Submitted Statement of Madeleine K. Albright
Hearing on U.S. Democracy Assistance
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
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Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, distinguished members of the committee: Thank you for holding today's hearing on U.S. democracy assistance and for inviting me to testify as Chairman of the Board of the National Democratic Institute.

Before I begin, I want to express my deepest respect and appreciation for the vital role this committee has played in sustaining and strengthening the non-military tools of American power. Experience has taught me that diplomacy, development, and democracy are as integral to our national security as defense. In today's uncertain and dangerous world, we weaken these national security tools at our peril.

I am pleased today to be able to appear alongside three good friends.

When I was in office, Jim Kolbe was a key partner on foreign assistance programs in Congress.

A few years after I left government, I had the opportunity to work with Vin Weber on a Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on democracy in the Arab world.

And more recently, Steve Hadley and I co-chaired the Atlantic Council's Middle East Strategy Task Force, which identified failures in governance as the root cause of the crisis in the region, and recommended that the international community focus more of its efforts on long-term institution building in the Middle East. The kind of support offered by democracy assistance programs and by independent organizations such as the U.S. Institute of Peace is a vital component of the strategy we proposed.

With that in mind, my testimony today will focus on three areas:

- First, the link between the growth of democracy abroad and our security here at home;

- Second, the strategic impact of U.S. democracy assistance programs;
- Third, the role of democracy assistance in addressing the threats and challenges facing America in the world.

There are still some in Washington and elsewhere who believe that promoting democracy does not qualify as real foreign policy. They see little connection between fostering democratic practices and the hard-headed pursuit of American interests.

But our wisest leaders, Democrats and Republicans alike, have always understood that American foreign policy must be shaped not solely on the basis of what we are against, but also what we are for. And our interests dictate that we should be *for* a world in which democracy is defended and universal values upheld.

The past seventy years provides ample proof that democracy is more than just another form of government; it is also a powerful generator of international security, prosperity, and peace.

Yesterday, May 8, marked 72 years since the end of World War II in Europe. In the years that followed, democracy helped Germany and Japan become integrated into the world economy and evolve into key allies of the United States.

Forty years later, the promise of democracy