidential candidate in 2006], I thought forget it! His baby looked like a

Gerber baby. – USAID employee on USAID programming in Venezuela.[333]

Venezuela is an important case study because, like 1980s Nicaragua under the

Sandinistas, the Venezuelan government under Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarians was committed

to democratic procedures. In fact, the Chávez government championed a participatory social and

economic democracy that encouraged feedback and engagement from the general population.

This participatory democratic mobilization included countrywide debates and meetings to shape

and then vote on a new constitution as well as the establishment and empowerment of local

communal councils to exercise political power, especially in poor rural and urban slum

communities.[334] Despite these democratic commitments, the NED consistently funded groups

that opposed Chávez and the Bolivarian government, blaming Chávez and his supporters for

political polarization, eroding democracy, and crime, especially against the middle and upper

classes.[335] It was not that the NED and other US democracy promotion institutions opposed

Chávez because he or the Bolivarian project was undemocratic but instead that they had a

different vision of democracy. As democracy promotion analyst and consultant Lincoln Mitchell

argues, "much of the sleight of hand" where the US pursues its interests while claiming to

support democracy "occurs in determining what countries are democracies and what leaders are

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[333] Gill, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, 185.
[334] See Tariq Ali, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Axis of Hope*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008); Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government* (London: Verso, 2007); Timothy M. Gill, "From Promoting Political Polyarchy to Defeating Participatory Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Far Left in Latin America," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 24, no. 1 (2018): 72–95.
[335] Gill, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela: the Legacy of Race, Neocolonialism, and Democracy Promotion*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2022.

democrats."[336] Unlike the neoliberal polyarchic democracy championed in US foreign policy, Bolivarian democracy is more radical, direct, and participatory, and it includes economic and social as well as political democracy in its democratic vision.

US officials in their diplomatic correspondences were open about their policies to support the opposition and remove the Bolivarian movement, and Chávez in particular, from office. A 2006 cable described American, and specifically USAID, policy toward Venezuela in a summary written by US ambassador William Brownfield to Venezuela in August 2004. USAID's five-point program included "1) Strengthening Democratic Institutions, 2) Penetrating Chávez's Political Base, 3) Dividing Chavismo, 4) Protecting Vital US business, and 5) Isolating Chavez internationally."[337] The only point on that cable that is not explicitly anti-Chávez is the first point about "strengthening democratic institutions" but that simply meant strengthening opposition organizations and parties like the NED-funded Primero Justicia (Justice First, PJ). US support to the Venezuelan opposition to Chávez went beyond influencing elections with pro-opposition training, media, and civil society programs however.

Some of the most significant beneficiaries of US democracy promotion in the country include organizations and individuals that engaged in or supported undemocratic and violent acts. The most prominent example is the April 2002 military coup that forced Chávez from power for forty-seven hours. Leading up to the coup, anti-Chávez demonstrators organized by NED-backed opposition leaders of the Solidarity Center-funded Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (Confederation of Workers of Venezuela, CTV) labor union federation and the

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[336] Lincoln Abraham Mitchell, *The Democracy Promotion Paradox* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 53.

[337] William Brownfield, "Usaid/Oti Programmatic Support for Country Team 5 Point Strategy," Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy (Venezuela Caracas, November 9, 2006), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CARACAS3356_a.html.

Primero Justicia (PJ) political party made an illegal re-route march from the PDVSA headquarters to the Miraflores presidential palace.[338] As the anti-Chávez crowd approached the palace and the pro-Chávez demonstrators surrounded it, a mysterious sniper attack killed both pro- and anti-Chávez demonstrators and caused panic among the crowds.[339]

Shortly after the sniper attacks, the Caracas Metropolitan Police entered the area and exchanged gunfire with Pro-Chávez demonstrators occupying an overpass near the palace. Anti-Chávez news media, who were conveniently located on a building balcony able to record the pro-Chávez demonstrators on the overpass but not the intersecting street occupied by the police, erroneously claimed that the pro-Chávez demonstrators, with the tacit approval of Chávez, had fired on and murdered unarmed opposition protestors.[340] The news footage and narrative of supposed murderous Chavista repression became the justification for anti-Chávez elements of the Venezuelan armed forces to demand Chávez's resignation, surround the presidential palace, and take Chávez into custody.

As interim president, opposition leaders swore in Pedro Carmona, the NED-backed leader of Fedecámaras, Venezuela's main business union that was funded by core NED grantee, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). In what became infamously known as the Carmona Decree, Carmona immediately dissolved the Venezuelan legislature, supreme court, and the 1999 constitution that had been drafted and approved via a participatory democratic process. On the day of the coup, the American government and mainstream media endorsed the regime change as a victory for democracy in blatant violation of the Democratic Charter of the

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[338] Gill, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, 147; Golinger, Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 43

[339] *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Digital, Documentary (Vitagraph Films, 2003), https://vimeo.com/513876099; *Llaguno Bridge: Keys to a Massacre*, Digital, Documentary (Self Distributed, 2012), https://vimeo.com/40502430.

[340] *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*; *Llaguno Bridge: Keys to a Massacre*.

Organization of American States (OAS), of which the US is a signatory.[341] Subsequent

investigations found that the US government knew about the coup beforehand and cultivated

relationships with, and provided material and diplomatic support to, prominent leaders of the

coup both before it happened and in subsequent years after.[342]

Both before and after the April 2002 coup attempt, the NED and its grantees supported

opposition figures and civil society groups implicated in the coup, including many who signed

the Carmona Decree. The president of the International Republican Institute (IRI), a core NED

grantee, even endorsed the unconstitutional coup, and the neoconservative NED president Carl

Gershman was forced to publicly rebuke the IRI after the coup was reversed. Despite that

rebuke, the IRI actually received more grant money to support the PJ party after the coup. PJ

continued to be led by figures who signed the Carmona Decree such as Leopoldo Martinez, who

was also selected to be Carmona's minister of finance, and people who illegally redirected the

anti-government demonstrators such as Leopoldo López.[343] The NED funded an NGO called

Asociación Civil Asamblea de Educación (Civil Association Assembly of Education, ACAE) to

combat Venezuelan government educational policies in place before the 2002 coup. The NED

continued to fund ACAE even after its leader, Leonardo Carvajal, signed the Carmona Decree

and agreed to serve as Carmona's new minister of education.[344] Another NED core grantee,

CIPE, before and after the 2002 coup, funded the Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento

Económico para la Libertad (Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge for Liberty,

CEDICE), a think tank that organized media, research, political conferences, and workshops to

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[341] Neil Burron, *The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas* (London: Routledge, 2012), 47.
[342] Juan Forero, "Documents Show C.I.A. Knew Of a Coup Plot in Venezuela," *The New York Times*, December 3, 2004, sec. U.S.; Golinger, *The Chávez Code*, 63, 64, 73.
[343] Golinger, *The Chávez Code*, 83.
[344] Gill, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, 161-162.

promote free market capitalism, attack the Chávez government, and unite the opposition parties and media.[345] CEDICE leader Rocio Guijarro was a Carmona Decree signatory, and in 2000 CEDICE brought former New York Police Department chief William Bratton to train the opposition-controlled Caracas Metropolitan Police.[346] This was the same police force that helped instigate the 2002 coup and shot dead several Venezuelans protesting Chávez's unconstitutional ouster during the forty-seven hours he was held in captivity.[347]

In a provocative move, USAID opened an Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) shortly after the coup. USAID OTI programs are meant to pump large amounts of investment in media and civil society over three to four years in countries going through or just coming out of regime change, civil war, or major crisis. The Venezuelan OTI program, however, lasted eight years under a government elected multiple times through normal constitutional procedures. OTI efforts to pull working-class Venezuelans away from Chávez through seemingly neutral community organizations quickly proved a disappointment but the OTI had greater success with student groups. Juan Guaidó, a National Assembly deputy from the Voluntad Popular (Popular Will), which he co-founded with the militant anti-Chavista leader Leopoldo López, would declare himself president of Venezuela in January 2019 after Chávez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, won the 2018 Venezuelan presidential election in a contest that was boycotted by most of the Venezuelan opposition. Guaidó's political career started in student protest movements in 2007 that were supported by USAID. In the wake of deadly US sanctions starting in August 2017, Guaido's attempt to declare himself president, call for US military intervention and harsher sanctions, and support for a 2020 coup attempt involving two former US Green Berets

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[345] Gill, *Encountering US Empire in Socialist Venezuela*, 134-140, 218.
[346] Golinger, *The Chávez Code*, 76, 114.
[347] Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights Watch World Report 2003: Americas: Venezuela," World Report (Human Rights Watch, 2003), https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k3/americas10.html.

contributed to a year's long crisis wherein the Venezuelan economy collapsed, and the country suffered near-civil war levels of political tension and violence.[348]

The above examples demonstrate US democracy promotion institutions giving support to Venezuelan government officials and NGO and political party leaders that engaged in undemocratic behavior, including the would-be president of the 2002 coup government. This case seems to offer an example of Lance deHaven-Smith's concept of SCADs in that the US-backed political, military, and civil society leaders contributed to a significant crime against Venezuelan democracy. While the SCAD concept applies to state officials and groups undermining their own national democratic system, the case of Venezuela might constitute a US crime against Venezuelan democracy. The fact that this was aided and, in some ways, led by institutions and figures explicitly mandated to promote and strengthen democracy makes the SCAD concept more relevant. The abrogation of the NED's principles, by supporting partisan organizations and figures that engaged in undemocratic behavior, as well as the US abrogation of its treaty obligations toward the OAS, by immediately recognizing the coup government, represent cases of US exceptionism. The NED and US made exceptions to their own laws to advance US foreign policy interests in contravention to democratic procedure and will.

Venezuela had a strong pro-opposition and anti-Chávez corporate media oligopoly before the US intervention campaign to undermine Chávez. Yet US democracy promotion institutions did play a role in generating deflective source propaganda in Venezuela. The April 2002 coup

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[348] José Luis Granados Ceja, "Sanctions on Venezuela Aren't Promoting Democracy, They're Killing Venezuelans," Truthout, May 24, 2023, https://truthout.org/articles/sanctions-on-venezuela-arent-promoting-democracy-theyre-killing-venezuelans/; Kevin T. Dugan, "Inside Operation Gideon, a Coup Gone Very Wrong," *Rolling Stone*, December 6, 2020, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/venezuela-operation-gideon-coup-jordan-goudreau-1098590/; Venezuelanalysis.com, "US Sanctions Against the Venezuelan Oil Industry: A Timeline," Venezuelanalysis.com, February 22, 2023, https://venezuelanalysis.com/images/15301; Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs, "Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela," *Center for Economic and Policy Research*, April 2019, 27.

became known among Chávez supporters as the "media coup" because of the important role the opposition corporate media played in instigating and justifying the coup. Alan Macleod demonstrates that both Venezuelan and US corporate media displayed a clear anti-Chavista, pro-opposition bias in their coverage of Venezuela following Chávez's election in 1998. [349] They consistently portray Chávez supporters as anti-democratic, irrational, and violent "thugs," while framing opposition groups and figures as respectable and democratic "civil society."[350] Exacerbating this one-sided depiction are the social biases of US and European journalists in Venezuela, who generally reside in upper class, opposition-supporting areas of Caracas and primarily rely on elite opposition supporters for information about what goes on in the country.[351] US government-funded democracy promotion institutions such as the NED and USAID that provide funding, training, equipment, and networking opportunities for these opposition figures and civil society groups thus contribute to the pro-opposition, anti-Chavista bias in Venezuelan and Western media.

US democracy promotion institutions played pivotal roles in regime change efforts in Venezuela but have thus far been unsuccessful at dislodging the Bolivarian government. In the next case study on Haiti, US democracy promotion was more successful at unseating their foreign adversary, the only truly popularly elected government in Haitian history. However, as in Venezuela, the exceptional US meddling in Haitian society failed to create a pro-US alternative that could establish hegemonic democratic legitimacy in Haiti.

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[349] Alan MacLeod, *Bad News from Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

[350] Alan MacLeod, "Chavista 'Thugs' vs. Opposition 'Civil Society': Western Media on Venezuela," *Race & Class* 60, no. 4 (April 1, 2019): 46–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396818823639.

[351] MacLeod, *Bad News from Venezuela,* 109-114; MacLeod, "Chavista 'Thugs' vs. Opposition 'Civil Society,'" 53-54.

Haiti: Democracy Promotion Unmasked

"Democracy is discipline" – 1994 Slogan of the NED-established-and-funded

Development and Democracy Foundation in Haiti[352]

Bazin: He [US ambassador Dean Curran] made a remarkable speech before leaving

regarding the interference between the politicians in Washington regarding Haiti. He

said, I'm the ambassador and I'm the one responsible for defining and applying US

policy in this country. You guys, some of you, listen to other people. And I suspect that it

was referring to [IRI leader in Haiti] Stanley Lucas. Actually he even said something…

Bogdanich: The chimères of Washington, he said.

Bazin: That's right! The chimères of Washington. That's correct. It was clear, the

allusion was clear, could not be any clearer.

Curran: Chimères in Haiti refers to the people who emerge from the night, armed and

hooded sometimes, commit outrageous acts, and nobody ever knows who they are…. the

chimères, the ghosts, because they're there and they do things and they terrify you and

then they fade away. So, people in Washington can also come down, terrify, then fade

away, and are not held accountable. – Brian Dean Curran, former US ambassador to

Haiti, and Marc Bazin, a Haitian politician opposed to Jean Bertrand Aristide, speaking

for Walt Bogdanich's 2006 documentary about Curran's farewell address to the Haitian

business opposition to Aristide[353]

US democracy promotion had a dark history in Haiti by the end of the Cold War. William

I. Robinson writes that Haiti under Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier (president from 1971 to

1986) was one of the dictatorial anti-communist regimes for which the Reagan administration

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[352] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 305.
[353] "Haiti: Democracy Undone," Digital (Discovery Times, 2006), https://vimeo.com/483807153.

pursued a controlled transition to neoliberal polyarchy.[354] After popular uprisings forced Duvalier to flee and the Haitian military took over in 1986, the NED, USAID, and their grantees linked up with or created Haitian elite-based civil society organizations, while more radical grassroots democratic movements coalesced around a Catholic priest and proponent of liberation theology, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.[355] For the 1990 elections, the US chose as its preferred candidate Marc Bazin, a World Bank official and former finance minister under Baby Doc. USAID spent $10 million on the 1990 Haitian elections and mobilized the elite-based civil society infrastructure the US had been developing throughout the previous four years to unite around Bazin. However, the political forces favored by US democracy promotion did not develop a unity and mass constituency sufficient to win in the face of mass clamors for real change.[356]

The popular working-class-based social forces known as the Lavalas (Haitian Creole for flood) movement united under Aristide, who won the presidency in a landslide with over 67 percent of the vote. As Aristide rolled out ambitious social democratic reform plans, US-Haitian relations became immediately strained. The US cut off aid to Haiti, claiming that aid would be conditional on stringent human rights improvements, despite the fact that aid had been unconditional under the previous Duvalier and military administrations and Aristide's government did substantially decrease human rights violations. Through USAID, the Department of State (DoS) also ramped up support to the elite-based, anti-Aristide private sector (which already received $26 million prior to Aristide's inauguration), political parties, and civil society groups they had previously funded, allocating $24 million in May 1991.[357]

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[354] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 273.
[355] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 285.
[356] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 289.
[357] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 295.

By the time a coup overthrew Aristide in September 1991, after just eight months in office, and established a brutal military government, the DoS's Democracy Enhancement Project had spent $13 million. The beneficiaries of USAID and NED political aid and other forms of US aid represented the key constituencies of the new regime.[358] The US officially condemned the coup and held up Aristide as the legitimate president, yet, unofficially, US policymakers worked to prolong the situation until the US could effect a democratic transition in Haiti without Aristide or successfully pressure Aristide to comply with Washington's interests. For three years, the military suppressed social movements and civil society groups associated with Aristide, but the DoS resumed its Democracy Enhancement Project in late 1992, supporting the same anti-Aristide figures and groups that had benefited before Aristide's ouster. The US imposed sanctions against the military government, but it designed them to be so weak that US trade with Haiti actually increased from $316.2 million in 1992 to $375.6 million in 1993, and the US continued to train Haitian army officers after the coup.[359]

US commitment to democracy efforts against the coup government was tenuous at best. William Robinson argues that "most of the coup leaders and members of the junta that directly conducted the systematic repression, and the political figures such as [Jean-Jaque] Honorat and [Marc] Bazin that tried to legitimize a post-Aristide order, had since established extensive relations with Washington through the CIA and the DIA, the NED, and other programs."[360] In 1992, the *New York Times* reported that "virtually all observers agree that all it would take is one phone call from Washington to send the army leadership packing." In October 1994, under pressure from domestic and international voices to fulfill a campaign promise to restore the

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[358] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 294.
[359] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 303-304.
[360] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 303.

elected government of Haiti, the new US President Bill Clinton launched an invasion and six-month occupation of Haiti that ended the military dictatorship and reinstalled Aristide. However, Clinton forced Aristide to commit to a deal where he would give more power to the opposition, secure amnesty for putschists, and enact a neoliberal structural adjustment program of austerity, privatization, and deregulation in exchange for a $1.2 billion aid package from USAID, the World Bank, IMF, and other lenders, most of which was to be handled directly by USAID.[361] Aristide was not even allowed to serve a full five-year term, as his three year exile was considered time served in office.

In addition to the US backing the legal political opposition, which possessed many problematic connections to the Duvalier and 1986 to 1990 and 1991 to 1994 military dictatorships, US deep political forces had other corrosive effects on Haitian democracy. In the wake of the Duvalier dictatorship's fall, the CIA supported the Haitian military and set up the Haitian intelligence agency, Service d'Intelligence National (SIN), both of which engaged in large-scale drug trafficking. As the CIA provided $1 million a year to SIN between 1986 and 1991, SIN agents killed up to 5,000 democracy activists and even cancelled the 1987 Haitian election when they gunned down as many as 300 people waiting in line to vote.[362]

William I. Robinson describes the 1991 to 1994 coup period as an "all sided war of attrition against the Haitian people" in which US policy, transnational media, and the Haitian elite and military converged.[363] The military officer who led the 1991 coup against Aristide, Raoul Cédras, was a CIA informant trained at the infamous US Army School of the Americas, where dozens of notorious Latin American intelligence, drug trafficking, death squad, and

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[361] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 308.
[362] Kathleen Marie Whitney, "Sin, Fraph, and the CIA: U.S. Covert Action in Haiti," *Southwestern Journal of Law and Trade in the Americas* 3 (1996), 319.
[363] Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 305.

military junta leaders had trained since 1946. In 1993, Emmanuel Constant, a founder of SIN who was on the CIA's payroll, founded the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, a death squad that murdered and terrorized Aristide supporters. Also in 1993, the CIA created black propaganda, meaning propaganda wherein the source is concealed or credited to a false authority, to undermine efforts to reinstate Aristide, passing around a later discredited report to US government officials alleging that Aristide was mentally unstable.[364] US democracy promotion institutions organized the elite sectors of Haitian society and papered over the excesses of bloody clandestine US and Haitian power, but the US failed to stem the Lavalas movement.

Aristide and his new Fanmi Lavalas (Flood Family, FL) party surged into office again in February 2001 after winning the 2000 elections with over 91 percent of the vote, more than doubling his raw vote count in an election that was boycotted by much of the opposition. In this episode of Haitian politics, however, US democracy promotion institutions would play a pivotal role in overthrowing Haitian democracy. The political crisis began like many regime-change efforts tacitly or openly supported by the US democracy promotion, with a dispute over elections.

FL won supermajorities in the Haitian Chamber of Deputies and Senate, but the opposition disputed ten senate seats because the votes were counted in a way that the FL candidates won outright, when they technically should have moved to a second-round vote. While polling evidence suggested that many of the FL candidates would have won the second-round vote, and FL would have maintained a clear majority, the opposition used the dispute as an

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[364] For more on black propaganda, see Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 21.

excuse to delegitimize the new Aristide FL government completely.[365] The US immediately cut

off aid to Haiti and then blocked $615 million in loans from the Inter-American Development

Bank that were scheduled to be distributed over a few years.[366] The US continued to deny aid

throughout Aristide's second term even after Aristide in 2001 obliged the winners of the disputed

Senate seats to resign, accepted opposition members into his government, and agreed to hold

legislative elections years early with a more opposition-friendly electoral council.[367]

In a 2006 documentary, Brian Dean Curran, the former US ambassador to Haiti first

appointed by President Clinton in January 2001, spoke bluntly about his frustrations with US

democracy promotion institutions, especially NED core grantee the International Republican

Institute. The IRI spent $3 million in Haiti in the years leading up to a second coup to oust

Aristide in 2004, and it was instrumental in uniting hardline anti-Aristide parties into the

Convergence Démocratique (Democratic Convergence) in the lead up to the 2000 presidential

election. Curran said that the Bush administration's official policy, and by extension his own

diplomatic mission, was to accept Aristide as president and work with him to find political

solutions to the political impasse Haiti suffered from, advising Aristide and the elite opposition

to compromise with each other. However, he complained that, through back channels, namely

the IRI, the elite opposition received messages from Washington to maintain a hardline

uncompromising stance against Aristide with the hope of overthrowing the Aristide

government.[368]

Ambassador Curran claimed that the IRI program officer in Haiti, Stanley Lucas, told

opposition leaders that he and his hardline regime change stance, not ambassador Curran and his

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[365] Peter Hallward, "Option Zero in Haiti," *New Left Review*, no. 27 (June 1, 2004): 37-38.
[366] Hallward, "Option Zero in Haiti," 39.
[367] Hallward, "Option Zero in Haiti," 39.
[368] "Haiti: Democracy Undone."

peaceful engagement and compromise stance, was the real US policy in Haiti. Lucas, the scion of a wealthy landowning elite mulatto family, had been a militant adversary of Aristide.[369] Stanley Lucas's cousins, Rémy and Léonard Lucas, were arrested in 1998 over allegations by human rights groups that they orchestrated the massacre of over 200 peasants who were protesting for land distribution outside the Lucas family ranch at Jean-Rabel in July 1987.[370] In the documentary, Ambassador Curran thus accused the IRI of directly undermining official US policy—to engage with the Aristide government and advance dialogue, compromise, and cooperation between the government and opposition—in favor of an unofficial hardline policy to remove Aristide from office and replace his government with the US-backed elite opposition.

Curran cabled his complaints about Lucas and the IRI officially to his superiors in the Bush administration Latin American policy team, led by neoconservative diplomats Elliott Abrams and Otto Reich. During the 1990s, many in Washington had seen Abrams as politically and morally compromised after he helped cover up the 1981 El Mozote massacre of 811 to 1,000 civilians by the Salvadoran military and was then convicted of lying to congress in 1991 about his knowledge of the Iran-Contra affair as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs.[371] Reich's reputation was similarly tarnished by his propaganda role in the Iran-Contra affair right after leaving USAID. Still, the neoconservative-dominated Bush administration

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[369] Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Annual Report 1999," Annual Report (Amnesty International, June 14, 1999), 187 https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/0001/1999/en/; Max Blumenthal, "The Other Regime Change," *Salon*, July 17, 2004, sec. News, https://www.salon.com/2004/07/17/haiti_coup/.

[370] Due to incompetence and lack of resources, the Haitian judicial system was unable to carry out an official investigation of the Jean-Rabel massacre. Léonard Lucas was released from prison in January 2003 following orders from Aristide, and Rémy Lucas escaped from prison just hours after Aristide was flown out of the country during the February 2004 coup. See Belleau Jean-Philippe, "Massacres Perpetrated in the 20th Century in Haiti | Sciences Po Mass Violence and Resistance - Research Network," Paris Institute of Political Studies, January 25, 2016, https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/massacres-perpetrated-20th-century-haiti.html; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "Rapport Nº 27/10, Pétition 134-02, Décision de Mise Aux Archives, Haïti" (Organization of American States, March 16, 2010), https://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/2010fr/Haiti134.02fr.htm.

[371] In 2000, the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs was renamed to the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

named Abrams Senior NSC Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations in June 2001. It installed Reich as the top US diplomat in Latin America and the Caribbean as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs from January 2002 to 2003; Reich, then served as Special Envoy to Latin America from January 2003 to June 2004.[372]

As Curran's boss, Reich refused to remove or censure Lucas, denying that he had even received Curran's complaints despite evidence to the contrary. Reich let slip to the *New York Times* that Curran failed to see the US policy shift away from support for Aristide; Reich's insider view contradicted US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who emphatically maintained that the only US policy toward Haiti was to support Aristide's right to serve out his democratically elected term.[373] In response to official complaints from the US embassy in July 2002, USAID banned Lucas from running IRI programs in Haiti for 120 days. Despite this, Lucas continued to de facto lead IRI programs while serving nominally as a translator, which IRI officials acknowledged went against the USAID ban.[374] David Adams, then USAID mission director in Haiti in charge of administering funds to IRI and other democracy promotion groups, had his own misgivings about Lucas but said that he faced strong pressure from Congress to continue the program and that "there were senior State/NSC officials who were sympathetic to IRI's position as well," likely referring to Abrams, Reich, and Roger Noriega.[375]

In December 2002, Lucas used money provided by USAID to fly hundreds of opposition members, excluding any members from Aristide's FL party, for a training program at the Hotel

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[372] George Bush attempted to appoint Reich Assistant Secretary in 2001 but failed due to opposition in the Senate over Reich's involvement in the Iran-Contra affair and his support for anti-Cuban terrorist Orlando Bosch. Bush made a recess appointment for Reich to become Assistant Secretary for one year without Senate approval, and then named him Special Envoy to Latin America, which also did not require Senate approval.
[373] "Haiti: Democracy Undone."
[374] Joshua Kurlantzick, "The Coup Connection," *Mother Jones*, November 2004, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2004/11/coup-connection/.
[375] Walt Bogdanich and Jenny Nordberg, "Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2006, 10.

Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic owned by the Fanjul family, Cuban expatriates and billionaire sugar and real estate tycoons. Two leaders of the armed rebellion, a former death squad leader and drug smuggler named Guy Philippe, and a former ambassador to the Dominican Republic under the 1988–1990 military junta government named Paul Arcelin, were at the hotel during the training meetings but stated that they did not attend the trainings.[376] After the 2004 coup, Guy Philippe said he had known Stanley Lucas since childhood, that Lucas used to be his table tennis coach, and that he met Lucas both in Ecuador in 2001 and in the Dominican Republic during the 2002 and 2003 IRI trainings, but that they did not discuss politics. Arcelin said he met Lucas at the Hotel Santo Domingo and talked "about the future of Haiti" but did not discuss the overthrow of Aristide. Lucas denied meeting with either of them.[377] Brian J. Berry, vice president of the GOP media consulting firm The Strategy Group for Media and director at the conservative political action committee Citizens United, was among the trainers brought to the Hotel Santo Domingo. A moderate opposition leader, Marc Bazin, said that representatives of his organization at the trainings told him that "there were two meetings – open meetings where democracy would be discussed and closed meetings where other things would be discussed, and we are not invited to the other meetings." Those who attended the closed meetings reportedly told Bazin that Aristide would ultimately be overthrown and that Bazin should stop calling for compromise.[378]

At the time of the trainings, Stanley Lucas was in constant contact with US far-Right neoconservative diplomat Roger F. Noriega. Noriega had worked at USAID under Reagan, where he oversaw so-called "non-lethal" aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. In the 1990s, he

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[376] Bogdanich and Nordberg, "Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos," 10.
[377] Bogdanich and Nordberg, "Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos," 10.
[378] Bogdanich and Nordberg, "Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos," 10.

became a senior staff member of segregationist Senator Jesse Helms, where in 1996 he co-authored the Helms-Burton Act that escalated the US embargo against Cuba. As leader of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Helms had backed the Haitian dictator Jean Claude Duvalier before Aristide's first election in 1990 and supported Raoul Cédras, the military junta officer who led the coup that ousted Aristide the first time in 1991.[379] In 1994, Helms, referring to a discredited CIA report, stated that Aristide was "mentally unstable" and that the US should not attempt to reinstate the democratically elected leader of Haiti.[380] Noriega, a longtime enemy of Aristide, was the US ambassador to the OAS during the 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and in January 2003 was nominated to replace Otto Reich as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, making Noriega the top US diplomat for Latin America during Aristide's ouster in February 2004.[381]

In September 2003, frustrated by the mixed signals from the Bush administration undermining his attempts at diplomacy, Ambassador Curran resigned and was replaced by James Foley. With the new Bush-aligned ambassador in office, Aristide's administration only got more fragile. Even as armed rebels crossed the border from the Dominican Republic and made their way to the capital of Port-au-Prince, Noriega helped the IRI increase funding to the Haitian opposition, and the Bush administration took a wait and see approach to the political crisis brewing in Haiti. As the rebels closed in, Aristide made one last failed attempt to create a power-sharing deal with the opposition wherein he would give up much of his power. Luigi Einaudi, a US OAS representative in Haiti who brokered the deal, accused the Bush administration, through Ambassador Foley, of "pulling the rug out" from their efforts by cancelling the meeting between

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[379] Max Blumenthal, "The Other Regime Change."

[380] "Haiti: Democracy Undone."

[381] James Dao, "Bush Names Veteran Anti-Communist to Latin America Post," *The New York Times*, January 10, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/10/world/bush-names-veteran-anti-communist-to-latin-america-post.html.

Aristide and the opposition.[382] On February 29, 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Ambassador James Foley spoke with Aristide and advised him to resign from office to avoid further bloodshed, chartering a US plane to fly Aristide to the Central African Republic. Aristide immediately told US and foreign politicians and activists that he had been coerced into resigning by US officials and that the US had kidnapped him to facilitate a coup against him.[383]

The two Aristide administrations and coups against him demonstrate striking similarities. They occurred under administrations of Bush Sr. and Jr., which both expressed little desire to support the only legitimate, popularly elected government and political movement in Haitian history. In fact, both administrations actively undermined the Aristide and Lavalas governments in favor of the far less popular and democratic elite opposition. Both Bush administrations did so with only the slightest democratic and human rights pretexts and covered up their efforts with a minimal diplomatic and media veneer.

The US felt little need to invest in a convincing media narrative against Aristide or for the opposition, relying mostly on dubious statements from US government officials in the Whitehouse, Congress, and CIA. This move illustrates Herman and Chomsky's third filter of their propaganda model, mainstream news's reliance on "official sources." US officials, acting as official sources, issued statements in mainstream coverage of Haitian politics to muddy the waters regarding Aristide's government without having to substantially invest in a Haitian or domestic propaganda program, as they had with Nicaragua under Reagan. US imperialist realpolitik in Haiti since the end of the "Baby Doc" Duvalier dictatorship has been perhaps the most naked of any in the world.

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[382] "Haiti: Democracy Undone."
[383] Constant Méheut et al., "Demanding Reparations, and Ending Up in Exile," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2022.

The 2004 episode shows an increasing importance for US democracy promotion institutions in deep political and imperialist intrigues. In this case, it was the NED and USAID's core grantee, the IRI, led by the right wing of US politics during a Republican administration. US policy, through its covert intelligence and pseudo-overt democracy promotion arms, seems to have committed a sustained State Crime Against Democracy (SCAD) in the name of promoting democracy using a logic of exceptionism. Elite US forces undermined official US policy and democratic and human rights principles, and democracy promotion institutions once again abrogated their own regulations against meddling in foreign elections and against supporting individuals or groups that undermine democratic processes. Investigations since the 2004 coup, during which Haitians suffered a fifteen-year United Nations military occupation, natural and man-made disasters, the banning of Haiti's most popular party, the FL, from contesting elections, and elections with low voter turnouts installing governments with little popular legitimacy, suggest that powerful forces in the UN allied to the US, namely France and Canada, have also engaged in a logic of exceptionism regarding Haiti.[384] The next case study demonstrates a similar instrumentalization of insurgent forces by high-ranking figures in US democracy promotion institutions to abrogate democratic processes under the pretext of an exceptional emergency situation, but with graver regional and indeed global consequences.

Ukraine: Opening Salvos of the New Cold War

"So that would be great, I think to help glue this thing and have the UN help glue it and, you know, fuck the EU." – Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, in a phone conversation with US ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt about

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[384] *Haiti Betrayed*, Digital, Documentary (Cinema Politica, 2020), https://haitibetrayedfilm.com/; Méheut et al., "Demanding Reparations, and Ending Up in Exile."

plans for a new Ukrainian government after the Euromaidan protests (leaked to the press on

February 4, 2014)[385]

> What was quite disturbing, this same Olga [Bohomolets, a Ukrainian physician] told that,
> well, all the evidence shows that people who were killed by snipers from both sides,
> among policemen and people from the streets, that they were the same snipers killing
> people from both sides… So that, and then she also showed me some photos, she said
> that as medical doctor, she can, you know, say it is the same, same handwriting, same
> type of bullets, and it's really disturbing that now the new, uhh new coalition, that they
> don't want to investigate what exactly happened. So that there is now stronger and
> stronger understanding that behind snipers they were, it was not Yanukovych, but it was
> somebody from the new coalition. – Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet in a phone
> conversation with Catherine Ashton, British Labour politician and First Vice President of
> the European Commission, about the aftermath of Euromaidan in Ukraine (leaked to the
> press on March 5, 2014)[386]

Given its size, historical connections to Russia, and location as a historical route of

invasions of Russia from the West since Napoleon, Ukraine is geopolitically valuable for

Russian security interests and US efforts to create political leverage over Russia. Western

imperial geopolitical rivalry with Russia can be traced back to the 19th century "Great Game"

between Tsarist Russia and the UK, the most direct imperialist predecessor to the US. The Great

Game involved UK-Russian competitions over territory and influence across south and central

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[385] Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt. "Nuland-Pyatt Leaked Phone Conversation _COMPLETE with SUBTITLES," uploaded April 29, 2014, YouTube video, 5:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV9J6sxCs5k.
[386] Urmas Paet and Catherine Ashton. "Breaking: Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Catherine Ashton Discuss Ukraine over the Phone," uploaded March 5, 2014, YouTube video, 10:49, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEgJ0oo3OA8.

Asia stretching from Iran and the Caucuses to Afghanistan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. In a Cold War echo of the 19th century Great Game, US National Security Advisor and future NED director Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote of an "arc of crisis" stretching from Bangladesh to what was then South Yemen.[387] In the Carter administration, Brzezinski took a hardline militant stance regarding this "arc of crisis" and advocated weaponizing Islam and anti-Soviet national and religious movements, particularly in Afghanistan, to secure US interests on the USSR's southern border region.[388] Brzezinski's efforts culminated in the 1980 Carter Doctrine and the CIA's Operation Cyclone in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992.[389]

US rivalry with Russia also outlived the anticommunist pretexts of the Cold War. This was partially expressed in the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance document cited earlier, which emphasize the need to prevent any power from consolidating a territory whose resources could be sufficient to project global power. The document highlights land, natural resources, and, in particular, the former territory of the USSR.[390] Even after the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation continued to be the largest country by landmass in the world and the largest country in Europe by population, with vast natural and human resources.

The end of the Cold War brought the possibility that Russia would integrate economically, politically, and militarily with the new European Union, that Europe would become peaceful and united and have less use for a US-led NATO hegemony. To counteract this

[387] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume 1, Foundations of Foreign Policy, Document 100," ed. Kristin L Ahlberg and Adam M Howard (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2014), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d100.
[388]. Fred Halliday, "The Arc of Crisis and the New Cold War," *Middle East Report*, November 23, 1981, https://merip.org/1981/11/the-arc-of-crisis-and-the-new-cold-war/; Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Les Révélations d'un Ancien Conseiller de Carter: 'Oui, La CIA Est Entrée En Afghanistan Avant Les Russes...,'" trans. David Gibbs, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 15, 1998, https://dgibbs.arizona.edu/content/brzezinski-interview-2
[389]; Justin Vaïsse, *Zbigniew Brzezinski: America's Grand Strategist*, trans. Catherine Porter, Illustrated edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2018). 298, 311.
[390] Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Defense Planning Guidance for the 1994–1999 Fiscal Years (Draft)," 2.

possibility, the US feverishly sought new *raisons d'être* for NATO and aggressively pursued

NATO expansion eastward. The US pursued this despite promises from Secretary of State James

Baker to Gorbachev in February 1990 that NATO would not expand "one inch eastward" from a

united Germany, and warnings from "containment" architect George Kennan, the US-aligned

Russian president Boris Yeltsin, and other notable figures that NATO enlargement would harm

Russia-West relations and Russian democratic development.[391] In 2008, while serving as US

ambassador to Russia, future NED board member and CIA director William J. Burns wrote that

NATO expansion to Ukraine would, "touch a raw nerve in Russia," and might spark a "civil

war" in Ukraine that Russia would need to contend with and perhaps intervene in.[392] After the

Cold War, governments of Yugoslavia, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine that were friendly or

neutral toward Russia and skeptical toward NATO became targets of US-backed Color

Revolution methods. Russian-friendly governments in Yugoslavia, Libya, and Syria were subject

to more violent US-led interventions.[393]

       Similar to the US Cold War strategy of weaponizing religious, cultural, and ethnic

reactionary extremists near the USSR's southern border, in Ukraine the US also weaponized

anti-communist groups. Perhaps the most infamous was Stepan Bandera's Organization of

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[391] David Ray Griffin, *America on the Brink: How US Foreign Policy Led to the War in Ukraine* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2023), 131-132.

[392] Cablegate, "Nyet Means Nyet: Russia's Nato Enlargement Redlines," Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy (Moscow: February 1, 2008), https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265_a.html.

[393] US 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia represented perhaps the biggest rift between the US, NATO, and Russian president Boris Yeltsin, who said the bombings pushed Russia toward military action which might cause "at a minimum, a European war, or maybe even a world war." David Hoffman and John F Harris, "Yeltsin Warning Stirs a Temporary Tempest," *Washington Post*, April 10, 1999.
The 2011 NATO destruction of the Libyan state was also a motivation for Vladimir Putin to run again in the Russian presidential elections in 2012 after he had stepped down in 2008 and his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, failed to veto UN resolution 1973 that authorized NATO military intervention in Libya. Gleb Bryanski, "Putin Likens U.N. Libya Resolution to Crusades," *Reuters*, March 21, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia-idUSTRE72K3JR20110321; Kim Ghattas, "What a Decade-Old Conflict Tells Us About Putin," *The Atlantic*, March 6, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/03/libya-russia-ukraine-putin/626571/.
Putin would go on to intervene militarily in Syria on behalf of the embattled Ba'athist government in September 2015 against NATO efforts to oust the government.

Ukrainian Nationalists, which collaborated with the Nazi war effort between 1939 and 1945 and

committed war crimes against Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian civilians. After WWII, the US and

its NATO allies fostered Bandera, Yaroslav Stetsko, Mykola Lebed, and other Ukrainian

nationalists both inside Ukraine and across the Ukrainian diaspora in Europe and North America

as dependable militants against communism.[394] The US and its NATO allies thus helped

preserve and strengthen a Right Wing ultra-nationalist current of Ukrainian politics. Such history

frames much of US intelligence and democracy promotion policy in Ukraine since the end of the

Cold War.

US and European democracy promotion institutions had a significant effect on Ukrainian

civil society during the post-Soviet period.[395] The US supported the anti-government protestors

of the 2005 Orange Revolution, a color revolution-style political upheaval that erupted around

accusations of a 2004 presidential election fraud. The Orange Revolution successfully forced a

revote and installed the US-backed candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. By 2010 however, many who

had supported the revolution decried it a failure.[396] Splits within Yushchenko's coalition and

popular disappointment regarding continued corruption and poverty in Ukraine caused

Yushchenko to lose his 2010 reelection bid, winning only 5.5 percent of the vote. In fact, the

candidate that the US opposed during the Orange Revolution, whose allegedly fraudulent

election was overturned in 2004, Viktor Yanukovych, won the 2010 presidential election. The

peaceful Orange Revolution had yielded disappointing results, but the US continued to support

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[394] Evan Reif, "How Monsters Who Beat Jews To Death in 1944 Became America's Favorite 'Freedom Fighters' in 1945—with a Little Help from Their Friends at CIA," *CovertAction Magazine*, June 10, 2022, https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/06/10/how-monsters-who-had-beaten-jews-to-death-with-hammers-in-1944-became-americas-favorite-freedom-fighters-in-1945-with-a-little-help-from-their-friends-at-cia/; Sam Roberts, "Declassified Papers Show U.S. Recruited Ex-Nazis," *The New York Times*, December 11, 2010, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/us/12holocaust.html.

[395] See Iryna Solonenko, "Ukrainian Civil Society from the Orange Revolution to Euromaidan: Striving for a New Social Contract," *OSCE Yearbook 2014*, 2015, 231.

[396] Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions*, 2, 175, 178, 185.

neoliberal and pro-US political forces in Ukraine while undermining socialistic and pro-Russian forces, culminating in a violent confrontation that removed the elected Yanukovych government.

The Euromaidan Revolution, or coup, of 2013–2014 represented one of the most dramatic and controversial episodes in US democracy promotion history. The Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014 began with a controversy over a foreign trade deal. The Yanukovych government received trade deal offers from both the EU and Russia. The EU deal would have economically integrated Ukraine with the EU and advanced Ukraine toward EU membership, but it also required Ukraine to implement social austerity and neoliberal economic policies. The Russian deal offered the same money without requiring neoliberal reforms.[397] In November 2013, the Yanukovych government decided in favor of the Russian trade deal, prompting large scale pro-EU and anti-Yanukovych protests centered in Kyiv's Maidan (Independence) Square immediately to break out. While many Euromaidan protestors were ordinary citizens expressing anger at government corruption and disagreement over the choice to back out of the EU deal, armed and violent far-Right, ultra-nationalist, and neo-Nazi organizations like the Svoboda party (formerly the Social National Party of Ukraine) and Right Sector and its Volunteer Corps paramilitary arm played a key role in Yanukovych's ouster.

Perhaps most disturbing and mysterious were the violent clashes between February 18 and 20, 2014, that escalated the protests into a final push for regime change. On February 20, unknown snipers shot and killed at least sixty-seven people and injured hundreds more, killing mostly anti-government protestors but also over a dozen police officers. Pro-Maidan figures and Western media blamed the murders on Yanukovych and his security forces, but post-Maidan Ukrainian authorities failed to identify or convict anyone responsible for the murders. In-depth

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[397] Branko Marcetic, "A US-Backed, Far Right–Led Revolution in Ukraine Helped Bring Us to the Brink of War," *Jacobin*, February 7, 2022, https://jacobin.com/2022/02/maidan-protests-neo-nazis-russia-nato-crimea.

open-source victim testimony and forensic research by Ukrainian-Canadian political scientist
Ivan Katchanovski, however, concludes that the "snipers' massacre" of February 20 was a false
flag operation carried out from the pro-Maidan side, specifically by the ultranationalist groups
Svoboda and Right Sector as well as the neoliberal opposition Fatherland Party led at the time by
Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who became the post-Maidan prime minister.[398] President Yanukovych
attempted to make a deal with the political opposition for early elections after the violence on
February 21 but lost control of the situation and was forced to flee Kyiv by that evening.

In the lead up to and during the Maidan protests, the US government and its democracy
promotion apparatus was particularly active. In 2012, USAID provided 54 percent of the budget
for United Action Center (Center UA) organized by Oleh Rybachuk, a major figure who
previously received US NED and USAID funds when he organized the pro-Western opposition
during the 2005 Orange Revolution. Center UA was a key part of Rybachuk's Western-backed
New Citizen NGO network, which played a large role in organizing and initiating the protests
against President Yanukovych in November 2013.[399] In September 2013, NED president Carl
Gershman had called Ukraine the "biggest prize" in the new East-West rivalry and pleaded for

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[398] Ivan Katchanovski, "The "Snipers' Massacre" on the Maidan in Ukraine" (Annual Meeting of American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 2015), https://www.academia.edu/8776021/The_Snipers_Massacre_on_the_Maidan_in_Ukraine; Ivan Katchanovski, "The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: A Summary of Analysis, Evidence and Findings," in *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, The West and Russia*, ed. J.L. Black and Michael Johns (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 220–24, 10.4324/9781315684567-12; Ivan Katchanovski, "The Far Right, the Euromaidan, and the Maidan Massacre in Ukraine," *Journal of Labor and Society* 23 (December 15, 2019): 5–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12457.
[399] Mark Ames, "Pierre Omidyar Co-Funded Ukraine Revolution Groups with US Government, Documents Show," *Pando Daily*, February 28, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140228231341/https:/pando.com/2014/02/28/pierre-omidyar-co-funded-ukraine-revolution-groups-with-us-government-documents-show/; Roman Olearchyk, "Ukraine: Inside the pro-EU Protest Camp," *Financial Times*, December 14, 2013, https://www.ft.com/content/e2d5aaaa-e124-3fae-804c-f85869b6d863. Rybachuk's NGO's like Center UA were also funded by the NED, the Omidyar Network, owned by billionaire PayPal founder and chairman Pierre Omidyar, and the International Renaissance Foundation, owned by billionaire George Soros.

the US to more aggressively engage the Ukrainian government and civil society to help it

integrate more fully with the West.[400]

On December 13, 2013, while clashes between Maidan protestors and government

security forces started becoming violent, the neoconservative Assistant Secretary of State for

European and Eurasian Affairs and future NED board member, Victoria Nuland, spoke at a US-

Ukraine Foundation conference in Washington DC sponsored by ExxonMobil and Chevron.

Having just returned from distributing food to protestors in Kyiv with US ambassador to

Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland spoke about the Maidan protests and situation in Ukraine. She

said the US had invested $5 billion into Ukrainian democracy and Western integration since

1991, and she called on Ukraine to make an economic deal with the IMF and EU.[401] IRI

Chairman and US Senator John McCain met with far-Right Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok and

Fatherland leader Yatsenyuk on December 14, 2013 and spoke in support of protestors at pro-

Maidan rallies alongside Tyahnybok and Democrat Senator Chris Murphy.[402]

A leaked January 28, 2014, phone conversation between Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey

Pyatt is perhaps the most sensational evidence of US democracy promotion efforts contributing

to an unconstitutional ouster a democratically elected official, in this case, Ukrainian president

Yanukovych. In this call, they discussed US plans for a post-Yanukovych government, and

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[400] Carl Gershman, "Former Soviet States Stand up to Russia. Will the U.S.? - The Washington Post," *Washington Post*, September 26, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/former-soviet-states-stand-up-to-russia-will-the-us/2013/09/26/b5ad2be4-246a-11e3-b75d-5b7f66349852_story.html.

[401] *Victoria Nuland: Ukrainians Deserve For Respect From Their Government*, Digital, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2y0y-JUsPTU.

[402] Guardian Staff and Agencies, "John McCain Tells Ukraine Protesters: 'We Are Here to Support Your Just Cause,'" *The Guardian*, December 15, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/15/john-mccain-ukraine-protests-support-just-cause; Adam Taylor, "John McCain Went To Ukraine And Stood On Stage With A Man Accused Of Being An Anti-Semitic Neo-Nazi," *Business Insider*, December 16, 2013, https://www.businessinsider.com/john-mccain-meets-oleh-tyahnybok-in-ukraine-2013-12; Brian Whelan, "Far-Right Group at Heart of Ukraine Protests Meet US Senator," *Channel 4 News*, December 16, 2013, https://www.channel4.com/news/ukraine-mccain-far-right-svoboda-anti-semitic-protests.

Nuland said that Arseniy Yatsenyuk should head the future government and work closely with

Svoboda leader Tyahnybok.[403] Indeed, Yatsenyuk became the new prime minister and several

members of Svoboda obtained cabinet positions in the new government, including the deputy

prime minister position.[404] International relations scholar John Mearsheimer names US and

European democracy promotion policies, along with NATO and EU eastward expansion, as

major factors that caused the 2014 Ukraine crisis, which became the origins of the Russia-

Ukraine war.[405]

Ukraine's Euromaidan crisis of 2014 seems to offer another instance of foreign (US) and

domestic (Ukrainian) State Crimes Against Democracy and an example of US democracy

promotion exceptionism. The US actions and programs in Ukraine provide further evidence of

US government and democracy promotion officials and institutions taking advantage of political

crises and tensions in foreign countries to back forces that aligned with US economic and

security interests and engaged in behavior that directly contradicted constitutional procedures

and democratic ethics. The Ukraine crisis also reveals problems with Western mainstream media

serving US corporate and national security state interests. Oliver Boyd-Barrett argues that

Western mainstream media coverage of Ukraine from 2013 to 2015 consistently ignored key

geopolitical contexts of previous US interference in the region vis-à-vis Russia and its allies as

well as the importance of far-Right forces in the 2014 regime change in favor of a simplistic

narrative of heroic democratic nationalists that ultimately advances elite US economic and

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[403] *Nuland-Pyatt Leaked Phone Conversation _COMPLETE with SUBTITLES*, Digital, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV9J6sxCs5k.

[404] Greg Rose, "Ukrainian Ultra-Rightists given Major Cabinet Posts in Government," *People's World*, February 28, 2014, https://peoplesworld.org/article/ukrainian-ultra-rightists-given-major-cabinet-posts-in-government/; Brian Whelan, "How the Far-Right Took Top Posts in Ukraine's Power Vacuum," *Channel 4 News*, March 5, 2014, https://www.channel4.com/news/svoboda-ministers-ukraine-new-government-far-right.

[405] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014), 77, 80.

security interests.[406] The $5 billion investment since 1991 in development and political aid for Ukrainian civil society, media, corporations, and government previously cited by Victoria Nuland suggests significant geopolitical stakes for US elites in bringing Ukraine into a Western orbit. Mainstream media complacency in pro-US conflict propaganda regarding geopolitical contests in Ukraine points to convergences among US government and democracy promotion professionals, the foreign civil society and media organizations they support and legitimize as the truly democratic forces of Ukrainian society, and corporate media interests.

Conclusion

Considering case studies at the intersections of democracy promotion, media, and deep politics illuminates key continuities as well as context-specific complexities. In Venezuela (2002), Haiti (2004), and Ukraine (2014), US government and democracy promotion officials dropped normal diplomatic and electoral processes in favor of backing forces willing to engage in or support extra-constitutional means of undermining and ultimately unseating a democratically elected government. Moreover, in Venezuela, Haiti, and Ukraine, the final regime change was driven by mysterious and strategically mediated spectacles of violence and chaos that had disquieting connections to US officials directly or to individuals or groups that US officials and institutions supported.

Regime change in Yugoslavia and Ukraine had a relatively larger base of support among the respective populations as compared to Venezuela and especially Haiti. Milošević and Yanukovych were not especially popular in their countries, whereas Chávez and Aristide possessed great mass support, and indeed the mass uprising against the 2002 Venezuelan coup government for Chávez was instrumental in returning Chávez to power. In Serbia and Ukraine,

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[406] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

as in many color revolutions, the US leveraged real popular grievances. However, the case studies covered here demonstrate that the purported democratic ideals in US democracy promotion institutions continue to be subordinated to US economic and security interests. They also help show the importance of propaganda campaigns through US-supported media and civil society groups, especially in longer drawn-out conflicts with adversary states as in Serbia and especially Venezuela. Finally, the case studies reveal important evolutions in US democracy promotion and its connections with US mainstream media and deep political forces.

This chapter reveals how US democracy promotion institutions, particularly USAID and the NED, have intersected with deep political forces and mobilized media and civil society to advance US foreign policy objectives abroad in the twenty-first century. Since the 1990s, USAID remains the most well-funded institution in the world charged with democracy promotion as a foundational priority, even though democracy promotion has never been its primary directive. The NED, while having a smaller budget than USAID and other government agencies such as the European Commission's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, still serves as an important intellectual clearinghouse for Western democracy promotion and is still the largest NGO completely dedicated to democracy promotion. Neoconservative figures, ideas, and intellectual institutions continue to hold a prominent place in US democracy promotion policy and institutions. Importantly, US democracy promotion developed into a broader US and Western democracy promotion *industry* in the 1990s and 2000s—a period in which neoconservative figures in powerful positions of government envisioned democracy promotion as a key rationale for US interventionism. The number and funding of US and Western democracy promotion institutions grew in the twenty-first century, yet the NED and USAID remain powerful players in the realms of geopolitics and international

relations. USAID, the NED, and US democracy promotion also continue to promote a narrow, neoliberal, elite-managed, polyarchic form of democracy that separates political democracy from economic and social democracy and aligns with US economic interests.

The NED and USAID dedicate substantial resources to supporting and creating foreign elite-based civil society and media that present themselves as independent news organizations and grassroots voices of the people in their respective countries. Especially in longer drawn out conflicts like in Venezuela, these US-funded groups and individuals become part of the "official sources" of raw news information that US mainstream media depend on to craft their narratives as theorized in Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model. Deflective source propaganda is an important part of US democracy promotion practice, because audience awareness of the ultimate money and power behind these sources of information and media and civil society groups would likely make audiences more skeptical of the groups and the outlets that draw from the perspectives and support of US democracy promotion. The NED itself can be seen as an example of deflective source propaganda. The NED portrays itself as an independent NGO headed by an independent board of directors. However, it is dependent on the US Congress for nearly all its funding. Its board was originally filled by the Reagan administration with Washington insiders and new staff were drawn from establishment figures from the Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, and the Democratic and Republican parties.

The NED and USAID also continue to play a prominent role in US interventions abroad, supporting deep political propaganda and insurgency campaigns against geopolitical adversaries of the US as part of a bipartisan, public-private imperialist project. In the cases of Serbia, Venezuela, Haiti, and Ukraine, the NED and USAID continuously violated supposed rules of impartiality and nonpartisanship, choosing clear sides in democratic competitions to align with

US economic and security interests. This has implicated the NED and USAID in what Aaron Good describes as US exceptionism. It has also implicated US democracy promotion institutions and figures in State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs), especially in the cases of Venezuela and Ukraine, and calls into question the democratic and humanitarian pretexts for their interventions. Subsequent research into the NED, USAID, and US democracy promotion institutions could explore their propaganda functions and significance for the maintenance of US imperial power projection abroad. The following penultimate chapter provides a detailed case study of USAID and NED interventions in Syria, using leaked internal documents from USAID and UK government contractors to further investigate the intersections of democracy promotion, deep political forces, and the roles of media and civil society in the maintenance of US imperial power abroad.

CHAPTER FIVE – THE MODERATE REBEL INDUSTRY: SYRIA, US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION, AND DEEP MEDIA IMPERIALISM

The Syrian Civil War (2011–present) has earned a reputation as the most documented conflict in world history, yet its basic facts represent some of the most contentious and polarizing topics in contemporary US political discourse.[407] This is due in part to interventions in Syria by the US and its NATO and West Asian (or Middle Eastern) allies that constitute one of the most significant illustrations of media imperialism and deep politics in the twenty-first century. Deep political forces in the intelligence, military, and corporate sectors of the US and its allies launched a massive, largely covert hybrid warfare campaign, involving a combined insurgency, propaganda, economic, diplomatic, lawfare, and political warfare strategy, for regime change against the Ba'athist administration in Syria. This process of intervention involved a billion-dollar propaganda and civil society program. The program created a strategically distorted narrative about the conflict that became dominant in the US foreign policy and media establishments.

This chapter looks at US national security state and deep political efforts in the Syrian Civil War, focusing on media and civil society programs. I explore the use of deflective source propaganda and creation of "official sources" by the US and its collaborators, which news media then relied on to cover the conflict. I also offer a history of US and UK intervention in Muslim-majority countries characterized by clandestine intrigue and Western weaponization of conservative religious and sectarian elements against secular nationalist and socialist adversaries. I then trace US meddling in Syria from World War II to the democracy promotion programs of

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[407] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Conflict Propaganda in Syria: Narrative Battles* (London: Routledge, 2021).

the W. Bush administration and explain how the US approach fits the larger historical pattern of Western imperialism.

After setting the historical context of Syria, I dedicate the bulk of this chapter to analyzing US intervention in the 2011 Syrian Civil War. I first offer an overview of NATO- and Persian Gulf State-supported anti-Syrian-government rebel networks as well as their largely clandestine media and civil society infrastructure built to facilitate rebel efforts and promote foreign intervention against the Syrian regime. I then zoom in my analysis on two key battlegrounds of the war, Aleppo City and Idlib province. I pay special attention to a Western consultancy called ARK and their creation, the White Helmets, a USAID-funded, ostensibly grassroots Syrian humanitarian organization that became a keystone of Western media and civil society efforts in Syria. I argue that the twenty-first century Syrian intervention represents an invaluable case study for understanding the digital age relationships between US democracy promotion, deep politics, media imperialism, and the roles of media and civil society in US imperialism.

The dissertation has thus far focused almost exclusively on US democracy promotion and intervention abroad. This chapter, however, must take a broader, more transnational approach due to the unique characteristics of the Syrian conflict as well as the limited sources available. Unlike the dissertation's other case studies, the conflict in Syria centered not around protests and disputed elections but around deadly kinetic combat between anti- and pro-government military groups. Even in Nicaragua during the Contra War there were free and fair elections in 1984 and 1990 that US democracy promotion could focus resources on. The closest historical parallel for US intervention and democracy promotion in Syria, for many reasons that will be discussed, is Afghanistan in the 1980s, where the military dimension similarly took precedence over all other

areas of conflict. This dynamic requires analyzing democracy promotion in a different light, where its role in facilitating military goals becomes more salient and its relationship with the international violence of US imperialism is more direct. This chapter thus pays close attention to the military conflict around the media and civil society programs of US democracy promotion.

Another aspect of the Syrian Civil War that requires an amended approach is the limited available sourcing, due in part to the conflict being more recent, expansive, controversial, and in many ways still ongoing. The Ukraine Euromaidan case study, while similarly recent, covered just over three months of demonstrations and riots, many of them taking place in the middle of Kyiv. The Syrian Civil War has spanned over a decade and included complex years-long battle fronts across much of the country, with the result that the limited sources must address developments covering more time and space.

To facilitate analysis in this expansive case study, I use about 1,400 pages of documents from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) that were leaked to the public in September 2020. The documents provide key inside insights into Western media and civil society programming inside Syria through a consortium of government contractors. While the US was deeply involved in such media and civil society efforts (on top of their extensive commitments of money, ordnance, and personnel in Syria), much of the vital US documentation is still secreted away from public view. I highlight the US contributions where they can be established or inferred, particularly those of the NED and especially USAID. However, to get a clearer picture of the interventions in Syria, it is necessary to use the leaked UK documents, and thus take a more transnational view of the conflict, including the activities of the UK.

Syria in Geopolitical Perspective

The previously cited 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, or the Wolfowitz Doctrine and later the Bush Doctrine, could be thought of as an extreme form of communist rollback. US government hardliners of the Cold War, known as Prussians and later as neoconservatives, advocated the rollback of the specific political economy of Marxist socialism.[408] During the Cold War, the foreign policy established even framed US actions against non-Marxist countries as preventative efforts against real or imagined Marxist threats; these instances include Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and Indonesia (1965). Yet after the Cold War, this hardline stance evolved into the rollback of any perceived threat or alternative to a US-led neoliberal capitalist world order. Some post-Cold War rollback targets included Latin American social democracy as exemplified by Jean Bertrand Aristide in Haiti or the more radical Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Rollback targets have also included West Asian, pan-Arab, socialist-oriented nationalism spanning from Saddam Hussein in Iraq to the more radical Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, or what remained of international Marxist socialism in Cuba or China. These countries threatened US capitalist primacy because they exemplified potential alternatives to the US-led system, held territories that under consolidated control could be sufficient to project global power, pursued policies that were inconvenient to US economic and geopolitical interests, or displayed some combination of the three.

Syria's Ba'athist government in the twenty-first century represents neither a radical alternative to US-led order nor controls resources sufficient to project global power. However,

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[408] A similar term can be found in the US Operation Cyclone intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992, where the Whitehouse establishment under Carter was broadly split into "Bleeders," led by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who favored an anti-détente, hardline commitment to use the Mujahideen and other covert projects to bleed out the Soviets and ultimately roll back communism, versus "Dealers" who sought negotiated compromise with the Soviets and the socialist Kabul government. See Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out Of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 187-190.

Syria has pursued policies and alliances inconvenient to elite US interests. Patrick Higgins

locates the sources of US national security establishment animosity toward Syria since WWII in

Syria's historic relationship with Russia, support for Third World national liberation movements,

support for Pan Arabism and anti-Zionism, and economic independence.[409] Syria has been

friendly with the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation since establishing diplomatic

relations in 1944; it has been a key Russian ally since at least the 1980 Treaty of Friendship and

Cooperation between Syria and the USSR. Illustrating the importance of the alliance, Russia's

only warm deepwater ports after the Cold War are in Tartus (Syria) and Sevastopol (Crimea).

Perhaps more importantly, Syria has been a close ally of Iran since Iran's 1979

revolution. Syria has also aligned itself with Palestinian resistance against Israel since 1948 and

the Lebanese anti-Zionist group Hezbollah since 1990. Syria's relationships with Iran,

Hezbollah, and Palestinian groups have been so close that they are often collectively referred to

as the "Axis of Resistance" against US and Israeli regional interests.[410] Syria also supported the

Marxist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) for nearly twenty years, both hosting PKK founder

Abdullah Öcalan and allowing PKK camps to operate on Syrian territory from 1979 to 1998,

which contributed to a long-term rift with key NATO-member, Türkiye (Turkey). In 2009, Syria

also rejected a proposed natural gas pipeline going from Qatar through Saudi Arabia, Syria, and

Türkiye to Europe in favor of another proposed pipeline flowing from Iran through Iraq, Syria,

and Lebanon into the Mediterranean. While none of these policies alone explain US regime

change operations against Syria, they collectively demonstrate that Syria has pursued policies

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[409] Patrick Donovan Higgins, "Gunning for Damascus: The US War on the Syrian Arab Republic," *Middle East Critique*, April 3, 2023, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19436149.2023.2199487, 220-222
[410] Ansar Allah, or the "Houthi Movement," in Yemen has also often been included in the Axis of Resistance since the 2004 Houthi Insurgency in Yemen and 2014 Yemen Civil War, although relations between Syria and Ansar Allah have not been as close compared to Syrian relations with Iran or Hezbollah.

and foreign relations in contravention to declared US interests and US allies in West Asia since the Cold War.

Syria's 2011 War in Deep Historical Perspective

> They [Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan and other Saudi officials] will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us [the Whitehouse] was 'We've created this movement, and we can control it.' It's not that we don't want the Salafis to throw bombs; it's *who* they throw them at—Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran. – Unnamed US government consultant, speaking to Seymour Hersh for *The New Yorker* regarding an alleged Saudi-US-Israeli strategy in the late-W. Bush administration to use Salafi forces against Shia adversaries in West Asia (February 25, 2007)[411]

> "Thank God for the Saudis and Prince Bandar, and for our Qatari friends," – Senator and IRI Chair John McCain, praising the Saudis and Qataris for their support to armed Syrian rebels at the Munich Security Conference (February 2014)[412]

Syria's Ba'athist secular, Pan-Arab, socialist-oriented nationalism and alignment with Soviet and Global South anti-imperialism help explain the intervention methods used by the West in the 2011 War. The US, UK, and their Western allies have a century-long history of weaponizing Sunni fundamentalism and sectarianism, particularly of the Salafi variety, to advance their economic, security, and geopolitical interests against nationalist and socialist forces in Muslim-majority societies. The largest and most influential Salafi organization in the world for many decades has been the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), formed in Egypt in 1928 with

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[411] Seymour M. Hersh, "The Redirection," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2007, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/03/05/the-redirection.

[412] Steve Clemons, "'Thank God for the Saudis': ISIS, Iraq, and the Lessons of Blowback," *The Atlantic*, June 23, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-saudi-arabia-iraq-syria-bandar/373181/.

a grant from the English Suez Canal Company. For nearly twenty-five years the UK and the British-backed King Farouk I of Egypt maintained a tenuous relationship with the MB, supporting the group to undermine and attack secular communists and nationalists.[413] After King Farouk was overthrown by the secular Arab socialist Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1952, the UK and US employed the MB to undermine and even attempt to assassinate Nasser, who would go on to form a short-lived united country with Syria between 1958 and 1961 known as the United Arab Republic.[414]

Throughout the Cold War, the US pursued a close alliance with Saudi Arabia, which promoted a fundamentalist Salafi (derisively called Wahhabi) vision of Islam and pan-Islamism.[415] A Department of State (DoS) memo from 1957 discusses an argument by President Eisenhower that "we should do everything to stress the 'holy war' aspect" of the Cold War conflict among Arab and Muslim countries, mobilizing religion to fight communism.[416] The CIA during the Cold War became a key player in using Islam as an organizational and propaganda tool to advance US agendas. In 1951, CIA officer Kermit Roosevelt, a key figure in the 1953 CIA-MI6-orchestrated coup in Iran, promoted an idea to find a "Moslem Billy Graham" who could inspire wide anti-communist sentiment in the Muslim World.[417] In the lead up to the 1953 coup in Iran, the US funded an Iranian ayatollah (Shia cleric) who allied with the MB and

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[413] Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 47-51, 54.

[414] Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 101, 124,

[415] Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 3; Christine R. Gilbert, "The Interagency, Eisenhower, and the House of Saud," Case Studies Working Group Report (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2012), JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/stable/resrep11953.16.

[416] Andrew Goodpaster, "Document 388. Memorandum of a Conversation With the President, White House, Washington, September 7, 1957, 10:07 a.m.," ed. Will Klingman, Aaron D. Miller, and Nina J. Noring (Office of the Historian, September 7, 1957), Volume XIII, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Near East: Jordan-Yemen - Office of the Historian, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v13/d388.

[417] Gilbert, "The Interagency, Eisenhower, and the House of Saud," 885.

founded the fundamentalist Devotees of Islam.[418] The US thus adopted the colonial strategy of using religion to divide and conquer Muslim-majority societies.

The CIA-led Operation Cyclone in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992 represents the closest Cold War precedent for US intervention in the Syrian Civil War, led by the CIA's Operation Timber Sycamore from 2012 to 2017. Both operations involved the US and its West Asian allies covertly and overtly funding, arming, and training Islamist and Salafi insurgents against a secular enemy government.[419] The Afghan case also included a media angle. The US and its European allies used ostensibly humanitarian and media NGO front organizations to sneak cameras and friendly journalists into Afghanistan, direct Mujahideen fighters to provoke and then record violent Soviet and Afghan government retaliations, and create atrocity propaganda films to broadcast on public and Christian television channels.[420] Similar to the Afghan case study in chapter three, in twenty-first century Syria, the NED, USAID, and a series of other US and UK organizations weaponized media, humanitarian, education, and refugee organizations to facilitate military efforts of both Western governments and Syrian rebels.

Other Western interventions in West Asia created media precedents for twenty-first century Syrian media and civil society operations. During the 1970s, British Special Air Service operatives fighting communist insurgents in Oman established a regional newspaper, village news bulletins, and radio station; they also distributed free radios in Oman while simultaneously running ostensible medical and veterinary assistance programs that gathered intelligence for the Omani military.[421] In Iraq, before the 2003 US invasion, US government-funded NGOs trained

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[418] Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 3.

[419] John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, third edition (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Max Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery: How America's National Security State Fueled the Rise of Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Donald Trump* (New York: Verso, 2019).

[420] Joel Whitney, *Finks: How the CIA Tricked the World's Best Writers* (New York: OR Books, 2016), 259, 263-268.

[421] Kinross, *Information Warriors*, location 2427

anti-Saddam Hussein Kurdish journalists. After the 2003 invasion, the US established friendly

journalists, media organizations, and communications infrastructure to promote the post-invasion

Western occupation and political and economic reforms, and even hired a contractor to pay Iraqi

outlets to publish articles by US soldiers that appeared to be written by independent Iraqi

journalists.[422] As in Syria, the influence campaigns in Iraq were officially framed as programs

for conflict stabilization and democracy promotion.

US intervention in Syria during the twentieth century might be seen as its first attempt to

promote democracy in West Asia. Historian Hugh Wilford recounts that the first covert

operations of leading CIA officer Miles Copeland Jr. in Syria had focused on making the 1947

Syrian elections cleaner and fairer, and on helping Syrians elect "the right kind of leaders."

Copeland Jr. even contended that US officials approached Syria as a pilot project to test their

abilities to democratize West Asia.[423] However, when the US became dissatisfied with the

elected government, the CIA encouraged a military coup, which created a period of instability

and short-lived dictatorial governments.[424] Fearing a leftward drift in Syrian politics, the CIA

tried and failed to instigate a military coup in 1956 and again in 1957, pushing Syria further

toward a pro-Soviet stance that would outlive the Cold War.[425]

The Syrian Ba'ath Party banned the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

shortly after taking power in 1963, prompting key MB leaders such as Issam al-Attar to operate

out of West Germany for much of the Cold War.[426] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Syria

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[422] Dionysis Markakis, *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: The Pursuit of Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2016), 121-123.

[423] Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 96-97.

[424] Wilford, *America's Great Game*, 108

[425] William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, Updated edition (London: Zed Books, 2014), 87-89.

[426] Ian Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 183, 197

experienced an Islamist insurgency led by the MB, which viewed the Alawites represented by President Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar, as heretical and not real Muslims. In this case, it was not the US directly but its allies in Israel and Jordan, with US foreknowledge, that aided the MB insurgency.[427]

Twenty-first century US plans and actions against the Syrian government also predate the 2011 war. Although no friend of al-Qaeda or the MB, Bashar al-Assad, who has been president of Syria since 2000, opposed US and Israeli actions against Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran during their so-called War on Terror. Journalist Seymour Hersh reported in February 2007 that the W. Bush administration had decided to refocus its West Asian efforts to oppose the Shia powers of Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria. The US, Saudis, and Israelis would work together to weaponize the region's Sunni-Shia divide through the use of anti-Shia Salafi militants.[428]

US government cables released by Wikileaks bear out some of these points. The cables show that as early as 2006, nearly five years before the so-called Arab Spring protests of 2011, destabilizing the Syrian government by all available means, and even working to generate regime change, was official US policy under the Bush administration. The most prominent concern expressed in the cables was not Syrian human rights or democracy but the Syrian government's relationships with US geopolitical adversaries, Iran in particular.

A December 2006 cable written by US charge d'affaires William Roebuck at the US embassy in Damascus discusses a series of vulnerabilities in the Syrian regime and possible actions the US could take to exploit them. The top US diplomat in Syria explicitly suggested working with the Egyptians and Saudis to fan Sunni anxieties and resentment vis-à-vis perceived Iranian influence in Syria; it also proposed stoking tensions between Syrian Kurds and the Assad

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[427] Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 190-191
[428] Hersh, "The Redirection."

regime as a means of creating problems for the Ba'ath government.[429] While stating that Syria had been the victim of al-Qaeda-linked terrorist attacks, and that the Syrian government actively opposed extremist Salafi groups, Roebuck suggested publicizing problems of extremism in Syria to portray the regime as weak and unstable. He concluded with a consideration of anti-regime Syrian Islamists, writing that, while the US did not yet have a good sense of their current strength in Syria, the Islamists were "certainly a long-term threat" to the regime.[430]

US cables also document US efforts, including early democracy promotion programs by USAID and core NED grantees, to undermine the Syrian government and support an anti-Assad opposition both inside and outside of Syria through international allies, media, and civil society. In December 2006, Roebuck suggested encouraging exiled Syrian opposition figures such as Abdul Halim Khaddam to meet with US allies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia and appear on regional news outlets; Roebuck hoped these actions would prompt Syrian fears of a government coup and create provocations between Syria and its neighbor states.[431]

An April 2009 cable by US charge d'affaires Maura Connelly describes early Obama administration efforts by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a regional partner of USAID under the DoS established in 2002 and authorized to spend $12 million on Syria-specific projects between 2005 and 2010. Connelly describes a $1.25 million grant for the International Republican Institute (IRI) to create and disseminate public opinion research and CDs containing footage by journalists and a report documenting human rights abuses. Connelly discusses a grant of over $2 million for the Aspen Strategic Initiative Institute in Berlin to organize conferences for Syrian opposition figures to meet international NGO, media, and human rights activists.

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[429] Cablegate, "Influencing the SARG in the End of 2006," US embassy, Damascus, Syria, December 13, 2006 https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS5399_a.html.
[430] Cablegate, "Influencing the SARG in the End of 2006."
[431] Cablegate, "Influencing the SARG in the End of 2006."

Connelly also lists $6.3 million for the Democracy Council of California to discretely collaborate

with the Syrian opposition to produce a website and "various broadcast concepts," and $611,000

for the Czech NGO People in Need to train Syrian activists on "using the model of Eastern

European democratization."[432] The same cable describes $584,904 for Etana Press, the

publishing arm of the Syrian opposition research, activism, and lobbying group Etana. A

February 2010 cable reveals that MEPI was supporting Barada TV, a London-based Syrian

opposition satellite TV network.[433]

      US officials were aware that these initiatives often worked against reform and

democratization in Syria because they encouraged the Syrian government to adopt a hardline,

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[432] Cablegate, "Behavior Reform: Next Steps for a Human Rights Strategy," US embassy, Damascus, Syria, April 28, 2009. https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09DAMASCUS306_a.html
This cable also mentions a nearly $1 million program with the University of New Mexico to establish a web portal for NGOs and train them to use it, $316,000 for the Berlin Society to establish a Syrian women's center that provides internet access, computer classes, and legal and medical advice, and $50,000 for the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center to research Syrian trade unions, connect them with US labor officials, and bring AFL-CIO staff to Syria for meetings with the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions.
[433] Cablegate, "Behavior Reform: Next Steps for a Human Rights Strategy"; Cablegate, "Human Rights Updates -- SARG Budges on TIP, but Little Else," US embassy, Damascus, Syria, February 7th, 2010, https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10DAMASCUS106_a.html.
The cable also describes how the Democracy Council of California grant was used to funnel money to the Movement for Justice and Development in Syria (MJD), a "London-based moderate Islamist group" founded by former disaffected members of the Muslim Brotherhood, ostensibly to provide money to the families of opposition figures jailed by the Syrian government. However, the cables imply that the Democracy Council may have funneled at least some of their $6.3 million grant to Barada TV. The US cables specify that Barada is "MEPI-supported," but does not specify the amount of money MEPI gave to Barada or how it was given. Barada TV was founded by Maliki al-Abdeh, the co-founder and board member of MJD and brother of MJD co-founder and chairperson Anas al-Abdah. Another cable demonstrates that the Syrians suspected a connection between Barada TV and the Democracy Council of California, describing how the Damascus director of Barada TV, Suheir Attasi, was questioned by Syrian security agents who asked her if she "knew Jim Prince," likely referring to the Democracy Council president James Prince (see Cablegate, "Show us the Money! SARG Suspects "Illegal" USG Funding," US embassy, Damascus, Syria, September 23, 2009, https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09DAMASCUS692_a.html). One 2011 article in the *Washington Post* analyzing the leaked cables on Syria explored the connections between Barada, MJD, and the Democracy Council and came to the conclusion that MEPI likely funded Barada through the Democracy Council and MJD (see Craig Whitlock, "U.S. Secretly Backed Syrian Opposition Groups, Cables Released by WikiLeaks Show," *Washington Post*, May 21, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-secretly-backed-syrian-opposition-groups-cables-released-by-wikileaks-show/2011/04/14/AF1p9hwD_story.html). Barada TV founder Maliki al-Abdeh denied getting money from the US State Department, but did admit that Barada TV received at least part of its $1 million yearly budget from the California-based Democracy Council (see Sarah Morrison, "UK-Based Syrian TV Station Denies Secret Funding from US Government," *The Independent*, April 18, 2011, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ukbased-syrian-tv-station-denies-secret-funding-from-us-government-2269730.html.)

paranoid stance against any internal opposition, denounce and persecute those supported by the US as traitors, and view democratic reforms as an existential, imperialist-conspired threat. A February 2006 cable cited testimony from Syrian opposition figures themselves, who argued that a recent $5 million-dollar public US pledge to the opposition impeded efforts to ease tensions between the Syrian government and internal opposition and ultimately reform the Syrian government in a more democratic direction.[434] One opposition leader, Riad Seif, told the US embassy that twenty opposition figures decided to publicly denounce the MEPI project, so as to avoid scrutiny from the government, and they accused the US of using the opposition as "just a chip" in their "game" against Assad.[435] A September 2009 cable reveals the validity of their concerns; it discusses Syrian government investigations and persecution of several civil society and human rights groups funded by the US.[436] Connelly's April 2009 cable identified bringing "our US-sponsored civil society and human rights programming into line [with] a less confrontational bilateral relationship" as a "core issue" for a human rights strategy in Syria. Yet the February 2010 cable shows that the US continued funding illegal groups that the Syrian government would, as stated in the April 2009 cable, "undoubtedly view… as tantamount to supporting regime change."[437]

These cables reveal a hardline US approach in dealing with the Syrian government, one that was not interested in dialogue or reform but confrontation and regime change. The cables also demonstrate a willingness, perhaps even enthusiasm, for stoking ethnic, religious, and

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[434] Cablegate, "Announcement to Fund Opposition Harshly Criticized by Anti-Regime Elements, Others," US embassy, Damascus, Syria, February 21, 2006. https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS701_a.html
[435] Cablegate, "Announcement to Fund Opposition Harshly Criticized by Anti-Regime Elements, Others."
[436] Cablegate, "Show us the Money! SARG Suspects "Illegal" USG Funding."
[437] Cablegate, "Behavior Reform: Next Steps for a Human Rights Strategy"; Cablegate, "Human Rights Updates -- SARG Budges on TIP, but Little Else"
For a corroborating analysis of the Syria cables and US regime change policy prior to the Syrian Civil War Robert, see Naiman, "Syria," in *The Wikileaks Files: The World According to US Empire*, by Julian Assange et al. (London: Verso, 2015), 312-315.

regional tensions to pursue regime change, even if it meant undermining international and internal Syrian opposition efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights in Syria through peaceful diplomatic and political efforts. The hardline US approach continued despite the fact that the Assad government, as noted in the same cables, was rolling out economic reforms and encouraging private enterprise and foreign direct investment that, in the view of establishment democratization theory, went hand in hand with democratization.[438] Even when Assad showed a willingness to move in the direction that US policy wanted Syria to go, US officials remained dedicated to undercutting Assad's "efforts to shore up his legitimacy" and ultimately toppling the Ba'athist government.[439]

These cables, written not by the critics of US foreign policy but by its agents, suggest that geopolitical interests, not democracy and human rights in Syria, were the US foreign policy establishment's greatest concerns. In fact, the cables indicate that US policymakers were willing to undermine efforts more likely to promote democracy and human rights, if it meant advancing US geopolitical interests. In reviewing these cables and the transition from Bush to Obama, Robert Naiman argues that despite a publicly advertised shift from confrontation to engagement with the Syrian government, the US government continued covert activities that it believed would, if discovered by the Syrian government, cause the Assad regime to view the US as pursuing regime change. This policy continued even as the US increasingly determined that the Syrian government was becoming aware of such activities.[440] The US government had falsely presented a policy of engagement and dialogue to US and international publics in the years leading up to the Syrian Civil War, while privately advancing a confrontational agenda that was

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[438] Cablegate, "Influencing the SARG in the End of 2006."
[439] Cablegate, "Influencing the SARG in the End of 2006."
[440] See Naiman, "Syria," 320.

bound to undermine public diplomatic efforts and thus justify a public shift toward regime change when the war broke out.

Theoretical Perspectives on Media Imperialism and Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

Critical media scholars highlight the Syrian War as a case study for topics of media imperialism, particularly mainstream Western media's promotion of Western state intervention. Florian Zollman, for example, demonstrates a pattern of US, UK, and German mainstream media's consistent support for NATO intervention narratives, couched as responses to questionable reporting on atrocities, against officially designated enemies in Yugoslavia (1999), Libya (2011), and Syria (2012).[441] Other scholars reveal that mainstream US and UK media consistently downplay how much their governments have intervened in Syria, advocate more intervention as a humanitarian necessity, and police the boundaries of acceptable discourse by delegitimizing critics of Western intervention in the conflict.[442] These studies demonstrate key biases that Western mainstream media outlets have exposed in their Syrian conflict coverage.

Syria provides a useful case study for exploring Herman and Chomsky's third propaganda filter of mainstream media's passive reliance on "official sources" of news and the related concept of "deflective source propaganda." Looking at US-led interventions since September 11th, 2001, including Syria, Piers Robinson argues that media imperialism scholars should expand Herman and Chomsky's third propaganda filter to include active propaganda campaigns and "information imperialism" committed by great powers. Robinson's perspective emphasizes the "processes through which information is managed and manipulated in the service

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[441] Florian Zollmann, *Media, Propaganda, and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 80-115, 145-168.
[442] Philip Hammond, Sumaya Al Nahed, and Tara McCormack, "Advocacy Journalism, the Politics of Humanitarian Intervention and the Syrian War," in *Reporting Human Rights, Conflicts, and Peacebuilding: Critical and Global Perspectives*, ed. Ibrahim Seaga Shaw and Senthan Selvarajah, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

of imperial power" before being passed from official sources to journalists, which he asserts is a substantial but understudied factor in promoting foreign wars.[443] PR and communications expert Vyvyan Kinross argues that communications and propaganda strategies in West Asia increasingly revolve around the "twin gods of outsourcing and consulting" since Operation Desert Storm of 1990.[444] Building on Kinross, Robinson contends that UK media operations in Syria employed an innovative strategy of outsourcing propaganda to NGOs and corporations with ties to the UK government such as ARK and the White Helmets.[445] Oliver Boyd-Barrett argues similarly that deflective source propaganda through government-funded NGOs, combined with a lack of Western reporters operating in rebel-held Syria (because doing so risked reporters being kidnapped or killed by said rebels), influenced Western coverage on the conflict in favor of pro-rebel, pro-intervention narratives.[446]

The relevance of Kinross's insights about the "twin gods of outsourcing and consulting" cannot be overstated regarding US and UK intervention in the Syrian War. If parapolitics is defined as "a system or practice of politics in which accountability is consciously diminished," then US and UK outsourcing of propaganda work to dizzying networks of consultancies, contractors, and subcontractors clearly represents the countries' system and practice to diminish accountability in Syria. If deep politics means "all those practices, deliberate or not, which are usually repressed rather than acknowledged," then the countries' outsourcing of crucial state

[443] Piers Robinson, "Propaganda, Manipulation, and the Exercise of Imperial Power: From Media Imperialism to Information Imperialism," in *Media Imperialism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Tanner Mirrlees, eds. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 107.
[444] Vyvyan Kinross, *Information Warriors: The Battle for Hearts and Minds in the Middle East*, (London: Gilgamesh Publishing, 2020), location 2820.
[445] Piers Robinson, "'Chemical Weapon Attacks and an Evil Dictator': Outsourcing Propaganda during the War in Syria," in *Journalism and Foreign Policy*, ed. Jesse Owen Hearns-Branaman and Tabe Bergman, (New York: Routledge, 2022).
[446] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, "Deflective Source Propaganda: A Syrian Case Study," in *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 85, 89.

intervention work to private third parties unaccountable to FOIA or other public disclosure laws constitutes practices that facilitate repression of state involvement.[447]

Approaching the 2011 War

In August 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in a classified report wrote that the Syrian conflict was "taking a clear sectarian direction" and that Salafi forces, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda in Iraq (which would later evolve into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)), are "the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria."[448] The report further states the DIA's assumptions about the crisis: that either the Syrian government will survive and control Syrian territory, or that the conflict will develop into a proxy war with the Iranians, Russians, and Chinese backing the government while the Western countries, Gulf states, and Turkey back the insurgency. The DIA discusses the potential of a "Salafist principality" establishing itself "in Eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor [sic])," stating that "this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want" to undermine the region's Shia powers, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. The final un-redacted section of the report predicts that the Islamic State in Iraq (formerly al-Qaeda in Iraq) could use the conflict to declare an Islamic State uniting groups in both Syria and Iraq.[449]

The document is remarkable because of its brief, plain language that accurately describes significant military and geopolitical aspects of the Syrian conflict from 2011 and ongoing as of 2024. The conflict quickly took on a sectarian, violent character, led by Salafi forces of the MB, al-Qaeda, and later ISIS, which represented the strongest military forces of the armed opposition

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[447] Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, 6-7.

[448] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Effects of Syrian Insurgency on Iraq, 14-L-0552/ DIA/287," Information report (Defense Intelligence Agency, August 2012), 289 https://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf.

[449] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Effects of Syrian Insurgency on Iraq, 14-L-0552/ DIA/287," 291.

backed by NATO (Western countries and Türkiye) and the Sunni Gulf States early in the conflict.[450] The report even predicted the rise of ISIS, which by 2014 did in-fact establish significant territories straddling eastern Syria and western Iraq.

The report indicates that at least some elements of the US national security establishment were aware of the violent, sectarian, and theocratic forces in the opposition and were willing to support these forces to one extent or another. It also indicates that the narrative of a civil war for liberal freedom and democracy against dictatorship was meant for public consumption. Inside the US government and military, officials took a realpolitik geopolitical approach and fell back on older habits of weaponizing religious fundamentalism to fight secular nationalist and socialist forces in Muslim-majority countries. However, the public narrative of a domestic Syrian uprising for democracy remained important for facilitating and justifying intervention in the conflict. The NED and especially USAID supported a transnational, largely covert propaganda and civil society program that was designed to facilitate opposition activities and administration on the ground while also creating and maintaining a plausible narrative of a domestic democratic uprising for Syrian, regional, and international (particularly US and European) audiences. The rest of this chapter examines the propaganda and civil society program during the war and how it connected to support for sectarian theocratic violence and terrorism.

The Western Consortium: Purposes and Allies on the Ground

There was this constant struggle between what was largely an exile group outside of

Syria trying to claim to be the political opposition, and the people on the ground,

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[450] William Van Wagenen, "Salafis Throwing Bombs: How American and British Planners Partnered With al-Qaeda Affiliated Groups At the Start of the Syrian Civil War | The Libertarian Institute," *The Libertarian Institute*, December 28, 2021, https://libertarianinstitute.org/articles/salafis-throwing-bombs-how-american-and-british-planners-partnered-with-al-qaeda-affiliated-groups-at-the-start-of-the-syrian-civil-war/; Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Conflict Propaganda in Syria*, 136-138.

primarily those doing the fighting and dying, who rejected that, and we were never able to bridge that… in a conflict like this, the hard men with the guns are going to be the more likely actors in any political transition than those on the outside just talking. And therefore, we needed to figure out how we could support them on the ground, better equip them – former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, interviewed by Jeffrey Goldberg for *The Atlantic*, (August 10, 2014)[451]

There were a couple former members of the [Obama] administration arguing we should give quote, "the opposition," which we couldn't identify as moderate, by the way, I'm serious about that, give them ground-to-air launch missiles. Can you imagine what would've happened if that had been done? Does anybody doubt they would've been in the hands of al-Nusra, or al-Qaeda, or Khorasan Group, or ISIL? – Vice President Joseph Biden, speaking at the JFK Jr. Forum at the Harvard John F. Kennedy School of Government, (October 3, 2014)[452]

Historically, deep political and parapolitical efforts both suffer from and nurture inter-elite factionalism; this occurred in Syria with complicated and sometimes confusing results.[453] US and NATO leaders and their West Asian allies were divided on how the Assad government should be removed and how much they should dedicate to removing it. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden became more cautious about Syrian intervention after Libya descended into chaos in the wake of their 2011 NATO intervention, and especially after the rise of al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria created the possibility that the Ba'athist administration would be

[451] Jeffrey Goldberg, "Hillary Clinton: 'Failure' to Help Syrian Rebels Led to the Rise of ISIS," *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/hillary-clinton-failure-to-help-syrian-rebels-led-to-the-rise-of-isis/375832/.

[452] Joseph Biden, "Vice President Biden Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy | Institute of Politics," uploaded October 3, 2014, YouTube Video, 1:35:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcKVCtg5dxM, 56:00-56:30.

[453] See Peter Dale Scott, "Washington's Battle Over Syrian Foreign Policy: Will Hawks or Doves Prevail?," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, no. 24 (June 16, 2013): 1; Higgins, "Gunning for Damascus," 219-220.

replaced with a government friendly toward and influenced, if not led, by al-Qaeda, ISIS, or similar groups. The Obama administration and its CIA promised to support only the "moderate" Syrian opposition. This perceived moderate faction included both the political opposition outside Syria, such as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces that styled itself as the legitimate government-in-exile, as well as the more nebulous armed opposition inside Syria that came to be branded as the Free Syrian Army (FSA). As a rhetorical tool, the term "moderate" in Western discourse generally implied liberal democrats fighting for a Western-style capitalist representative democracy as officially promoted by the NED and USAID.

In practice however, the term "moderate" was purposely vague to shift and apply to different situations and groups depending on the needs, goals, and negotiations of elite policymakers. Foreign policy elites occasionally expressed the contradictory use of the term moderate, revealing inter-elite divisions on which Syrian groups should be included in the moderate category and what should be done to assist them. For example, Vice President Joe Biden said in October 2014, "we Americans think in every country in transition there's a Thomas Jefferson hiding behind some rock or a James Madison beyond one sand dune. The fact of the matter is the ability to identify a moderate middle in Syria was [impossible], there was no moderate middle, because the moderate middle is made up of shopkeepers, not soldiers."[454] These contradictions in words and policies were exacerbated by the US's regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Türkiye, who, for their own reasons, supported Sunni Islamist and Salafi rebels with little pretense of promoting liberal democracy. Biden spoke further that,

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[454] Biden, "Vice President Biden Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy," 52:10-53:00.

the Turks… the Saudis, the Emiratis, etcetera, what were they doing? They were so

determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did

they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons

into anyone who would fight against Assad. Except that the people who were being

supplied were al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda, and the extremist elements of Jihadis coming from

other parts of the world.[455]

The media dismissed Biden's description of Syrian intervention by the US and its

regional allies as a "gaffe," but his words expressed a real division between Biden and more

hawkish figures such as Hillary Clinton that US and allied media and civil society programs in

Syria were meant in part to manage.[456] To increase their influence over the armed opposition,

manage domestic inter-elite disagreements on Syria policy, and keep options for intervention

open, the US and UK established a consortium of government contractors who set up a

propaganda and civil society infrastructure in Syria and neighboring countries, especially the

Republic of Türkiye. This consortium was tasked with aiding rebel administrative bodies in Syria

while also controlling information in mostly rebel-held spaces to influence local, regional, and

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[455] Biden, "Vice President Biden Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy," 53:30-54:15.

[456] Aaron Blake, "Why This Joe Biden Gaffe Matters More," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/06/why-this-joe-biden-gaffe-matters-more/. During his aforementioned October 2014 Harvard speech, Joe Biden indirectly slighted Hillary Clinton without naming her, saying that "I'm finding that former administration officials as soon as they leave write books, which I think is inappropriate, but anyway [audience laughter]. No I'm serious I do think it's inappropriate, at least give the guy a chance to get out of office." Hillary, who planned to run for US President in 2016, had recently resigned as Secretary of State in February 2013 and published a memoir titled *Hard Choices* in June 2014 about her time in office where she criticized President Obama's Syria policy and advocated greater support to the Syrian opposition, which she reiterated in an interview with *The Atlantic* in August 2014. In her book and August 2014 interview, Clinton also praised US ambassador to Syria Robert S. Ford, who resigned in February 2014 over frustrations with perceived weakness in Obama's Syria policy. See Jeffrey Goldberg, "Hillary Clinton: 'Failure' to Help Syrian Rebels Led to the Rise of ISIS," *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/hillary-clinton-failure-to-help-syrian-rebels-led-to-the-rise-of-isis/375832/. Biden, who also had ambitions to run for US President, appears to refer to Clinton and perhaps Ford when, again in his October 2014 speech, he criticized "a couple former members of the administration" for wanting to give the Syrian opposition "ground-to-air launch missiles," saying the weapons would have undoubtedly ended up in the hands of extremists. See Joe Biden, "Vice President Biden Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy | Institute of Politics," 55:55-56:30.

global audiences. The work consistently demonized the Assad government, facilitated select militias' war efforts, and softened rebel public profiles to convince Syrian and Western audiences that the Western-approved rebels represented a coherent, united, secular, democratic, pluralistic, liberal, and moderate opposition ready to bring freedom and democracy to Syria. By further supporting and simultaneously moderating armed rebels and branding intervention as humanitarian, the programs attempted to satisfy both hawkish and cautious officials in the US and UK in reaching an elite consensus on Syria policy.

The consortium had the dual task of selling an idealized representation of the armed opposition to audiences abroad and improving situations on the ground to make the idealized representation closer to reality. The government contractors promoted approved groups, making them out to be more powerful and liberal than they often were, while trying to make them more powerful and liberal in reality. Simultaneously, they neutralized, appropriated, or downplayed the power of disapproved groups through sometimes hazy and tenuous methods. Ultimately, even with relatively low standards for groups worthy of support, the Western powers failed to create an armed opposition that was sufficiently "moderate" and able to militarily supplant Assad, al-Qaeda, and ISIS.

The US and UK defined "moderate" armed opposition loosely in determining who could receive aid. In practice, moderate meant essentially any militia except ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda branch in Syria that rebranded itself as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and ostensibly distanced itself from al-Qaeda in January 2017. The militias that received aid included several violent sectarian and theocratic Salafi organizations: Harakat Nur al-Din al-Zenki, Ahrar al-Sham, and Jaysh al-Islam. Western support was terminated or temporarily suspended at various times if scandals or atrocities by specific groups made the support untenable. Al-Zenki was well

known as a member of the CIA-vetted "moderate" opposition that received BGM TOW anti-tank missiles until 2015, when reports of atrocities, particularly in Aleppo City, made the public relationship unsustainable.[457] Ahrar al-Sham, sometimes referred to as the "Syrian Taliban," committed sectarian atrocities against Alawite civilians in Latakia in 2013 and kidnapped hundreds of civilians from 2012 to 2016.[458] Jaysh al-Islam developed an infamous reputation in their 2013 to 2018 administration of Eastern Ghouta, regularly using arbitrary imprisonment and torture of civilians, and putting Alawites in cages to be used as roving human shields.[459] All three groups had, at various times from 2013 onward, been allies or enemies of each other as well as al-Nusra/HTS, and all three groups received covert media, PR, and civil society assistance from UK government-funded contractors.[460]

Building Infrastructure for Administrative and Narrative Control

A key player influencing the conflict, and narratives surrounding it, was a research and conflict transformation and stabilization consultancy founded in 2011 and based in Dubai. Initially called Access Research Knowledge, the company changed its name to Analysis Research Knowledge sometime between October 2012 and January 2013, but it was often known as ARK FZC (Free Zone Company), later ARK DMCC (Dubai Multi Commodities Centre), or,

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[457] Martin Chulov, "Syrian Opposition Group That Killed Child 'Was in US-Vetted Alliance,'" *The Guardian*, July 20, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/20/syrian-opposition-group-which-killed-child-was-in-us-vetted-alliance.

[458] Guido Steinberg, "Ahrar Al-Sham: The 'Syrian Taliban,'" Comments (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, May 5, 2016), https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/ahrar-al-sham-the-syrian-taliban, 1-3.

[459] Youmna al-Dimashqi, "Syrians Describe Horrific Torture In Jails Run By Islamist Militants," *HuffPost*, March 25, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/syria-torture-army-of-islam_n_56f54d0fe4b0143a9b47fc59; MEE and Agencies, "Syrian Rebel Group Appears to Use Alawites in a Cage as Human Shields," *Middle East Eye*, November 2, 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syrian-rebel-group-appears-use-alawites-cage-human-shields.

[460] US and Western willingness to support al-Zenki, Ahrar al-Sham, and Jaysh al-Islam but not al-Nusra or ISIS was partially due to the latter two's associations with the US's primary War on Terror foe, al-Qaeda. However, it was also because the former groups, similar to the Afghan Taliban, did not have internationalist ambitions beyond establishing a theocratic state for Sunni Arab men in Syria. Al-Zenki, Ahrar al-Sham, and Jaysh al-Islam thus posed less of a risk of attacking targets in US-friendly regional countries or in the West itself, even if their extremism inside Syria was difficult to meaningfully distinguish from al-Nusra or ISIS.

most often, simply ARK.[461] Specializing in the art of public relations and the science of data

compilation and evaluation, ARK and its business partners managed data, rebel public relations,

and media narratives aimed at targeted audience demographics. Meanwhile, their agents on the

ground cultivated relationships with rebel militias, delivered key services to facilitate rebel

administrations, and provided the raw video and photo resources necessary to build consortium

narratives. All this served to influence perceptions of the Syrian War for Syrian, regional, and

global audiences.

     The US DoS likely started their media work with ARK at the same time as the UK

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). ARK's earliest mention in mainstream media is

October 2012, when *Foreign Policy* reported that the US DoS pledged $45 million to support the

Syrian opposition through their new Office of Syrian Opposition Support (OSOS), which was set

up with the assistance of a research consultancy, Pursue Ltd.[462] The UK initially dedicated £5

million to the program.[463] Pursue Ltd was directed by Alistair Harris OBE, a former UK

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[461] For the timeline of the name change, see Justin Vela, "Holding Civil Society Workshops While Syria Burns," *Foreign Policy*, December 18, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/10/holding-civil-society-workshops-while-syria-burns/; Development Alternatives Incorporated, "Syria Regional Option (SRO) Final Report" (USAID/OTI Washington, April 2013), 25 https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00k16n.pdf.
 ARK can also be traced back to 2009, when it was founded as ARK Lebanon. See Anonymous, "Ark Lebanon," https://daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory/ark-lebanon.
[462] Justin Vela, "Holding Civil Society Workshops While Syria Burns."
OSOS itself was set up by a new DoS bureau started in January 2012, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, which listed USAID as an interagency partner. The DoS MEPI program also provided $10 million in initial funds to the program (see US Department of State, "CSO: One-Year Progress Report," Situation Report (US Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, March 11, 2013), https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cso-one-year-progress-report; Greg Miller, "Syrian Activists Say Pledges of U.S. Communications Aid Are Largely Unfulfilled," *Washington Post*, August 20, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-activists-say-pledges-of-us-communications-aid-are-largely-unfulfilled/2012/08/20/14dff95a-eaf8-11e1-9ddc-340d5efb1e9c_story.html)
[463] Damien Mcelroy, "Britain and US Plan a Syrian Revolution from an Innocuous Office Block in Istanbul," *The Telegraph*, August 26, 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9500503/Britain-and-US-plan-a-Syrian-revolution-from-an-innocuous-office-block-in-Istanbul.html.
The US initially dedicated $25 million to the Syrian effort before increasing their pledge to $45 million, so the £5 million commitment by the UK may have also risen in subsequent months.

diplomat who also founded ARK.[464] The *Foreign Policy* article describes ARK as a DoS

implementing partner as well as an advisor and intermediary for the "Friends of Syria," a group

of countries favoring regime change in Syria, to transfer money to the Syrian opposition. It is

also the first mention of ARK funding and consulting the opposition media outlet Basma

(meaning fingerprint in Arabic).[465] The *Foreign Policy* article shows that the US, early in the

Syrian war, dedicated more money to Syrian media programs than their UK partner, and that not

only did the US fund ARK through the DoS, but ARK's founder Alistair Harris may have also

been instrumental in establishing OSOS in the first place. DoS spokesperson Victoria Nuland

announced that OSOS was training the opposition in August 2012, and *The Telegraph* reported

that Alistair Harris oversaw the program, thought they later edited the article to omit Harris's

name.[466]

In September 2020, hackers claiming to be the group Anonymous posted nearly 1,400

pages of UK government contractor documents online, confirming previous investigations of UK

strategic communications and exposing an extensive propaganda operation. Some documents

had been reported on by *The Guardian* and *Middle East Eye* before becoming publicly

available.[467] Later in September, Ian Cobain confirmed the hack of the UK foreign ministry, said

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[464] ARK, "ARK.international," ARK.international, accessed December 8, 2023, https://www.ark.international;
Alistair Harris, "Alistair Harris | LinkedIn," accessed December 8, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/alistair-harris-91b94371/?originalSubdomain=uk.

[465] Vela, "Holding Civil Society Workshops While Syria Burns."

[466] Mcelroy, "Britain and US Plan a Syrian Revolution from an Innocuous Office Block in Istanbul."
See Vela, "Holding Civil Society Workshops While Syria Burns," for confirmation that the Mcelroy article initially named Alistair Harris as the program overseer.

[467] Ian Cobain et al., "How Britain Funds the 'propaganda War' against Isis in Syria," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/03/how-britain-funds-the-propaganda-war-against-isis-in-syria; Ian Cobain and Alice Ross, "REVEALED: The British Government's Covert Propaganda Campaign in Syria," *Middle East Eye*, February 19, 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/revealed-british-government-covert-propaganda-campaign-syria.
Documents quoted in the Cobain articles match two documents in the leak dump (UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014, c2014). Both files and the entire leak can be downloaded from this website, although they now require a paid subscription to retrieve the files https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05

that officials were investigating it, and confirmed some of the details of the leaked documents.[468]

Yet the story went unreported in the mainstream Western press and only alternative Western

outlets like *The Grayzone* and scholars like Piers Robinson covered the leak in any detail.[469]

According to internal records of the UK's FCO, public relations firms like ARK and other

private government contractors ran a propaganda network in Syria and neighboring countries that

created and then fed stories to media outlets, some of which were established, supported, and/or

run by the contractors themselves. The documents confirm to an extent not previously known

that Western government contractors set up, funded, ran, and trained pro-opposition journalists

and media outlets in Syria to aid the opposition and justify Western intervention.

Because most leaked documents consist of biased reports made to curry favor with

government benefactors and secure contracts, one must be careful using them to determine the

real successes and failures of the programs. Yet their data and the contractors' infrastructure are

nonetheless impressive. Consortium achievements and networks encompassed over a thousand

media trainees, over a dozen radio stations, several magazines and TV stations, and relationships

with over 1,600 international journalists and people of influence to get their stories around the

world. The government contractors whose documents were leaked include ARK, The Global

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[468] Ian Cobain, "EXCLUSIVE: UK Government Probing Cyber-Attack over Syria Propaganda Leaks," *Middle East Eye*, September 28, 2020, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-uk-government-probing-cyber-attack-over-syria-propaganda-leaks.
Cobain records that, in one of the documents, a UK contractor, which Cobain leaves unnamed, distributed more than 660,000 printed items across Syria in six months. This was most likely referring to one of two ARK documents from the September 2020 leak which claimed that ARK had distributed "668,600 print products" in Syria over a six-month period. Cobain also describes a document by a contractor claiming to be in contact with 1,600 international journalists and other individuals able to influence public opinion. This most likely referred to documents by InCoStrat, which on three occasions claimed that it had close contact with a "network of over 1600 journalists" and key influencers regarding Syria.
[469] Ben Norton, "Leaked Docs Expose Massive Syria Propaganda Operation Waged by Western Govt Contractors and Media," *The Grayzone*, September 23, 2020, https://thegrayzone.com/2020/09/23/syria-leaks-uk-contractors-opposition-media/; Piers Robinson, "'Chemical Weapon Attacks and an Evil Dictator': Outsourcing Propaganda during the War in Syria," in *Journalism and Foreign Policy*, ed. Jesse Owen Hearns-Branaman and Tabe Bergman, 1st edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).

Strategy Network (TGSN), Albany Associates, Adam Smith International, and Innovative

Communication and Strategies (InCoStrat). In addition to their media production, they and other

contractors set up a civil society infrastructure including local administrative councils, courts,

police, and civil defense services.

All five organizations overlapped and occasionally collaborated in different schemes.

They also worked with over two dozen other firms, mostly based in the US, UK, and Turkey but

also Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. All firms specialized in public

relations, consultancy, data analytics, media production, monitoring and evaluation, and

equipment procurement. ARK worked particularly close with TGSN, led by former director of

global counterterrorism at the British Secret Intelligence Service (popularly known as MI6),

Richard Barret.[470] Propaganda was first organized through an ostensibly grassroots outlet called

Basma, which was developed by ARK and evolved into a multimedia platform called

Moubader.[471]

ARK and other FCO consortium partners' boastful details provide fascinating evidence.

The documents are largely undated, but by examining dates listed in documents and identifying

linked documents, most can be placed between 2013 and 2018, with some going into early 2020.

By 2015, ARK had delivered $66 million for Syria programming on behalf of international

donors.[472] ARK's team bragged about their "extensive experience managing programmes and

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[470] Chartwell Speakers, "Richard Barrett: Keynote Speaker," Chartwell Speakers, accessed November 30, 2021, https://www.chartwellspeakers.com/speaker/richard-barrett/.
[471] ARK, "PART A – METHODOLOGY," circa 2014e, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 023 GrassRoots ARK, https://ufile.io/kdf1gqxs, 1-3; ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 9.
[472] ARK, "2.1.5 Overall Approach and Methodology," circa 2014a, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 006 AJACS ARK, https://ufile.io/wd5exmu4, 4-5.

conducting research funded by many different governmental clients in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq and other conflict-affected states."[473] Their Syria programming derived from years of experience in similar operations throughout West Asia.

ARK claimed that it trained over 1,450 individuals and organizations and disbursed over 54,000 pieces of equipment by 2015.[474] Its network reached "into all of Syria's 14 governorates," including "liberated, regime- and extremist-controlled areas," and ranging from "the most senior Syrian opposition politicians, to armed groups, civil society organisations, and ordinary Syrians."[475] From 2014 to 2017, ARK lists ninety-seven stringers (freelance journalists), twenty-three photographers, forty-nine distributors, fourteen FM radio stations, eleven magazines, two TV stations, three media offices, and eight training centers.[476] Alongside their media resources, ARK lists civil society groups, including seventeen civil defense teams in Aleppo and sixteen in Idlib, sixty Syrian field researchers able to produce "broad-based population surveys," as well as "dozens of Local Councils; judicial courts; documentation centres" and "a variety of other organisations."[477]

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[473] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.14," circa 2014d, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK, https://ufile.io/5db2juq7, paragraph 1. See Appendix, Excerpt I

[474] ARK, "Part A: Methodology," circa 2015, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 011 Syria Rapid Response ARK, https://ufile.io/c97tfzhv, 1. See Appendix, Excerpt II

[475] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.13," circa 2014c, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK https://ufile.io/yckzx9a9, 1. See Appendix, Excerpt III

[476] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.13," 1; ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 6. See Appendix, Excerpts III and IV

[477] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.13," 1. See Appendix, Excerpt III
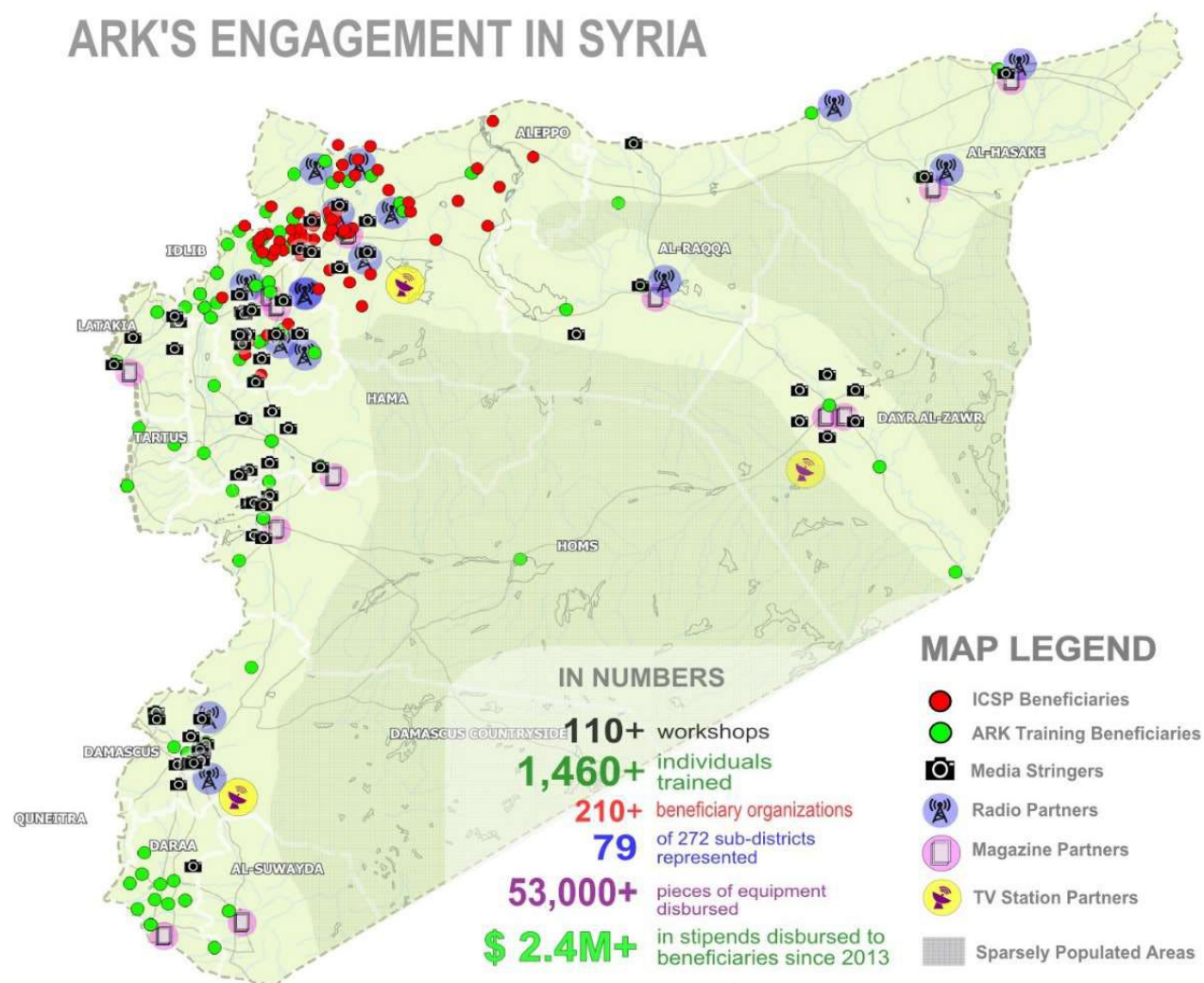
Figure 5.1. Map of Syria showcasing ARK's operations in Syria, circa 2015.[478]

As early as 2012, the consortium designed propaganda and media strategy for the Free

Syrian Army (FSA) to improve its media profile. ARK reported that extremist and pro-

government forces dominated digital media space in 2013, and ARK studied the media capacities

of extremist groups to mold the FSA's online presence and distinguish the FSA's advertised

values, behavior, and agenda to appeal to target audiences.[479] It designed and optimized websites

for the FSA and the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the FSA's command structure from 2012

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[478] ARK, "Part A: Methodology," 5.
[479] ARK, "CPG 01737 1. Methodology," circa 2013a, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 027 StratCom MAO SMC FSA ARK https://ufile.io/go452zrd, 0-2.

to 2014. ARK created "a 're-branding' of the SMC" to distinguish it "from extremist armed opposition groups and to establish the image of a functioning, inclusive, disciplined and professional military body." ARK identified "four distinct audiences for this project: the FSA/SMC; the general population inside Syria; the Syrian regime; and the international community."[480]

The consortium studied violent extremists to calibrate messaging and define the FSA for targeted audiences in ways that positively differentiated them from disfavored groups. Western agents thus demonstrated their influence in organizing, branding, and managing the Syrian opposition into something that had a façade of unity, liberal values, and effective fighting abilities. The contractors then sold this story to the FSA units, the Syrian people, Western audiences, and the governments providing the arms, training, and money.

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[480] ARK, "CPG 01737 1. Methodology," 0. See Appendix, Excerpt V

Figure 5.2. An example of ARK's "rebranding" projects for armed militias.[481]

Corroborating *The Guardian*'s 2016 reporting on Western propaganda operations in

Syria, ARK's staff identified and cultivated Syrian media spokespeople, tailoring their messages

depending on the targeted national, regional, or international audience.[482] These public relations

personnel would then be "promoted as go-to interlocutors for regional and international media."

They would "echo key messages linked to the coordinated local campaigns across all media,

with consortium platforms able to cover this messaging as well and encourage other outlets to

pick it up."[483] ARK and The Global Strategy Network (TGSN) claimed they could distribute

their messages promoting the Syrian opposition and denouncing the Syrian government through

their "well-established contacts with numerous key media organisations including Al Jazeera, Al

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[481] ARK, "CPG 01737 1. Methodology," 1.
[482] Cobain et al., "How Britain Funds the 'propaganda War' against Isis in Syria."
[483] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 2. See Appendix, Excerpt VI

Arabiya, Orient, Sky News Arabic, CNN, BBC, BBC Arabic, The Times, The Guardian, FT

[Financial Times], NYT [New York Times], Reuters and others."[484]

Satellite television was the most dominant source of news across Syria, and audiences in

opposition held areas consumed and trusted regional channels such as Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera,

and Orient the most.[485] ARK and TGSN themselves named Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, Orient, and

Sky Arabic as most trusted in their 2017 target audience analysis of media users in opposition

held areas.[486] Newspapers and especially radio were underdeveloped outside of government-

supporting outlets and government-held areas early in the war.[487] Importantly however, Idlib

Governorate, where the armed opposition had most widespread and sustained control, and where

the UK FCO consortium was most active, had established unusually high media penetration

levels by 2016.[488]

While directly running their own platforms like Basma and opposition digital media

presence, consortium members established secret partnerships with regional media and Syrian

opposition outlets already benefiting from international support. By 2017, ARK and TGSN

produced and placed more than 2,000 news reports, vox pops, documentaries, and other products

on Orient, Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, and Sky Arabic, and promised at least weekly placements on

those platforms in future projects.[489] TGSN partners included Syrian opposition media networks

like Sham News Network and Syria Media Action Revolution Team (SMART), which operated

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[484] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 5. See Appendix, Excerpt VII

[485] Jad Melki and May Farah, "Syria Audience Research," Research (Berlin: Media in Cooperation and Transition, August 2014), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ecbde016a831b2551433606/t/5efe17ae2845322eabd3371e/1593710511481/syrienstudie_20140814.pdf, 5, 13.

[486] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 8.

[487] Melki and Farah, "Syria Audience Research," 2, 4.

[488] Jad Melki, "Syria Audience Research," Research (Berlin: Media in Cooperation and Transition, 2016), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ecbde016a831b2551433606/t/5eff258e8603197f2e8c9558/1593779610890/FPU_GMDF_MiCT_audience_research_syria_2016.pdf, 41-42.

[489] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 8.

Hawa SMART radio and SMART TV, and other TV, radio, and online outlets like Halab Today

(aka Halab al-Yawm), ARTA FM, Rozana FM, Watan FM, and Radio Fresh.[490] Albany

Associates named prominent multimedia platform Enab Baladi as an intimate consortium

partner.[491] These outlets (also supported by Western media development NGOs) were some of

the most popular in Syrian opposition-held, contested, and refugee areas throughout the war.[492]

The consortium influenced regional television that anti-Assad Syrian audiences relied on for

information while also building and coordinating a wide array of anti-Assad Syrian outlets

reliant on foreign funding in rebel held spaces and neighboring countries.

In addition to their propaganda activities, the Western government contractor consortium

claimed a key role in setting up civil society administrations in Syria to compete with Syrian

state services. The most expensive of these were local administrative councils and the Free

Syrian Police (FSP). Together these entities received the equivalent of at least one billion US

dollars, mostly from the US and UK but also Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark.[493] The UK

FCO funded the FSP through a government contractor, Adam Smith International (ASI), while

the US DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs worked through another contractor, Creative

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[490] TGSN, "Sections 1.5-1.6 PROCESSES," circa 2020, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 028 Other FCO Files, https://ufile.io/pgzo4kya, 4. See Appendix, Excerpt VIII

[491] Albany Associates, "Part A – Methodology," circa 2017, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 016 MOR Resilience Albany, https://ufile.io/4ntc9ikt, 1, 6.

[492] Rima Marrouch, "Syria's Post-Uprising Media Outlets: Challenges and Opportunities in Syria," Journalist Fellows' Paper (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014), https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/syrias-post-uprising-media-outlets-challenges-and-opportunities-syria, 9, 23-24; Melki, "Syria Audience Research," 33, 42-44, 78-79; Biljana Tatomir, Enrico de Angelis, and Maryia Sadouskaya-Komlach, "Syrian Independent Exile Media," Briefing Paper (Copenhagen: International Media Support, November 2020), https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/evidence/8147/, 34, 36-38.

[493] Frances Z. Brown, "Dilemmas of Stabilization Assistance: The Case of Syria" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 26, 2018), https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/26/dilemmas-of-stabilization-assistance-case-of-syria-pub-77574; Robert S. Ford, "Syria: Which Way Forward?" *Middle East Institute*, February 7, 2018, https://www.mei.edu/publications/syria-which-way-forward-testimony-amb-robert-s-ford.

Associates International (CAI), a key contracting partner of USAID.[494] The FSP became known

for widespread corruption and aiding extremist groups like al-Zenki and HTS.[495] The

organization unceremoniously dissolved in January 2019 after HTS took almost total control of

the last rebel-held enclave in Idlib.[496]

In 2012, however, ARK gave birth to another key player with an intimate role on Syrian

soil that served as the bridge between the propaganda and civil society operations. This was

Syria Civil Defence (British spelling), popularly known as the White Helmets.[497] The White

Helmets sold themselves as nonpartisan, grassroots, search and rescue teams in rebel held Syrian

territory, who would run into warzones to save lives and record the horrors inflicted by the Assad

regime and its allies.

James Le Mesurier, a former British military intelligence officer and private security

contractor for the United Arab Emirates, joined ARK in 2011 as its director of strategy. He

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[494] In Response to my FOIA request, USAID officials denied having any ongoing or previous programming partnerships with the Free Syrian Police, Aleppo Free Police, Idlib Free Police, or the UK government contractors described in this chapter, including ARK. However, in the same FOIA request, USAID also denied having any ongoing or previous programming partnerships with James Le Mesurier but stated that they did have partnerships with Syria Civil Defence and Mayday Rescue Foundation, two organizations that James Le Mesurier founded and actively administered during the Syrian War. This suggests both that USAID may have had an indirect relationship with Le Mesurier through Le Mesurier's NGOs, and that USAID will admit to relationships in FOIA requests only if the relationship between USAID and the second party is or was direct. This inference is backed up by the fact that USAID denied any relationship with ARK in my FOIA request, but they did fund ARK through their contractor, Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI). Public records show that DAI subcontracted part of their USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) Syria programming out to ARK in January 2013. This inference combined with the fact that CAI is historically a contractor for USAID leads me to suspect that USAID may have funded the FSP indirectly through CAI, and did not feel the need to disclose any indirect relationship with the FSP as a result. The same seems to hold true with their indirect funding of ARK through DAI. I am awaiting response to a new FOIA request regarding USAID's programs with CAI and DAI in the Syrian Civil War.

[495] Hannah O'Grady, dir., "Jihadis You Pay For," Digital, *Panorama* (BBC One, December 4, 2017), https://vimeo.com/662187605; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Review of the Monitoring Systems of Three Projects in Syria, AJACS, White Helmets and NLA," IOB Evaluation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), August 2018), https://www.dutchnews.nl/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Review_of_the_monitoring_systems_of_three_projects_in_Syria.pdf, 11, 31, 37.

[496] Harun al-Aswad, "Syrian Free Police Disband Following HTS Militant Takeover in Idlib," *Middle East Eye*, January 16, 2019, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syrian-free-police-disband-following-hts-militant-takeover-idlib.

[497] ARK International, "Developing Civil Defence Capabilities," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ark.international/impact/develop-civil-defence-capabilities.

organized the initial civil defense teams from a Turkish base.[498] In 2013, he started the non-profit

Mayday Rescue Foundation in Dubai, the location of ARK's headquarters, which later moved to

the Netherlands. Le Mesurier's non-profit delivered foreign training, supplies, and funding to the

White Helmets. By 2021, the White Helmets received approximately €100 million from the UK,

Germany, Holland, and Denmark, $54.7 million from USAID, and several million dollars more

from Japan, Canada, and Qatar.[499]

The White Helmets brought the international consortium's dual purpose together in one

organization. The group received training and equipment to provide search and rescue, medical,

fire suppression, and post-battle cleanup services. The White Helmets simultaneously received

training and equipment to film group members and other Western-funded civil society

organizations doing those services, thus creating footage for consortium "media products" that

emphasized the atrocities of the Assad regime and the liberal values of the rebellion. The White

Helmets combined media activities with civil society work that was easy to sell to target

audiences as purely humanitarian and locally derived.

The White Helmets became a central player in Western and Syrian rebel efforts to incite

Western intervention through atrocity propaganda, particularly regarding controversies around

alleged chemical attacks after President Obama made chemical weapons his Weapons of Mass

Destruction "red line" for intervening against Assad in August 2012. ARK was instrumental in

spreading the first chemical weapons attack controversy. On December 23, 2012, Syrian

opposition groups accused the Syrian government of carrying out a chemical weapons attack in

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[498] Jonathan Gornall, "Newsmaker: The White Helmets," *The National*, September 29, 2016, https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts/newsmaker-the-white-helmets-1.220873.

[499] Ana van Es and Anneke Stoffelen, "Kaag wilde Kamer informeren over fraudemelding bij stichting, ambtenaren hielden brief tegen," *de Volkskrant*, May 7, 2021, sec. Topverhalen vandaag, https://www.volkskrant.nl/gs-bbe21e3c; Syria Civil Defence, "Our Partners," May 2019, Accessed April 20, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20190511204754/https://syriacivildefense.org/our-partners

Homs, which ARK's outlet Basma reported on.[500] The Obama administration immediately

voiced skepticism that chemical weapons had been used in the Homs attack. Still, a state

department cable, leaked to the press in January 2013 shortly after Obama's rebuke, explained

that ARK, Basma, and three unnamed ARK contacts in Syria had investigated and reported to

the US consulate in Istanbul that the Syrian military likely used chemical weapons, probably

"Agent 15," in Homs.[501] Arms expert Jeffrey Lewis lambasted this narrative, writing in *Foreign

Policy* that Agent 15 did not even exist. Agent 15 was one of the dubious UK intelligence claims

concocted to demonize Saddam Hussein between 1998 and 2002. As ARK was a known DoS

partner creating anti-Assad propaganda through Basma, Lewis concluded that the leak, and

possibly the cable itself, was probably produced by one or more dissatisfied US officials trying

to appeal Obama's decision by having "a U.S.-funded propaganda group 'confirm' claims by

Syrian opposition" first to the DoS and then to the press when Obama failed to express the

desired response.[502]

The White Helmets are perhaps most famously implicated in a scandal involving the

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The scandal concerns an

alleged April 2018 chemical weapons attack in rebel-held Douma, during which one or more

White Helmet members helped create a staged hospital scene of supposed chemical attack

victims.[503] Documents leaked to Wikileaks and OPCW whistleblowers involved in the Douma

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[500] Josh Rogin, "Secret Syria Chemical Weapons Cable Revealed," *Foreign Policy*, January 22, 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/22/secret-syria-chemical-weapons-cable-revealed/.

[501] Josh Rogin, "Secret Syria Chemical Weapons Cable Revealed."

[502] Jeffrey Lewis, "Buzz Bomb," *Foreign Policy*, January 25, 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/25/buzz-bomb/.

[503] Robert Fisk, "Opinion: The Evidence We Were Never Meant to See about the Douma 'Gas' Attack," *The Independent*, May 23, 2019, sec. Voices, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/douma-syria-opcw-chemical-weapons-chlorine-gas-video-conspiracy-theory-russia-a8927116.html; Riam Dalati [@Dalatrm], "After Almost 6 Months of Investigations, i Can Prove without a Doubt That the #Douma Hospital Scene Was Staged. No Fatalities Occurred in the Hospital. All the #WH, Activists and People i Spoke to Are Either in #Idlib or #EuphratesShield

investigation allege that the OPCW malignly influenced reports to post-hoc justify Western airstrikes.[504] Like Western journalists, the OPCW could not access rebel-held Syria after May 2014 because of dangers to their researchers, so on several occasions, they abandoned their strict chain of custody rules to outsource groundwork to the White Helmets.[505] The access to rebel-held spaces that the contractors enjoyed, combined with the lack of access for others, gave the consortium and their militia, media, and civil society allies profound control over internationally significant information, narratives, and atrocity evidence coming out of the warzones.

ARK ran social media accounts for the White Helmets, whose prolific rescue and service videos addressed what ARK identified as the digital media disadvantage for the FSA versus extremist groups. Through Twitter (now called X), ARK began collaborating with The Syria Campaign (TSC), an oil-industry-connected British lobbying and public relations NGO started in 2013.[506] ARK credited TSC's social media presence with getting the White Helmets "a number of international TV features and articles."[507] In 2014, TSC selected the White Helmets "to front its campaign to keep Syria in the news."[508] Western support for civil society and media groups like the White Helmets was public knowledge, if only vaguely, but the leaked UK FCO documents show that its activities were fully integrated into a US-UK-managed hybrid warfare scheme.

Areas. Only One Person Was in #Damascus.," Tweet, *Twitter*, February 13, 2019, https://twitter.com/Dalatrm/status/1095677403198906369.

[504] Aaron Maté, "Did Trump Bomb Syria on False Grounds?," *The Nation*, July 24, 2020, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/opcw-leaks-syria/.

[505] Aaron Maté, "Chain of Corruption: How the White Helmets Compromised OPCW Investigations in Syria," *The Grayzone*, September 9, 2022, https://thegrayzone.com/2022/09/09/syrian-white-helmets-opcw/.

[506] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.5," circa 2014b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK, https://ufile.io/hhdnezl4, 1, See Appendix, Excerpt IX; Ben Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs: Propaganda Agents Behind The White Helmets (2016) Documentary and Media Imperialism in the Syrian Civil War," *The Projector* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2022), https://www.theprojectorjournal.com/save-the-children.

[507] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.5," 1. See Appendix, Excerpt IX

[508] ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.5," 1. See Appendix, Excerpt IX
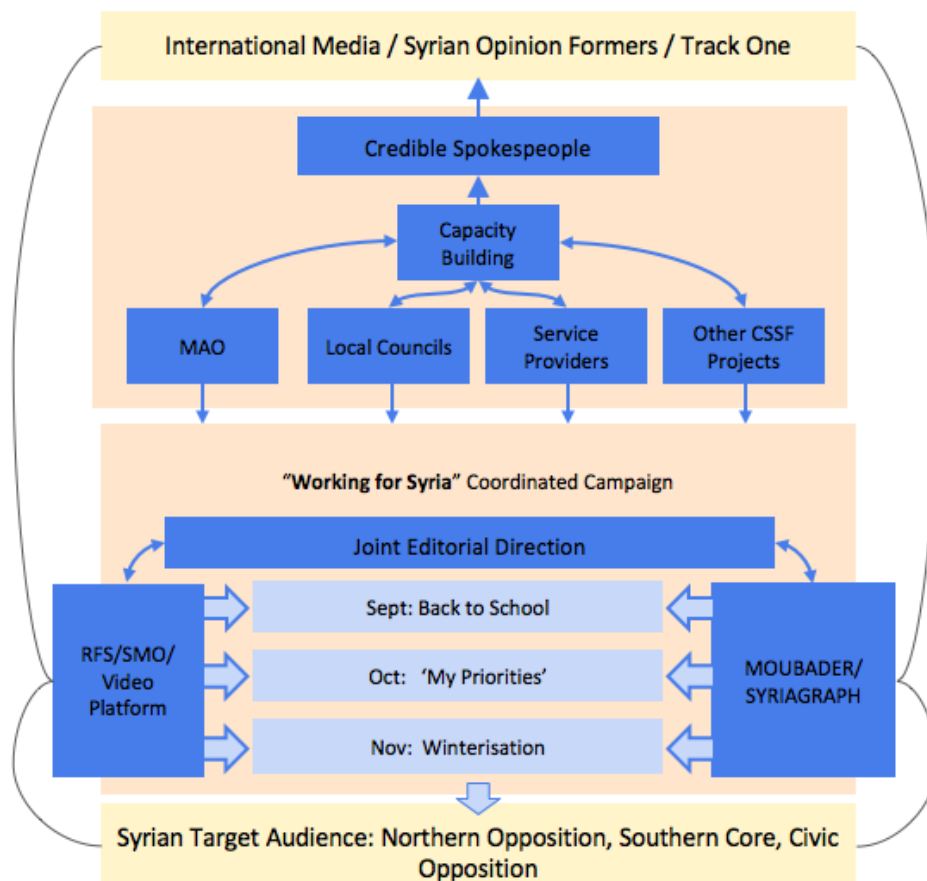
Figure 5.3. ARK "Project Schematic" illustrating the link between civil society and propaganda programs. The events from September to November were planned by ARK to both provide governance and turn their services into pro-rebel, anti-regime propaganda.[509]

USAID and the NED's Role in the Consortium

USAID shows up dozens of times in the UK leaked documents, but only in the context of current or past work engaged in by UK government contractors in Syria or the resumes of personnel working for the contractors. USAID was a major funder of civil society programs in Syria, namely the White Helmets, but it is difficult to establish its involvement beyond funding. USAID started funding Syrian civil society groups via the contractor Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI) as early as July 25, 2012, through USAID-DAI's Tunisia Transition

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[509] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 3.

Initiative.[510] Through the initiative, DAI subcontracted ARK at least once as early as January

2013.[511] USAID gave $54.7 million to Syria Civil Defence from 2013 to October 2020, when it

ended its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) Syria Regional Program.[512] USAID announced a

further $30 million cooperative agreement with the White Helmets in response to the February

2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquake.[513] At the end of March 2023, USAID announced it would

partner with a Qatari development agency to continue funding the White Helmets.[514]

By 2022, the US government, largely through USAID, spent a total of $14.1 billion on

humanitarian assistance for Syria and Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, and $1.3 billion

on "stabilization assistance" involving municipal services, education, economic development,

and capacity building programs like those detailed in the leaked UK documents.[515] Robert S.

Ford, the US ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014, reported in February 2018 that the US had

spent $3 to $4 billion on military operations in Syria between 2014 and 2017; it is unclear if that

figure includes money spent on the covert Operation Timber Sycamore.[516]

USAID spent a large amount of money on programs in Syria, including civil society

initiatives such as the White Helmets, but there is little public information on USAID's media

programs. Media development scholar Wazhmah Osman describes a similar lack of information

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[510] Development Alternatives Incorporated, "Syria Regional Option (SRO) Final Report" (USAID/OTI Washington, April 2013), https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00k16n.pdf, 1.
Tunisia was famously where the Arab Spring initially began, and was the only uprising that resulted in a transition to constitutional democratic governance until the rise of a semi-constitutional dictatorship in July 2021.
[511] Development Alternatives Incorporated, "Syria Regional Option (SRO) Final Report," 25.
[512] "Syria | Stabilization and Transitions," U.S. Agency for International Development, October 31, 2022, https://www.usaid.gov/stabilization-and-transitions/closed-programs/syria.
[513] "Fiscal Year 2023 Agency Financial Report," Annual Report (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2023), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/USAID_2023AFR_508.pdf, 28.
[514] "Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Cooperate to Support the White Helmets in Northwest Syria. | Syria | Press Release," U.S. Agency for International Development, March 28, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/syria/press-releases/mar-28-2023-qatar-fund-development-qffd-and-united-states-agency-international-development-usaid-cooperate-support-white-helmets-northwest-syria.
[515] USAID, "Syria," Country Profile (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2022), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/USAID_Syria_Country_Profile_2022.pdf.
[516] Ford, "Syria: Which Way Forward?"

in her field work on media in US-occupied Afghanistan. She writes that, despite multiple queries in numerous interviews and email correspondences from 2009 to 2010, USAID officials in Kabul refused to say if or how media networks and organizations received funding and that Afghan media station owners and managers also withheld such information.[517] Osman concluded that, due in part to both donor and recipient fears that audiences would view them as engaging in propaganda on behalf of the donor nation, there was likely an agreement between USAID, the DoD, the DoS, and their Afghan media partners not to disclose or release media development funding information.[518] Rima Marrouch, in her 2014 report on opposition media development in Syria during the civil war, also describes a lack of transparency about specific sources and conditions of funding among international-donor-funded radio stations established during the war.[519] The leaked UK documents confirm that the UK enforced secrecy among its contractors in Syria through non-disclosure agreements. Thus, it seems reasonable to believe that a similar understanding for comparable reasons exists among USAID and its partners regarding US funding of media in Syria, especially given the covert nature of US involvement there.

There is also a lack of strong documentation concerning NED funding to media during the Syrian conflict. What the NED did in Syria was minor relative to the extent of the broader Western intervention. This is appropriate since a kinetic war is quite different than the protest movements and electoral disputes the NED normally fosters against adversaries of the US. However, it is worth discussing what is known about NED programming in Syria in the context of the media imperialism operations conducted during the conflict. Publicly accessible records go back only to 2016, the last year of intense fighting, when the rebels had a substantial chance

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[517] Wazhmah Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 99-100.
[518] Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars*, 100.
[519] Marrouch, "Syria's Post-Uprising Media Outlets," 25-26.

of winning. Earlier NED programs were likely more significant, but the grants since 2016 help

clarify the NED's minor role in the broader operation.

Between 2016 and 2021, the NED spent $5,155,623 on sixty-seven Syria-focused

program grants.[520] The largest recipient of NED money in Syria is the International Republican

Institute, which Maura Connelly's 2009 cable mentions as a recipient of substantial US funding.

The IRI received $1,725,000 in four US grants between 2016 and 2021. A 2016 grant was

designed to establish "Schools of Politics" on political party and movement building with a focus

on youth and women. A 2018 grant of $500,000 was to build the capacity of opposition

leadership to develop, articulate, and implement policy. The 2018 funding was also supposed to

create a unified structure to connect local and national opposition leadership bodies, which may

have meant connecting municipal councils with FSA or government-in-exile structures. IRI's

2020 grant of $250,000 and its 2021 grant worth $500,000 went to help opposition civil society

programs represent Syrian citizens and bring them into the constitutional process, though it is

unclear if the constitutional process is one developed by opposition groups or the Syrian

government's constitutional processes that included May 2021 elections for president.[521]

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[520] The 67 grants listed only have vague descriptions offering general goals the money will be put toward, and all except four in 2021 do not even list the organizations that received the grant. However, there is a limited workaround. When one types characters into the "Organization Name" search bar in the NED's grants database for 2016 to 2020, the search bar starts to automatically fill with potential organizations that match what is typed. When entering "Enab Baladi," thusly, "Enab Baladi (Uzüm Dali Dernegi)" appears and finds four Syrian grants, each under the project title "strengthening independent media," including $44,800 in 2016, $45,400 in 2017, $45,700 in 2018, and $98,000 in 2019. Some specific organizations can be established this way if one knows what to search for.

[521] National Endowment for Democracy, "Awarded Grants Search," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/themes/ned/search/grant-search.php?organizationName=international+republican+Institute&region=&projectCountry=Syria&amount=&fromDate=&toDate=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&search=&maxCount=100&orderBy=Year&sbmt=1; National Endowment for Democracy, "Syria 2021," February 14, 2022, https://www.ned.org/region/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria-2021/.

A distant second for NED funding was the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), which received $848,480 between 2016 and 2017. Focusing on Syrian youth, the grants were meant to foster education that would increase public support for "market-based democracy" and highlight "market-oriented solutions" to Syria's development problems. CIPE provided technical assistance to an unspecified Syrian partner to coordinate private-sector stakeholders and improve development and education initiatives.[522] The grants imply that CIPE was trying to establish or support a kind of Syrian chamber of commerce and engage in small-scale economic development.

In third place for NED funding was the National Democratic Institute (NDI) which received $520,000 between 2016 and 2020. The NDI conducted focus groups, public opinion polling, and policy forums for the benefit of opposition leaders, organizations, and councils. The NDI also led a youth political academy on political leadership and party development, and it assisted civil society groups to engage in international peace talks with a "mapping exercise" and a series of consultations.[523] In February 2017, longtime NDI president Kenneth Wollack testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that NDI had over two dozen governance advisors in Syria who carried out thousands of consultations and training sessions for over 500 local council

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[522] National Endowment for Democracy, "Awarded Grants Search," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/themes/ned/search/grant-search.php?organizationName=center+for+international+Private+Enterprise+%28cipe%29&region=&projectCountry=Syria&amount=&fromDate=&toDate=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&search=&maxCount=100&orderBy=Year&sbmt=1.

[523] National Endowment for Democracy, "Awarded Grants Search," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/themes/ned/search/grant-search.php?organizationName=national+democratic+Institute+For+International+Affairs&region=&projectCountry=Syria&amount=&fromDate=&toDate=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&search=&maxCount=100&orderBy=Year&start=1&sbmt=1.

members and 7000 civil society activists in 34 locations. Wollack, a former legislative director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) who, in the 1980s, founded and co-edited a DC newsletter with another AIPAC lobbyist called the *Middle East Policy Survey*, argued that the councils and civil society groups represented a "powerful model for the country's future."[524]

A notable name from the NED public list of Syria grants is Enab Baladi, the multimedia platform identified as an intimate consortium partner by Albany Associates. Enab Baladi received $355,400 between 2016 and 2021, but the grant descriptions do not specify that Enab Baladi would do anything beyond its normal functions to provide "an alternative to state-controlled and sectarian media."[525] Given previously cited media development studies that discussed Syrian opposition media's reliance on international donors, this may indicate that the NED funded Enab Baladi simply to ensure its continued survival. The NED seems to have had a similar relationship with Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, a media outlet founded in ISIS-held Raqqa, which received $92,800 across three grants awarded between 2018 and 2020. Beyond one grant that specified a series of half-day workshops on alternative media, counter-

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[524] United States Senate, "Democracy and Human Rights: The Case for U.S. Leadership" (Washington, D.C, February 16, 2017), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg40671/html/CHRG-115shrg40671.htm; Paul Taylor, "Two Newest Scoop Artists Enjoy Daily Double of U.S. Journalism," *Washington Post*, March 6, 1982, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/03/06/two-newest-scoop-artists-enjoy-daily-double-of-us-journalism/504437f4-e6e0-495a-89d9-7f43b492c552/.

[525] National Endowment for Democracy, "Awarded Grants Search," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/themes/ned/search/grant-search.php?organizationName=enab+baladi+%28Uz%C3%BCm+Dali+Dernegi%29&region=&projectCountry=Syria&amount=&fromDate=&toDate=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&search=&maxCount=100&orderBy=Year&start=1&sbmt=1; National Endowment for Democracy, "Syria 2021."

extremism, and women's issues, the grants simply explain that the outlet was to continue its reporting in the Raqqa governorate.[526]

Based on information currently available, the NED seems to have provided minor media and civil society support to the Syrian opposition in line with the programs of the US-UK-led consortium. NED grants reinforced the consortium's efforts to maintain and professionalize opposition media, encourage moderate branding of the opposition, appeal to youth, women, and minorities, counter ISIS propaganda, support opposition municipal councils, use polling and focus group data to refine media and civil society efforts, and unite groups into a coherent and effective opposition. The only standout aspect of the NED programming in Syria is the clear neoliberal agenda expressed in its grants to CIPE, indicating the NED's continued equation of democracy and capitalism.

The leadership of the NED and its core grantees were certainly hawkish on Syrian intervention. In a May 2012 speech at New York University, as the violence in Syria was escalating into a full-scale war, NED president Carl Gershman criticized the Obama administration for showing a weak response to the Syrian crisis. While Obama had sent UN monitors to observe and prevent violence, Gershman called on the US to set up "safe havens" in cities such as Homs, Hama, and Idlib, and safe passages to help the opposition move around Syria and between neighboring countries. Gershman argued that, to avoid a years-long, regionally destabilizing, sectarian civil war, the US needed to lead with sanctions and military

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[526] National Endowment for Democracy, "Awarded Grants Search," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/themes/ned/search/grant-search.php?organizationName=raqqa+Is+Being+Slaughtered+Silently&region=&projectCountry=Syria&amount=&fromDate=&toDate=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&projectFocus%5B%5D=&search=&maxCount=100&orderBy=Year&sbmt=1.

steps to remove Assad and create a political transition process, but he did not detail how much

US airpower, sea power, and troops on the ground would be necessary to achieve that vision.[527]

The IRI's John McCain was one of the most influential figures in Washington promoting

US regime change intervention. McCain, who held a seat on the Senate Armed Services

Committee and served as committee chair from 2015 to 2018, was a proponent of arming rebels

and using the US military to overthrow Assad. McCain secretly travelled to Syria in May 2013,

becoming the highest-ranking American to enter Syria during the war. There he met with Salim

Idris, chief of the FSA's Supreme Military Council and other FSA leaders from across Syria.[528]

His trip caused a minor scandal when a Lebanese newspaper reported that one of the rebels in a

photo op with McCain, Mohammad Nour of the Northern Storm Brigade, had led the kidnapping

of eleven Lebanese Shiite pilgrims in Syria.[529] In 2017, McCain made another secret trip to

Syria, this time to visit US troops and Kurdish allies occupying the northeast.[530]

Being an influential senator, McCaine was able to draw media attention with

unannounced warzone visits and consistent televised speeches, but NDI chair Madeleine

Albright was also a consistent, if less headline grabbing, supporter of US military intervention in

Syria. Albright urged congress to authorize military intervention as early as September 2013 in

response to alleged chemical weapons attacks.[531] In November 2016, Albright led a bipartisan

task force organized by the Atlantic Council. Its report called on the US to increase its covert

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[527] Carl Gershman, "The Arab Revolts: A Fourth Wave or an Ebbing Tide?," uploaded May 15, 2012, YouTube Video, 1:01:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=632JJoPOWS0, 42:30-44:00.

[528] Suzanne Gamboa, "Sen. McCain Slips into Syria, Meets with Rebels," *USA Today*, May 27, 2013, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/05/27/mccain-syria/2363911/.

[529] Erika Solomon, "U.S. Senator McCain Pictured with Syrian Rebel Kidnapper: Paper," *Reuters*, May 30, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE94T0V3/.

[530] Dion Nissenbaum, "John McCain Makes Secret Trip to Syria in Midst of U.S. Assessment," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2017, sec. World, https://www.wsj.com/articles/mccain-makes-secret-trip-to-syria-in-midst-of-u-s-assessment-1487795458.

[531] "Statement by Madeleine K. Albright on Syria," Albright Stonebridge Group, September 6, 2013, https://www.albrightstonebridge.com/news/statement-madeleine-k-albright-syria.

operations and support for opposition groups, use its military power to enforce "safe zones" (protected by US forces from air and ground attacks), and prevent the Syrian government from retaking East Aleppo.[532]

My overview of a few prominent documents from the September 2020 UK FCO leak demonstrates a robust US-UK enterprise to affect perceptions abroad and influence realities on the ground in Syria. These two points, plus the consortium's willingness to collaborate with forces that are anything but moderate and liberal, corroborate both the pre-civil war history of US intervention in Syria and West Asia as well as research and reporting already released about the Syrian Civil War. Though many details are missing from the public record, my brief summary of USAID and NED grants to Syrian opposition groups, along with the efforts of leaders in the NED and its core grantees to promote greater US intervention, demonstrates important points about US democracy promotion in the Syrian War.

First, it shows that the NED and especially USAID continue to play prominent media and civil society support roles vis-à-vis the covert, deep political interventions of the CIA and other US national security state players. Second, the NED and USAID, like the more well-documented UK FCO-funded consortium, used a network of contractors and consultancies as intermediaries to create deflective source propaganda and "official sources" that influenced what media sources were available and encouraged for target Syrian and international audiences. To better connect NED- and USAID-style democracy promotion with the US and UK's strategies, dubious

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[532] Madeleine K. Albright and Stephen J. Hadley, "Middle East Strategy Taskforce: Final Report of the Co-Chairs" (The Atlantic Council, November 2016), https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/MEST_Final_Report_web_1130.pdf, 57, 64-66.
Senior advisors for this report included the billionaire Petrofac CEO Ayman Asfari, founder of The Syria Campaign, then-IRI president Mark Green, and then-NDI president Kenneth Wollack.

partnerships, and violence in Syria, the last two sections of this chapter zoom in on how the US-

UK media and civil society consortium played out in two key Syrian battlegrounds.

Aleppo: Using Moderate Syrian Faces to Pre-justify Intervention

Aleppo City, during the 2012 to 2016 battle, was perhaps the most strategic space for

controlling the flow of information for the consortium and its allies. International media relied on

Syrian journalists and activists, who needed to maintain cordial relationships with armed Jihadist

groups to operate safely and obtain information on the ground.[533] Syrian journalists and activists

in-turn relied on international media entities to get their images, videos, and stories to a broader

public, creating mutually dependent relationships beyond the Western funding and training that

Syrian media outlets needed to function.[534] As Johannes Scherling argues, this interdependence

contributed to an environment in which selective reporting that whitewashed rebel forces and

demonized Syrian government forces dominated Western mainstream media.[535] Because of the

battle's importance, ARK and other Western contractors had their greatest concentration of

media stringers and partner governance bodies in and around Aleppo City, and they were

particularly active in promoting foreign intervention in 2016 as the battle tipped decisively in

Assad's favor.

To add authenticity to the media about Aleppo produced by the consortium and its

partners, Western powers made extensive use of local collaborators. Sarah Le Mesurier was the

UK program manager of ARK in charge of "overall project coordination" and the second wife of

White Helmets and Mayday Rescue founder James Le Mesurier. She sought to ensure that

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[533] Patrick Cockburn, "Who Supplies the News?," *London Review of Books*, February 2, 2017, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n03/patrick-cockburn/who-supplies-the-news.

[534] Nina Grønlykke Mollerup and Mette Mortensen, "Proximity and Distance in the Mediation of Suffering: Local Photographers in War-Torn Aleppo and the International Media Circuit," *Journalism* 21, no. 6 (June 1, 2020): 729–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918793054.

[535] Johannes Scherling, "A Tale of Two Cities: A Comparative Study of Media Narratives of the Battles for Aleppo and Mosul," *Media, War & Conflict* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 191–220, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219870224.

"content development, production, and distribution maximise message impact, particularly through innovative and extended distribution methods, and that this is then measured and assessed effectively." Her parallel task was to transition all possible enterprises to being "Syrian-run and sustainable by the end of the project."[536] In another document, ARK bragged that its Basma "products" were "a radical departure to previous multi-million-dollar programming in Iraq and Afghanistan in that it has **raised and trained local national staff as the core element of the capability**," which "resulted in a <u>resonance of product</u>" (emphasis in original).[537]

Western governments and NGOs attempted this Syrian-faced strategy through Aleppo Media Center (AMC), an important outlet during the battle of Aleppo. AMC received funding, training, and radio infrastructure through a DC-based NGO called Syrian Expatriates Organization, the French government, and later the European Endowment for Democracy. AMC then trained its own journalists, photographers, and videographers.[538] AMC was not a grassroots project, but the more Western powers could make their outlets locally led and sustainable, the more they could achieve plausible deniability and their programs' "value for money."

In response to a FOIA request by the author, USAID confirmed its relationship with AMC. In August 2016, AMC caused a major media stir when its stringers recorded now-famous images of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh bloodied and covered in dust as he is placed in an ambulance after an airstrike in rebel-held East Aleppo; the images became a rallying cry for Western intervention in Aleppo. One of AMC's photojournalists, Mahmoud Raslan (sometimes spelled Rislan), who was also a correspondent for *Al Jazeera Mubashir*, captured the viral

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[536] ARK, "PART A – METHODOLOGY," 12. See Appendix, Excerpt X
[537] ARK, "CPG 01737 Why ARK/Accadian?," circa 2013b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 027 StratCom MAO SMC FSA ARK, https://ufile.io/k8stc4d2, 1. See Appendix, Excerpt XI
[538] Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs."

images of Omran and shared his story in several mainstream news articles on the event.[539] Raslan became embroiled in scandal, however, after it was discovered that he had praised suicide bombers on social media and posted a friendly selfie in August 2016 with two fighters of the US-armed-and-trained al-Zenki Movement who, in July 2016, filmed themselves capturing a wounded twelve-year-old Palestinian boy and sawing his head off with a knife.[540]

Mirroring ARK's strategy of portraying a moderate armed opposition as the dominant force against the Assad regime, AMC agents gave cultivated narratives to outside observers that highlighted the moderate values of the rebels. One source in Mollerup and Mortensen's research on AMC photojournalists said Aleppo was a "stronghold" of the ostensibly liberal, democratic, and secular FSA, and that the al-Qaeda (meaning al-Nusra) presence in the city consisted of only around fifty people.[541] Reports by Amnesty International, the Carter Center, and even US military officers, however, show that rebel-held East Aleppo was dominated by Salafi factions like al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and al-Zenki.[542] Even at the end of the battle, UN estimates put al-Nusra's numbers at about 1,000 fighters.[543] The misleading narrative supplied by the AMC journalist represented a wider strategy of weaponizing the aesthetics of grassroots activism and community media to sell stories of moderate rebels fighting a powerful and brutal state.

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[539] Steve Coll, "Assad's War on Aleppo," *The New Yorker*, August 28, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/05/assads-war-on-aleppo; The Syria Campaign, August 18, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/TheSyriaCampaign/photos/a.608812989210718.1073741828.607756062649744/111805 7038286308/?type=3&theater.

[540] Brad Hoff, "The Man behind the Viral 'boy in the Ambulance' Image Has Brutal Skeletons in His Own Closet," *The Canary*, August 19, 2016, https://www.thecanary.co/global/2016/08/19/the-man-behind-the-viral-boy-in-the-ambulance-image-has-brutal-skeletons-in-his-own-closet-images/.

[541] Mollerup and Mette Mortensen, "Proximity and Distance in the Mediation of Suffering," 739.

[542] Scherling, "A Tale of Two Cities"; Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs."

[543] UN News, "Eastern Aleppo May Be 'Totally Destroyed' by End of Year, Warns UN Envoy," UN News, October 6, 2016, https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/10/542082-eastern-aleppo-may-be-totally-destroyed-end-year-warns-un-envoy.

The covert consortium's own outlets also helped coordinate calls for greater foreign intervention and supported armed militias during the battle for Aleppo City. Journalist Rania Khalek reported in 2016 that popular opposition media outlet Revolutionary Forces of Syria Media Office (RFS) was funded by the British government and that RFS offered $17,000 a month for journalists to act as mouthpieces for opposition activists and militia spokespeople.[544] RFS worked with the White Helmets to use children and popular Western cultural trends like the mannequin challenge, Pokémon Go, and Marvel's Avengers to demonize the Syrian government and call for humanitarian intervention in Aleppo, gaining some viral stories covered in Western mainstream news as a result.[545] RFS even helped keep militias armed. Western governments supplied anti-tank TOW missiles to groups under the condition that they post videos on YouTube of themselves firing the weapon and hitting their target. This meant that each missile-firing video on the RFS YouTube channel, and many of the 20,000 such videos uploaded on YouTube by the summer of 2015, were posted as evidence foreign governments required to replace munitions.[546] The 2020 FCO leaks confirmed that not only was RFS funded by the British government, but that it was also directly run by MI6-connected consortium partner, The Global Strategy Network. RFS also represented the consortium's most popular media platform with over 608,000 Facebook followers.[547]

ARK, AMC, and The Syria Campaign were instrumental in producing and marketing several viral videos and documentaries featuring or starring the White Helmets in Aleppo,

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[544] Rania Khalek, "British Gov-Funded Outlet Offered Journalist $17,000 a Month to Make Propaganda for Syrian Rebels," *The Grayzone*, December 9, 2016, http://thegrayzone.com/2016/12/08/rfs-media-office-british-gov-funded-propaganda-syrian-rebels/.
[545] Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs."
[546] Stefan Tarnowski, "What Have We Been Watching? What Have We Been Watching?," Bidayyat, May 5, 2017, http://bidayyat.org/opinions_article.php?id=167.
[547] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 2, 6

including an Oscar winning 2016 documentary, *The White Helmets*.[548] The documentaries

earned the White Helmets international acclaim, two Nobel Peace Prize nominations, and

endorsements from dozens of Western celebrities and politicians. Meanwhile, TSC and the

White Helmets used their films and new acclaim to promote Western intervention to turn the tide

in Aleppo, including a US enforced no-fly zone.[549] Given that US-enforced no-fly zones of the

past thirty years in Bosnia, Iraq, and Libya ended in regime change, the no-fly zone in Syria

promoted by the White Helmets and their consortium-connected allies would have represented a

decisive intervention.

Idlib: Maintaining the Moderate Rebellion without Alienating Extremists

The FCO consortium had the most time and space to operate their civil administration

projects in Idlib, where the opposition had the most widespread and consistent control. Because

the main power in Idlib since at least 2015 was al-Nusra, and because Western strategies in Syria

after 2013 sought to counter both ISIS and Assad, the consortium had an ambiguous relationship

with non-ISIS, so-called extremist elements. From at least 2014 to 2017, consortium

programming was tasked by the UK government to be explicitly hostile to ISIS but only

"indirectly" counter al-Nusra and its successor, HTS.[550] In practice, this meant promoting

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[548] Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs."
[549] Thomason, "Save the Children, Launch the Bombs."
[550] UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO THE SYRIAN MODERATE ARMED OPPOSITION – STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT," November 2014, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 024 StratCom MAO SOR, https://ufile.io/onuqevv9, 3, See Appendix, Excerpt XII; ARK, "1.1.4 Approach, Methodology, Proposed Milestones and Timeline," circa 2017a, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I Complete FCO.rar. Folder 014 CSSF PeaceBuilding ARK, https://ufile.io/fsmn78rx, 4, See Appendix, Excerpt XIII; UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT SYRIAN MODERATE OPPOSITION RESILIENCE (MOR) STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT," July 2017, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 015 MOR Resilience SOR, https://ufile.io/5n2sbiaf, 2. See Appendix, Excerpt XIV

ostensibly moderate liberal democratic values and groups but not openly opposing non-ISIS extremist, sectarian, theocratic values and groups. Western contractor papers and media that endorsed certain groups, services, or events had an uncanny ability to turn anything in the moderate to extremist gray zone into moderate opposition.

Idlib City was one of the few provincial capitals to completely fall to rebel control when, in April 2015, it was taken by the al-Nusra- and Ahrar al-Sham-led Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest). In an internal document, ARK referred to that conquest as "its liberation." When the UK government requested an overview of the situation, ARK "mobilised its stringers and networks in civil society organisations, the Idlib Free Police, the Syria Civil Defence, and the political opposition to produce a rapid three-page analytical report and a verbal briefing."[551] When the Jihadists took over Idlib City, ARK's media and civil service infrastructure helped establish order and provided a narrative. Since they described this Jaish al-Fatah victory as a liberation, one can speculate they gave a more optimistic picture than was perhaps appropriate.

The FCO consortium continued working in Idlib after the Salafi conquest. Al-Nusra, rebranded as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in January 2017, had initially conquered Idlib alongside Ahrar al-Sham. However, starting January 20, 2017, HTS and its allies fought with Ahrar al-Sham and its allies; HTS emerged victorious by July 23, 2017, taking complete control of Idlib City and about 60 percent of Idlib Governorate.[552] This timeline is important, as ARK boasted in a September 2017 document that it ran the communications strategy for Idlib City Council (ICC), doubling its Facebook following and increasing average views for videos from 3,000 to 60,000 in one month, June to July, 2017.[553]

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[551] ARK, "Part A: Methodology," 3. See Appendix, Excerpt XV

[552] Al Jazeera, "Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham Take Control of Syria's Idlib," *Al Jazeera*, July 23, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/7/23/hayet-tahrir-al-sham-take-control-of-syrias-idlib.

[553] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 9. See Appendix, Excerpt XVI

ARK claimed to oppose HTS, yet the UK government called for its agents to only indirectly counter extremists by directly bolstering moderate narratives, and ARK admitted that its own "Northern Opposition" target audience "accommodates HTS."[554] In another document, ARK explicitly said it would not directly criticize HTS or groups linked to HTS for fear of backlash from HTS or local populations.[555]

ARK did not mention relocating after the HTS victory, or anything about rebel infighting, despite these developments happening during the time of its own projects. ARK vaguely notes the "recent shrinking" of the Turkish-backed "FSA's overt presence" in Idlib, which by 2017 seemed to include Salafi groups like Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.[556] This implies that, while the money streams lasted, ARK and its partners kept making moderate rebel propaganda regardless of who was in charge of the area. Consortium partners claimed to promote only moderate factions, but "moderate opposition" was a nebulous concept they defined and shifted as needed. Even if a truly moderate opposition had no real power on the ground, the *idea* of a moderate opposition could be kept alive as long as international entities had media production capabilities and paid collaborators communicating the right messages.

The consortium had a similar ambiguous and indirect approach to women's and minority issues. Describing the southern front, ARK noted "a requirement to promote democratic values

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[554] UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT SYRIAN MODERATE OPPOSITION RESILIENCE (MOR) STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT," 2; ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 1

[555] ARK, "1.3.2 Conflict Sensitivity (untitled)," circa 2017d, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/1gzu1gjv, paragraph 3. See Appendix, Excerpt XVII

[556] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 10, See Appendix, Excerpt XVIII; Albany Associates, "Part A – Methodology," 4.
The document by Albany Associates is dated March 2020, but the text suggests it was actually written in 2017. The latest date mentioned is December 2016, and it discusses supporting the opposition in Ghouta and the Southern Front alliance, both of which were defeated in 2018.

and the participation of women and minorities to counter prevailing attitudes that have become extremist in all but name."[557] Yet ARK would not directly challenge those attitudes, writing,

> The consortium is extremely aware of the risks of promoting women's participation beyond currently accepted social norms in Syria, given the potential to hinder message resonance or result in a backlash against female participation. The proposed project will therefore continue to subtly reframe the narrative of women, by highlighting their work and its value, and increasing the amount of coverage of their initiatives and opinions as the context allows.[558]

The consortium could maintain services as long as it did not offend local militias, so-called extremist or otherwise, but the services were also propaganda. The White Helmets and other services featuring women's bodies in places like Idlib could still become media packaged in sleek reports by groups like The Syria Campaign.[559] These would be passed along to Western journalists such as Simon Tisdall who, despite never seeing these spaces and services, would report that moderate "informal" civil initiatives offered paths to democratic solutions if only Western politicians, donors, and NGOs invested in them.[560] The Western-backed moderate opposition was too weak to directly criticize the former affiliate of al-Qaeda, promote women's equality, or safely bring Western journalists to Idlib. Yet in NGO reports and news articles, Idlib civil society appeared to be a dynamic and empowering place for women and moderate Syrians that international donors should support. The consortium created a gray physical and media

[557] ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," 3.
[558] ARK, "1.3.3 Gender (untitled)," circa 2017e, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/hashrpxr, paragraph 3.
[559] Peace Direct and The Syria Campaign, "Idlib Lives: The Untold Story of Heroes" (The Syria Campaign, May 2018), https://www.idliblives.org/report/assets/video/idlib-lives-text-only.pdf.
[560] Simon Tisdall, "Amid Syria's Horror, a New Force Emerges: The Women of Idlib," *The Guardian*, May 26, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/26/syria-idlib-women-children-society.

space where it was difficult to separate indirectly opposing from indirectly supporting HTS through the foreign maintenance of a "moderate" opposition that operated largely at the sufferance of HTS.

When necessary, the consortium had protocols to relocate operations and cut relations with any group that could threaten UK government reputation or missions. Its agents stored data on a "dark cloud" and used software called Meraki to remotely wipe phones, laptops, and hard drives if equipment fell into the wrong hands.[561] Consortium partner Albany Associates admitted to developing communication skills and strategy for Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, then boasted that their methods insulated them from risk of being wed to "groups who may or may not be at any given time viable, effective, respected in the community, or, in fact, moderate."[562] The project was necessarily opaque and reliant on plausible deniability, especially since there was little ideological or operational difference between HTS and other Salafis they supported.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that US democracy promotion institutions such as the NED and especially USAID provide instrumental ideological and organizational support to the deep political interventions of US-led capitalist imperialism. As a grant-making institution, the NED provided minor support to US pro-rebel media and civil society initiatives in Syria comparable with a plethora of other Western government-funded democracy promotion and media and civil society NGOs. The leadership of the NED and its core grantees also represented influential voices in Washington for greater intervention in Syria. USAID, however, being the institution

[561] ARK, "1.3.1 Risk (untitled)," circa 2017c, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/km1vy2o8, 2; ARK, "1.3.4 Duty of Care (untitled)," circa 2017f, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/pyxdgj6p, 2.
[562] Albany Associates, "Part A – Methodology," 4. See Appendix, Excerpt XIX

with the largest budget for democracy promotion programs in the world, provided much more substantial support to semi-covert, pro-rebel, anti-Assad media and civil society. This included direct support relationships worth tens of millions of dollars for groups such as the White Helmets, Mayday Rescue Foundation, and Aleppo Media Center, and indirect support to groups such as ARK, through partner contractors such as Development Alternatives Incorporated.

My investigation of US and UK media and civil society programs in Syria add evidence and depth to studies that examine US and UK media imperialism in Syria, which featured deflective source propaganda and "official sources" that supplied much of the raw news information to Western news outlets that had little access to rebel-held spaces. Considering the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky and its third filter, my study demonstrates that official news sources do not simply exist "out there" in the lands of government institutions, think tanks, academia, and business, waiting for journalists to ask for information. Official sources can be actively manufactured: funded, supplied, trained, focus grouped, branded, legitimated, popularized, and directed through a coordinated propaganda campaign.

This chapter contributes to scholarly understandings of US and UK media imperialism in Syria by connecting the contemporary coordinated Syria propaganda campaign to a historical pattern of US and UK imperialism in West Asia and to the methods and ideological pretexts of US democracy promotion more broadly. The US and UK have a decades-long history of weaponizing sectarian, fundamentalist, theocratic religious sentiments and groups in Muslim-majority countries to undermine their secular nationalist and socialist adversaries and to advance US and UK economic and security interests. The patterns in Syria provide additional evidence that US democracy promotion institutions also have a history of supporting and whitewashing violent, antidemocratic individuals and groups.

The US and UK combined in Syria to portray a largely clandestine, bloody, sectarian proxy war against an ally of their geopolitical adversary, Russia, as a story of a homegrown, liberal, democratic uprising against an evil dictator and as a civil war that the West largely observed from the sidelines. The rise of the "twin gods of outsourcing and consulting" in post-Cold War West Asian information warfare can be seen as a refinement of the CIA's cultural front networks of 1947 to 1967. US democracy promotion since 1983 can be understood as the bridge between Cold War and post-Cold War strategies. In this twenty-first century operation, US elites outsourced much of the CIA's former intellectual and cultural work to the NED and USAID, who further refined and obfuscated this work through an ever-shifting network of publicly unaccountable private contractors and consultancies. US involvement in Syria helps connect democracy promotion with the violence, propaganda, and deep politics of US imperialism.

This chapter lends further credence to studies that critique democracy promotion as an arm of US imperialism, and demonstrates that US democracy promotion institutions apply an exceptionist logic in world affairs similar to the broader US national security state. Syria shows that US democracy promotion is not just a mechanism for reproducing capitalist hegemony in the everyday functions of the bourgeois state and media. US democracy promotion forms part of the coercive armor that both exercises and masks lawless violence when the US governing class decides that a state of crisis and exception exists. Syria exposes the base, manipulative character of US and Western soft power when its full weight is brought to bear to eliminate a troublesome adversary without the US directly bloodying its hands. Syria is also, so far, a failure for US imperialism. The subsequent brief conclusion identifies the dissertation's case studies as

evidence of a cohesive and evolving US democracy promotion system, and considers what this

system reveals about the dialectical relations between US imperialism and US soft power.

CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to contribute a historical inventory and theoretical toolkit to analyze the elite, US art of masking violence behind façades of benevolence, humanitarianism, and democracy promotion through the powers of money, credentials, institutions, aesthetics, and narrative. It examined US democracy promotion and, specifically, its premier institutions, the NED and USAID, to understand if or how this art figures into US foreign intervention. It used historical and political economy methodologies to explore the connections between US democracy promotion and the violent and antidemocratic methods and outcomes of US foreign intervention. It combined secondary source histories of US foreign policy and democracy promotion with close reading of primary source documentation by foreign policy and democracy promotion elites and institutions as well as journalistic accounts that document each case study of US intervention to establish a transnational history of democracy promotion's roles in the exercise of US power.

The case studies covered in my chapters reveal that democracy promotion is an integral piece of a profoundly violent, antidemocratic history of US intervention since 1983. The NED and USAID since the Reagan administration have consistently subordinated ostensible commitments to democracy, nonpartisanship, transparency, and human rights to advance elite US economic, security, and geopolitical interests. USAID is an official arm of US foreign policy, making its subordination to elite foreign policy establishment interests more formal and direct. While the NED claims to be an independent nongovernmental entity, it is thoroughly integrated into an undemocratic and often publicly unaccountable revolving door of a US power elite involving military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media-academia-think-tank networks.

The NED and USAID's subordination to undemocratic elite capitalist US interests are particularly significant during times of exceptional crisis and conflict.

Taking a transnational perspective, the dissertation sought to identify concrete ways that US soft power evolved from the Cold War to the twenty-first-century digital information age, and understand how US soft power has synergized with hard power methods of US intervention abroad. My chosen evidence reveals that democracy promotion institutions and leaders are implicated in US deep politics, which involve systems and methods of politics wherein accountability and public input is consciously or unconsciously diminished. This evidence calls into question the democratic nature of democracy promotion and, indeed, the socio-economic-political system that the US embodies and seeks to spread to the rest of the globe. Since 1983, democracy promotion not only contributes to the cultural and ideological power of US foreign influence, but it also forms part of the coercive violence of US foreign intervention during exceptional moments of crisis and conflict.

Scholarly Contributions

The dissertation brought Marxist, media imperialist, and deep political scholarship into conversation through a critical history and political economy analysis of US democracy promotion. Starting with Leninist conceptions of capitalist imperialism and neocolonialism, it sought to understand how media and information industries function as a structural pillar of US intervention since World War II. Information industries in the twenty-first century represent one of the most important sectors of global capital concentration, export, trade, and warfare, making it a substantial part of what Leninist scholars describe as global, US-led, capitalist imperialism.

Critical scholars of democracy promotion tend to take a Gramscian Marxist perspective of democracy promotion, and thus see it as a method of creating capitalist cultural hegemony

through consent rather than coercion. Building on these Gramscian perspectives, the dissertation used deep political theory and history to locate the limits of hegemonic consent, and considered when, where, and how coercion operates alongside, and occasionally overrides, the normal and ostensibly consensual processes of what Gramscian scholars call bourgeois hegemony. The case studies of US democracy promotion draw on Lance deHaven-Smith's concept of State Crimes Against Democracy, wherein public officials in a nominally democratic system take concerted action or inaction to weaken or subvert popular control of their government, and Aaron Good's ideas about exceptionism, which entails the institutionalization of a logic that the interests of US elites, who identify contexts of perpetual conflict, warrant interminable exceptions to the rule of law.[563] Throughout, the case studies explore where, when, and how US democracy promotion elites and institutions apply an exceptionist logic to abrogate even restricted polyarchic principles of democracy, and thus implicate themselves in anti-democratic actions in the service of elite US economic, security, and geopolitical interests.

While deep political scholarship strengthened the analysis of the inner workings and logics of US democracy promotion and elite international statecraft, the dissertation used media imperialism theory and history to understand how communications, media organizations, and propaganda reinforce and reproduce bourgeois imperialist hegemony. Media imperialism scholarship explores the connections between media and imperialism both in their normal everyday functions as well as in exceptional episodes of economic, political, electoral, and social conflict, particularly war and foreign intervention. A framework of media imperialism scholarship especially important for my critical understanding of democracy promotion is Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model of US mainstream media political economy,

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[563] deHaven-Smith, "When Political Crimes Are Inside Jobs." 333; Good, *American Exception*,

particularly their third filter of media reliance on "official sources."[564] Oliver Boyd-Barrett's

explorations of deflective source propaganda and humanitarian and democratic media pretexts in

US foreign intervention, and Piers Robinson's concept of "information imperialism" expand on

Herman and Chomsky's third filter to highlight the production of official sources and

propaganda before they are interpreted by mainstream journalists.[565] Leninist, Gramscian, and

Marxist theories represent the dissertation's critical theoretical framework for approaching US

democracy promotion and imperialism, while media imperialism and deep political scholarship

offers tools to explain how manufacturing consent and enforcing global capitalist prerogatives

function in the American Century of 1945 to the present day.

Summary of Democracy Promotion History and Case Studies

Democracy promotion has its roots in what Frances Stonor Saunders calls the Cultural

Cold War, led by the CIA from 1947 to 1967.[566] The CIA covertly weaponized media and civil

society to create an international anti-Soviet and anti-neutralist united front of conservatives,

right wing militants, Cold War liberals, and anti-Soviet Leftists. The CIA's Cultural Cold War

contributed to the rise of neoconservatism by linking early neoconservative thinkers and activists

to US intelligence and foreign policy establishments. Covert CIA cultural programs, and the CIA

itself, suffered from public exposures in the 1960s and 1970s as economic, political, and social

crises and upheavals rocked the post-World War II establishment anticommunist consensus.

Democracy promotion through institutions such as the NED and USAID did not develop

as a result of popular democratic pressure. Instead, formal institutionalized democracy promotion

developed out of inter-elite negotiations and strategic imperial planning to allow the US to refine

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[564] Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.
[565] Boyd-Barrett, "Deflective Source Propaganda"; Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*; Robinson, "Propaganda, Manipulation, and the Exercise of Imperial Power."
[566] Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*.

its foreign influence programs beginning in the 1980s. Neoconservative individuals and

organizations, alongside influential figures in US intelligence, influenced the planning and

development of US democracy promotion, ensuring its compatibility with militaristic elite US

economic and security interests. By making funding relationships public and centering programs

around a positive mission of promoting democracy rather than a negative mission of fighting

communism, democracy promotion gave US soft power programs in foreign countries a more

benevolent, democratic, humanitarian, and progressive appearance. At the same time, democracy

promotion was tailored to each country to manage relationships with both friendly and

adversarial governments on a case-by-case basis depending on the priorities and interests of US

foreign policy.

The kind of democracy promoted by organizations such as the NED and USAID is not a

universal democracy, but a particular model of representative electoral governance developed by

US academics and foreign policy elites called polyarchy.[567] This model separates civil and

political rights from economic rights that many popular democratic movements throughout

history have insisted be part of a comprehensive democratic system. In theory and practice, the

model is less about creating more just, free, equitable, and sustainable socio-political systems,

and more about managing the democratic aspirations and movements of people around the world

to make them more compatible with the geopolitical, economic, and security imperatives of US-

led capitalist imperialism.

Two Cold War case studies of US democracy promotion aimed at unfriendly

governments occurred in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. In Nicaragua, US democracy promotion

officials and institutions gave media and civil society support to the CIA-backed, drug-

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[567] Dahl, *Polyarchy*; Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*.

trafficking Contra rebels as part of the illegal propaganda and covert warfare operation known as the Iran-Contra Affair. The democracy programs of the NED and USAID demonized the democratically elected Sandinista government, promoted aid to the Contras, and supported the US-backed Nicaraguan civil, media, and electoral opposition in Nicaragua, the US, and internationally.

In Afghanistan, the US pursued a similar CIA-backed, right-wing, narcotics-funded insurgency in the form of the Mujahideen. With no Afghan elections for US democracy promotion to focus its efforts on, the NED and USAID seized on weaponizing ostensible humanitarian concerns to build support for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and internationally. USAID infamously spent $60 million on reactionary, fundamentalist, pro-Mujahideen textbooks used in Afghan and Pakistani schools and refugee camps. NED funds and leading figures supported CIA-linked, purportedly humanitarian organizations such as the Afghanistan Relief Committee and the International Rescue Committee to create atrocity propaganda and weaponize civil society and refugees to support the Mujahideen. The case studies of Nicaragua and Afghanistan show that formal, institutionalized US democracy promotion was, from its beginnings, integrated into a national security establishment apparatus of foreign intervention and implicated in deep political and even illegal US operations to support violent, anti-democratic groups abroad.

The dissertation's post-Cold War case studies of Yugoslavia, Venezuela, Haiti, and Ukraine detailed in chapter four demonstrate that US democracy promotion grew into a more fundamental aspect of global US geostrategy after 1991. In the wake of the USSR's dissolution, neoconservative and hawkish US foreign policy elites developed a doctrine of seeking perpetual global primacy, with the promotion of democracy, conflated with neoliberal capitalism, as an

explicit pretext for exercising US power. Democracy promotion grew from a few dedicated institutions such as the NED, or offices with a democracy promotion mission within agencies such as USAID, to a multi-billion-dollar Western transnational democracy promotion industry with hundreds of dedicated democracy promotion professionals and dozens of institutions and agencies committed to democracy promotion as a top priority.

The yearly NED budget alone grew from, at most, $18 million in the 1980s to $321 million in 2022. By the early 1990s, USAID had become the primary channel for democracy assistance, and, indeed, it became the institution with the largest budget for promoting democracy abroad in the world. USAID's budget dedicated to democracy assistance programs grew from $400 million in 1994 to a requested 2024 budget of $2.8 billion for projects dedicated to foster democratic governance and counter corruption.[568] It is difficult to account for all the money dedicated to democracy promotion by the US government and US elites in the twenty-first century because the language of democracy promotion became so ubiquitous in US agencies such as the Department of State and NGOs such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace or the Ford Foundation that almost any of their programs operating abroad can be said to have democracy promotion as a key goal.

US democracy promotion in the twenty-first century continues to be associated with violent, deep political methods of intervention with undemocratic results. In each case study discussed in the dissertation, US democracy promotion institutions and their grantees created deflective source propaganda and manufactured official sources to influence media narratives about each conflict in the given country, the US, and internationally. In Serbia, following the NATO bombings, sanctions, and support for the insurgent Kosovo Liberation Army, US

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[568] USAID, "Budget Justification," U.S. Agency for International Development, April 17, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/cj.

democracy promotion abrogated principles of government independence and nonpartisanship to support regime change against the government of Slobodan Milošević and elect groups favored by Washington to the detriment of other democratic forces competing in elections. The US used strategic civil disobedience destabilization techniques developed by Cold War defense intellectual Gene Sharp that leveraged real public discontent and weaponized aesthetics of grassroots youthful democratic rebellion. The US-backed overthrow of Milošević in 2000 was hailed by US foreign policy and media elites as a success story of the "color revolution" method of regime change that the US attempted to replicate in other regions of the globe.

In Venezuela, the NED, USAID, and their grantees were profoundly involved in a bloody 2002 military coup against the democratically elected government of Hugo Chávez, who promoted a more expansive vision of popular participatory democracy, implicating them in a US and Venezuelan state crime against Venezuelan democracy. After the coup, the NED and USAID continued to support opposition forces in Venezuelan politics who engaged in violent and anti-democratic behavior against Chavista forces. US democracy promotion backed elite Venezuelan opposition factions as purportedly credible and democratic civil society, manufacturing aesthetics and narratives of grassroots, youthful, and democratic rebellion and exacerbating the already pro-opposition, anti-Chavista bias in mainstream Venezuelan and Western media.

US democracy promotion institutions again battled against a popular democratic movement and government in Haiti that included economic rights in its democratic vision. The US invested little in propaganda but made significant investments in elite sectors of Haitian civil society. In the early 2000s, a core NED grantee, the International Republican Institute, and key neoconservative staff of the W. Bush administration brazenly undermined Haiti's only popularly

elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, in contravention of officially stated US policy. IRI and Bush administration staff made prominent contributions to the second anti-democratic overthrow of Aristide in 2004 and the disintegration of Haiti's fledgling democracy. This was after US democracy promotion institutions had already, from the late-1980s to the mid-1990s, been implicated in meddling in Haitian elections to the detriment of the popular democratic Lavalas movement, undermining the first democratic administration of Jean Bertrand Aristide, and supporting the military dictatorship that overthrew Aristide in 1991.

In Ukraine, US democracy promotion institutions and the US government invested $5 billion in turning Ukrainian politics against Russia and toward integration into NATO and the Western US-led orbit. From 2004 to 2005, the US supported a non-violent, color-revolution-style protest movement organized around accusations of fraud in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections in favor of the US-backed candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. After the more Russian-friendly politician Viktor Yanukovych won the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, US democracy promotion institutions and leaders intervened in a 2013 to 2014 controversy over a Ukrainian foreign trade deal, supporting the Euromaidan protest movement against Yanukovych. Militant Ukrainian ultranationalists, fostered by the US and its Western European allies since World War II, played a key role in the escalating violence in the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv that forced Yanukovych to flee the country before the end of his democratic mandate. US media and democracy promotion leaders and institutions dubiously blamed Yanukovych for the violence and assisted in installing and whitewashing neoliberal and ultranationalist forces that took power in the wake of Yanukovych's overthrow.

The dissertation's analysis of US democracy promotion institutions, specifically the NED and USAID, as engines of intellectual warfare, which are soft power arms of US foreign

intervention with implications in US deep political and parapolitical intrigue, manipulative propaganda, and anti-democratic political violence, culminates most forcefully in Syria's 2011 civil war. USAID, the CIA, and other US and allied government agencies and NGOs engaged a multi-billion-dollar hybrid warfare campaign consisting of a combined insurgency, propaganda, economic, diplomatic, lawfare, and political warfare strategy, for regime change against the Russian-and-Iran-aligned, secular nationalist Ba'ath regime in Syria. The US and its NATO and Persian Gulf state allies funded, trained, and armed far-right, theocratic, sectarian, Sunni Arab rebels with dubious democratic credentials who committed war crimes in Syria. This strategy, led by the CIA's Operation Timber Sycamore, reflected a decades-long history of UK and US weaponization of religion against secular nationalist and socialist forces in Muslim-majority countries. US intervention in the Syrian Civil War also built on the history of deep political regime change policies by US intelligence, diplomatic, and democracy promotion institutions and leaders in Syria since World War II.

The leaked UK government and contractor documents illuminate a billion-dollar, US-and UK-led, semi-covert, multi-state deflective source propaganda and civil society program in Syria. Their scheme created media narratives for Syrian and international audiences while supporting rebel administration of territories and populations under their control to facilitate, obscure, and whitewash Western-backed Syrian rebel efforts and foreign intervention against the Syrian government. The NED played a minor media and civil society support role for the Syrian political opposition, although key leaders of the NED and its core grantees represented influential voices for greater military intervention in the conflict. USAID, however, played a substantial role in funding media and civil society initiatives of the US and NATO. The US and its allies outsourced much of their media and civil society warfare operations to a complex

network of private contractors and consultancies, repressing public knowledge and accountability of state involvement in the conflict. Zooming in on key battlegrounds of the Syrian Civil War, namely Aleppo City and Idlib province, the analysis examined US- and UK-managed deflective source and atrocity propaganda initiatives through organizations such as the White Helmets, Aleppo Media Center, and Revolutionary Forces of Syria and their influences on international media narratives about the Syrian conflict. The Syrian Civil War of 2011 to the present thus represents a significant case study for understanding US the connections among democracy promotion, deep politics, and media imperialism in the twenty-first century.

Further Considerations

On a historical and methodological level, this dissertation focuses on the structures of US foreign intervention, specifically the democracy promotion soft power brand of US intervention represented by the NED and USAID. While the dissertation's delimitations did not allow the space and time to thoroughly research and describe the key individuals involved in US democracy promotion, the NED, USAID, or the seven case studies, future studies should trace the careers of such individuals across multiple institutions and interventions. A thorough accounting of both structures and agents are necessary to gain a fuller understanding of each individual career, institution, and conflict, as well as the broader systems of US democracy promotion, US imperialism, and global capitalist imperialism.

Democracy promotion's philosophical problems, identified in this dissertation, as well as its cultural, political, and even racial supremacist assumptions, its exercises and obfuscations of violence, and its indifference toward, even idolization of, iniquitous and exploitative social relations should be explored as problems of liberalism writ large. Both promoters and critics of democracy promotion describe the ideological framework of democracy promotion as "liberal

internationalist," "neo-Tocquevillian," or simply liberal. US professionals often act as if

democracy is in their blood, as if everything they do in the world inherently promotes

democracy. Their actions and rhetoric share a colonizing character with Western forebears such

as President William McKinley, who acted as if, and perhaps believed, civilization was in their

blood and that everything they did in the world promoted civilization. Further investigation of

the historical and ideological dialectic between liberalism and capitalist imperialism could also

yield significant contributions to understandings of where democracy promotion fits into the

intellectual history of liberalism and imperialism.

Democracy promotion through NGOs and government agencies fundamentally reflects

an unequal world system. As the journalist Mark Ames, labor organizer Sopo Japaridze, and

political activist Arundhati Roy have suggested, such institutions, organized publicly or

privately, are an expression of one person or set of people using their superior money and power

to influence people with less money and power.[569] They are unelected and accountable only to

their funders and state regulators. Some elite persons in Global South countries such as Stanley

Lucas in Haiti gain prominent positions and connect with global markets and elites through US

democracy promotion institutions. However, the inequality of the global system allows wealthy

countries to pay many of their Global South collaborators paltry sums to do difficult and

dangerous work, such as the Syrian White Helmets who received $150 a month to risk their lives

producing propaganda and providing services in warzones. US democracy promotion claims

universality to obfuscate its capitalist imperialist class character, which benefits a tiny minority

of humanity. Deeper research on how democracy promotion and global NGO-government-

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[569] Roy, "The NGO-ization of Resistance"; John Dolan and Mark Ames, interview with Sopo Japaridze, *Radio War Nerd*, "Episode #369 — Georgia Protests & NGO Colonialism, feat. Sopo Japaridze," podcast audio, March 11, 2023, https://www.patreon.com/posts/radio-war-nerd-79898423.

industrial complexes reflect, contribute to, and depend on an iniquitous global system would add invaluable insight to democracy promotion's role in a global political economy that continues to be shaped by imperialism and neocolonialism.

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APPENDIX A. DOCUMENT EXCERPTS CITED

Below are excerpts from the leaked UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office referenced in

Chapter five. The excerpts demonstrate the validity of the sources and my use of them. In some

instances, I have highlighted (in blue) the most relevant details to better identify the exact words

or data being cited. While the leaked documents are still available online, they were put behind a

paywall between April and August 2022. If any reader would like to access the documents in full

for free, please email me at thomaba@bgsu.edu.

Excerpt I: chapter five, endnote 473

ARK F.Z.C.   **2.2.14**

ARK employs a multi-national project team with extensive experience managing
programmes and conducting research funded by many different governmental clients in
Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq and other conflict-
affected states. The vast majority of these staff are either native Arabic speakers or fluent
Arabic speakers who have spent years developing relationships in the region.

ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.14," circa 2014d, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-

FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-

TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK,

https://ufile.io/5db2juq7, paragraph 1.

Excerpt II: chapter five, endnote 474

Part A: Methodology

Ability to deliver in northern and southern Syria. Since 2011, ARK has delivered over GBP 45 million in programming in Syria for HMG, the governments of the United States, Netherlands, Denmark, Japan, and Canada, and the European Union. ARK programmes have ranged from human rights accountability, local governance support provision, civil society capacitation, community security and policing, civil defence and strategic communications to enhancing women's participation and the prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. These programmes delivered support to thousands of Syrian partners across both northern and southern Syria, including over 1,450 former beneficiaries of training, delivering over 54,000 pieces of equipment and over $2 million in stipends and grants.

ARK, "Part A: Methodology," circa 2015, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 011 Syria Rapid Response ARK, https://ufile.io/c97tfzhv, 1.

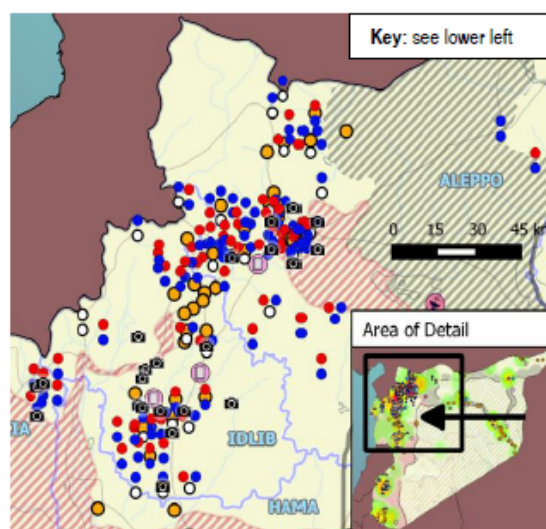Excerpt III: chapter five, endnotes 475, 476, and 477

ARK F.Z.C.   2.2.13

ARK, as a company that has specialised in Syria programming for more than three years, has access to a wide-range of networks in Syria. ARK has trained over 1,400 beneficiaries representing over 210 beneficiary organisations in more than 130 workshops, and disbursed more than 53,000 individual pieces of equipment. This network reaches into all of Syria's 14 governorates (see map below), including liberated, regime- and extremist-controlled areas, and ranges from the most senior Syrian opposition politicians, to armed groups, civil society organisations and ordinary Syrians. This includes but is not limited to:

- 61 stringers; 17 teams of distributors;
- 14 FM radio stations; 11 community magazines; two local TV stations;
- 17 Civil Defence teams in Aleppo; 16 in Idlib;
- 58 police stations in Aleppo; 32 in Idlib; eight in Latakia;
- 10 Syrian field researchers; 60 Syrian researchers who can conduct broad-based population surveys (a survey study in May 2014 reached 1,300 individuals); a focus group database of over 800 individuals;
- Dozens of Local Councils; judicial courts; documentation centres; and
- A variety of other organisations.

ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.13," circa 2014c, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK https://ufile.io/yckzx9a9, 1.

Excerpt IV: chapter five, endnote 476

As required by the SoR, the project will provide an Arabic-speaking, DV-cleared and DoD CAC (Common Access Card) holding liaison officer to the military Global Coalition against Daesh. TGSN's liaison officer has played this role since mid-2015 when the UK began providing strategic communication support and he will continue to do so under the new project, if awarded. TGSN's work has included joint planning and strategy sessions at US military SOF HQs in the USA prior to their deployment to forward locations to direct Syria-based counter-Daesh work. Both TGSN and ARK's sister company TSN have briefed the Global Coalition extensively in their regional HQs, providing a Syrian prism for their planning and messaging, and strategic advice in positioning the counter-Daesh effort within the existing context of Syria. The collaboration with ARK in this consortium means that this liaison function can align civil society and Raqqa-based CSSF StratCom programming (including the Global Coalition's Arabic social media presence, which TSN runs) with ongoing military efforts.

CONSORTIUM IN-COUNTRY RESOURCES	
Video stringers	97
Writers	23
Distributors	49
Photographers	23
In-country trainers	19
Training centres	8
Media offices	3
In-country M&E / Research officers	32

CONTENT CREATION AND COORDINATION: ARK and TGSN already share a common approach to content creation and this will be continued and enhanced under the new project. Over the years of implementing the existing projects, both companies have identified and nurtured fully-Syrian stringer and production teams which are now highly skilled in creating resonant and engaging outputs against high level creative briefs, under the guidance of senior international mentors and managers. Through the consortium's networks on the ground (see networks map below) it can gather original material from all areas of opposition-held Syria, including video and audio content, photographs and written articles. This network of writers and stringers has established relationships of trust with local institutions, providing the network with access to resonant local stories and ensuring they are covered in manner that is sensitive and retains a strong, authentic local voice.

6

ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 6.

Excerpt V: chapter five, endnote 480

This project will be delivered in five main phases (for a detailed overview of these phases, see Timeline on p.15)

Phase 1:	Baseline attitudes survey/existing equipment and skills audit/SMC office procurement
Phase 2:	Rebranding Exercise/Media Awareness and Crisis Communications Training for FSA and SMC
	Creation of SMC and FSA websites
Phase 3:	Operational and strategic media training for SMC Media Office staff
Phase 4:	Product design, creation and placement and proactive media engagement, with focus group testing to gauge effectiveness
Phase 5:	Project evaluation and follow on planning for transition/sustainability

These phases will be enabled through the following functions, as outlined in the tender:

Mentoring

ARK/Accadian will provide Hiwa Osman as the dedicated mentor to the Head of SMC STRATCOM and General Idriss, as required. Hiwa was previously Media Advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Iraq Country Director for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting. His role will develop the media handling skills of the Spokesperson and, where needed, General Idriss, including preparation for media appearances, written and oral briefings and overall guidance on strategy.

Media Strategy

ARK/Accadian will provide a 're-branding' of the SMC in order to distinguish itself from extremist armed opposition groups and to establish the image of a functioning, inclusive, disciplined and professional military body. There are four distinct audiences for this project: the FSA/SMC; the general population inside Syria; the Syrian regime; and the international community.

In **Phase 1**, ARK/Accadian will carry out a baseline analysis of Syrian attitudes towards the SMC/FSA through its Basma and Insight analysis team. The initial stage will augment

ARK, "CPG 01737 1. Methodology," circa 2013a, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 027 StratCom MAO SMC FSA ARK https://ufile.io/go452zrd, 0.

Excerpt VI: chapter five, endnote 483

STRATEGY AND PLANNING: Building on the consortium's experiences to date, the proposed project would see a step change in the approach to delivering strategic communications in Syria. During the period that ARK and TGSN have established and run Syrian opposition media platforms, they have increasingly had to defend against sophisticated perception-manipulation techniques by both the regime and its proxies and by violent extremist organisations. As such, the project methodology is tailored to shift the existing narratives around the moderate opposition from decline to resilience and challenge the media dominance of extremists and other groups that seek to undermine the moderate opposition. The consortium will provide capacity building and mentoring to moderate governance and armed actors to enable them to carry out strategic communications for their own activities, under the aegis of a coordinated, overarching nationwide campaign supported by ARK and TGSN, covered and amplified through their stringer networks, their extensive media relationships and through successful UK-funded platforms set up under the existing projects. Together these platforms have more than 1.3 million social media followers[1] providing a powerful base from which to promote cross-cutting outreach efforts, covering and amplifying local-level activities. Additionally, the consortium will use the capacity building sessions to identify credible, moderate civilian governance spokespeople who will be promoted as go-to interlocutors for regional and international media. They will echo key messages linked to the coordinated local campaigns across all media, with consortium platforms able to cover this messaging as well and encourage other outlets to pick it up. This multi-media approach, which will provide, promote and coordinate positive messaging around the moderate opposition, linking the hyper-local level to the international aims, will increase target audience exposure to examples of moderate opposition successes and ongoing, positive narratives about their efforts, growing their credibility and enabling an increase in public trust and engagement.

ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-

HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-

PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK,

https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 2.

Excerpt VII: chapter five, endnote 484

CREDIBLE SPOKESPEOPLE: The capacity building component of the consortium's strategy will leverage the success TGSN has had in developing credible spokespeople for the MAO project, by identifying a small number of civilian spokespeople who will be provided with training and mentoring to act as credible interlocutors for regional and international media. ARK and TGSN have well-established contacts with numerous key media organisations including Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Orient, Sky News Arabic, CNN, BBC, BBC Arabic, The Times, The Guardian, FT, NYT, Reuters and others. Through these contacts, the spokespeople will be able to respond to regime abuses while also promoting the successes of the moderate opposition and credibly re-framing the narrative that all opposition areas are dominated by extremists. The availability of both credible spokespeople and well-trained and connected local governance media offices will be the foundation of this new approach, moving from reactive news output to a proactive, narrative-formation strategy.

ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 5.

Excerpt VIII: chapter five, endnote 490

Media Partnerships – a network of networks

In addition to these CSO partners, TGSN's longstanding work in the Syrian media space with our own flagship platforms SY24 and SY+ has created strong relationships with other Syrian media partners including Radio Alkul, ANA Press, Sham News Network, SMART TV, Orient TV, Syria TV, Halab Today, Enab Baladi, Al-Arabiya, AlnHadath, Nine TV, Alshariq TV, Watan FM, Anadull, Alaraby TV , Radio Nassaem, Rozana FM, Jesr Press, Radio Fresh, Alsouria.net, ARTA FM.

These media partners form a distribution and amplification network that will achieve more momentum and impact than any single one of them could alone. Coordination of campaigns with them will be driven by TGSN's own platforms SY+ and SY24 that already have strong relationships and a proven track record of designing and delivering campaigns with them that are driven into the mainstream.

TGSN, "Sections 1.5-1.6 PROCESSES," circa 2020, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 028 Other FCO Files, https://ufile.io/pgzo4kya, 4.

Excerpt IX: chapter five, endnotes 506, 507 and 508

As part of its programming to build a CD capability in Syria, ARK also developed an internationally-focused communications campaign designed to raise global awareness of the teams and their life saving work. As a key part of this campaign, ARK created and continues to run a Twitter feed and Facebook page on behalf of the Syrian Civil Defence teams, posting photos and updates on their activities in English throughout the day. This has received high profile recognition from international websites and commentators, resulting in a number of international TV features and articles on civil defence activities. New York-based advocacy group The Syria Campaign (TSC) reached out to the civil defenders through the Twitter feed, and following subsequent discussions with ARK and the teams, selected civil defence to front its campaign to keep Syria in the news. With ARK's guidance, TSC also attended ARK's civil defence training sessions to create media content for its #WhiteHelmets campaign which launched in August 2014 and has since gone viral. As a result of this campaign and HMG support, two civil defenders have been invited to form part of the Syrian opposition delegation to the UN General Assembly in September 2014.

1

UK FCO - STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS; RESEARCH, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SERVICES; AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT IN THE SYRIA REGION **ARK F.Z.C.**

ARK, "ARK F.Z.C. 2.2.5," circa 2014b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 019 Acquisitions Framework ARK, https://ufile.io/hhdnezl4, 1.

Excerpt X: chapter five, endnote 536

CORE PROJECT TEAM

Sarah Le Mesurier
UK Citizen

Proposed Input - Sarah currently heads ARK's Communications Programme, working with a fully Syrian creative team to ensure that content developed is aligned with HMG objectives, responsive to events in Syria and production is effective and delivery timely. She will continue to ensure that content development, production and distribution maximise message impact, particularly through innovative and extended distribution methods, and that this is then measured and assessed effectively. She will also ensure that as many areas of this project as possible transition to being fully Syrian-run and sustainable by the end of the project, as well as working with the UK to further Canadian and other resource burden sharing.

ARK, "PART A – METHODOLOGY," circa 2014e, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 023 GrassRoots ARK, https://ufile.io/kdf1gqxs, 12.

Excerpt XI: chapter five, endnote 537

Innovative

ARK's approach to current UK-funded strategic communication programming, through its Basma products, is a radical departure to previous multi-million dollar programming in Iraq and Afghanistan in that it has **raised and trained local national staff as the core element of the capability.** This has resulted in a <u>resonance of product</u> not seen in products produced and disseminated by non-native staff. Basma products carry local language syntax and dialect. This approach very closely matches that of Accadian in other environments.

Figure 3. A video placed on a Kafrnabel website with English subtitles. While professionally produced, it failed to resonate with Syrians due to unrealistic images, such as the one depicted above of a photogenic FSA solider placing a flower in his rifle barrel.

ARK, "CPG 01737 Why ARK/Accadian?," circa 2013b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 027 StratCom MAO SMC FSA ARK, https://ufile.io/k8stc4d2, 1.

Excerpt XII: chapter five, endnote 550

13. **Tasks (Ways).**

    a.   Enhance the reputation of the Syrian MAO amongst the Syrian population, the Region and the International Community; Syrians are to be the primary target audience.

    b.   Promote the MAO as a credible guarantor of future security in Syria.

    c.   Build greater Syrian popular support for the MAO and strengthen the RFS brand.

    d.   Undermine the Assad regime narrative through the effective use of communication.

    e.   Counter violent extremist[6] narratives by promoting the MAO as a credible alternative.

    f.   Promote and reinforce positive attitudes and behaviours within the MAO.

14. **Outputs – Desired Effects (Ends).**

    a.   A MAO central media office (operating 24/7) with media production capability.

    b.   Fronts that are Media and StratCom aware and can use communications to best effect.

    c.   Campaigns to create a compelling narrative to enhance the reputation of the MAO so it is broadly accepted as the alternative to both the Assad regime and extremism.

COORDINATING INSTRUCTIONS

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5 Currently co-located with the central media office in Istanbul.

6 ISIL/IS explicitly and ANF indirectly.

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO THE SYRIAN MODERATE ARMED OPPOSITION – STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT," November 2014, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-II-02-05: Taming Syria II. Folder 024 StratCom MAO SOR, https://ufile.io/onuqevv9, 3.

Excerpt XIII: chapter five, endnote 550

Countering violent extremism: As noted above, TSN is implementing CVE projects for CSSF in Syria, and ARK is highly aware of the opportunities this project provides to build community resilience to extremism. A TSN project has been supporting the Hentawi group to run three centres in IDP camps in Idlib, providing safe spaces for community gatherings and uniting host and IDP communities through informative briefings – on psycho-social care, unexploded ordnance (in coordination with Syria Civil Defence), etc. – as well as shared activities such as sports and arts classes. They provide a strong existing basis on which to develop concrete peacebuilding activities that work to strengthen community understanding of extremism and resilience to it. As part of this project, ARK would work with the Hentawi network and its SMEs to develop additional activities that indirectly enable communities to contest HTS control.

ARK, "1.1.4 Approach, Methodology, Proposed Milestones and Timeline," circa 2017a,

https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-

COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I

Complete FCO.rar. Folder 014 CSSF PeaceBuilding ARK, https://ufile.io/fsmn78rx, 4.

Excerpt XIV: chapter five, endnote 550

PROJECT PURPOSE AND INTENT

6. The purpose of this project is to support Syrian grassroots media activism within both the civilian and armed opposition spheres. This is to be a combination of human capacity-building and assisting with the sustainment of delivery platforms capable of reaching Syrian audiences.

7. The overall objective of the project is to contribute towards positive attitudinal and behavioural change through:

    a. Promoting and reinforcing moderate values[1] in Syria: both by contributing to an effective, credible and unified Syrian Moderate Armed Opposition; and by contributing to effective, credible and unified structures of moderate civilian opposition governance, security, civil-society and service-provision. Indirectly, these activities should support the rejection of extremist alternative narratives through bolstering the moderate alternative.

    b. Supporting credible in-Syria partners to expose and highlight abuses and military excesses of the Assad Regime and its backers.

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT SYRIAN

MODERATE OPPOSITION RESILIENCE (MOR) STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

PROJECT," July 2017, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-

INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-

05: Taming Syria I. Folder 015 MOR Resilience SOR, https://ufile.io/5n2sbiaf, 2.

Excerpt XV: chapter five, endnote 551

Analytical products. ARK has previously applied methodologies similar to those requested under this tender to *deliver rapid, accurate analytical products about developments in the field to service HMG needs and respond to requests for information (RFI).* When HMG requested an overview of the situation in Idlib city following its liberation in April 2015, ARK mobilised its stringers and networks in civil society organisations, the Idlib Free Police, the Syria Civil Defence, and the political opposition to produce a rapid three-page analytical report and a verbal briefing. The deliverables addressed nine key questions from HMG related to humanitarian conditions and service provision, as well as the evolving governance and security space. Under the HMG co-implemented Integrated Community Security Programme (ICSP), ARK provided both solicited and unsolicited context analysis of a similar nature. For example, ARK repeatedly flagged, mapped, and analysed programmatic threats posed by DTOs as they advanced towards strategic programme areas bordering Turkey (July and August 2014), and helped develop the appropriate contingency planning. All of ARK's programmes have been implemented with local buy-in, meaning that ARK has a track record of successfully assessing the capacity and reliability of local partners.

"Part A: Methodology," circa 2015, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-

INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-

SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 011 Syria Rapid Response ARK,

https://ufile.io/c97tfzhv, 3.

Excerpt XVI: chapter five, endnote 553

Building Idlib City Council's media capacity, June-July 2017

The ICC's online following more than doubled during ARK's four-week training programme, hitting an engagement rate of more than three times the Syrian average, with views of online videos reaching an average of 60k (up from less than 3k prior to the training). The ICC project also serves as an indication of consortium synergies, as ARK delivered some of the in-country training with an instructor who was trained and equipped by TGSN staff through the MAO project.

CAPACITY BUILDING: As detailed in the strategy section above, capacity building will be a key part of the proposed project to develop sustainable skills across moderate opposition entities to raise awareness about and support for their activities, and to enable them to work to change the narrative from one of decline to one of resilience. This approach builds on the capacity building ARK and the TGSN teams have been carrying out for Syrian opposition entities and activists under the existing projects they are implementing, but moves beyond basic communications training to focus on narrative formation, building in particular upon ARK's recent experience developing a communications strategy for the Idlib City Council (ICC). Both companies have a range of expert, male and female Arabic-speaking trainers able to provide core technical skills, such as filming and editing and the consortium also

In-country training resources
Given the difficulties of providing cross-border training, TGSN staff

ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK, https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 9.

Excerpt XVII: chapter five, endnote 555

PROJECT CONTEXT: The consortium's review of the SoR from a conflict sensitivity standpoint was a key contributor to its proposed design, and has resulted in an approach which focuses on developing a coordinated, strong, positive narrative around moderate opposition governance activities, one which moves the MAO component from events-based messaging to values-based messaging, linking all components through shared campaign themes, including an international humanitarian law campaign. The consortium proposes focusing initially on locations receiving support through CSSF or other donors, as HTS and other extremist armed groups are significantly less likely to attack opposition entities that are receiving support, and can demonstrably provide key services. The project will not directly criticise HTS (or linked groups), given that this may be a polarising topic for many who view it as a legitimate resistance force, though not a desirable governance actor (as was demonstrated in the Target Audience Analysis). Given that the TAA demonstrated that there is a lower tolerance for minorities and women's participation in the south, ARK and TGSN will ensure their approach is tailored to promote inclusivity without raising the profile of these groups in a way that might promote backlash. The consortium has also designed campaign activities to be flexible enough to pivot if programming becomes impossible in particular areas for different project components, or to enable the project to support a nascent peace process.

ARK, "1.3.2 Conflict Sensitivity (untitled)," circa 2017d, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-

HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-

PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK,

https://ufile.io/1gzu1gjv, paragraph 3.

Excerpt XVIII: chapter five, endnote 556

Through its CSSF-funded research project in Idlib, ARK is in a unique place to contextualise Idlib-based work, particularly with the recent shrinking of the FSA's overt presence in the province. Likewise, necessary restrictions on the Grassroots project's ability to operate in northern rural Aleppo due to the tight Turkish control of the 'Euphrates Shield' area, are balanced by TGSN's extensive activities and contact with the moderate factions in that area. As such, a combination of TGSN and ARK allows for an ability to coordinate campaigns across northern Syria, while both have existing operations in the south. The consortium's ongoing research capabilities and project monitoring will provide the independent, objective and appropriately safeguarded assessment required to make well-informed decisions on how and when to adapt and flex programming, in coordination with HMG direction. The consortium's platforms and relationships ensure it is well placed to promote popular support for a peace deal, if one were to emerge from ceasefires and ongoing talks. Such an effort would require knowledge and contact with key civil, governance and military figures as well as a sound understanding of Syrian narratives and access to the Syrian media sphere. The consortium would be ideally placed to scale up at short notice to provide such support. As mentioned above, TGSN's IHL programme also seeks structural and behavioural changes from the MAO that would as a corollary facilitate any SSR or DDR process.

ARK, "1.2.1 Methodology (untitled)," circa 2017b, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-

HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-

PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 017 MOR Resilience ARK,

https://ufile.io/j11m22xe, 10.

Excerpt XIX: chapter five, endnote 562

In order to facilitate credible access, maximize flexibility, and ensure project resonance, Albany intends to hire a Syrian staff member, Mr. Ammar Kourany, who has a proven track record of managing relationships with armed groups in the context of stabilisation, development, and humanitarian programming. This MAO engagement leader has deep credibility with key groups including (north) Failaq ash-Sham, Jabha Shammiyeh, Jaysh Idleb al Hur, Ahrar ash-Sham, (center) Jaysh al Islam, Failaq al Rahman, and (south) Jaysh Tahrir in the south and experience in development, communications, research and analysis, as well as assessments and evaluations. The engagement leader will provide a conduit for Consortium support in developing communications skills and strategies appropriate for each group, with technical backstopping from Albany, M&C Saatchi, and ORB. A distinct advantage of an Albany-based engagement leader to engage with the MAOs is the inherent flexibility. As armed groups change allegiances, wax and wane, having this knowledgeable point of contact will protect the project from the risk of being wed to a particular institutional formula comprised of groups who may or may not be at any given time viable, effective, respected in the community, or, in fact, moderate. This approach will have the advantage, for which there is no substitute in this region, of the glue of human relationships and networks as we build a unified strategy and communications across moderate armed groups.

Albany Associates, "Part A – Methodology," circa 2017, https://telegra.ph/OP-HMG-TROJAN-HORSE-FROM-INTEGRITY-INITIATIVE-TO-COVERT-OPS-AROUND-THE-GLOBE-PART-1-TAMING-SYRIA-I-02-05: Taming Syria I. Folder 016 MOR Resilience Albany, https://ufile.io/4ntc9ikt, 4.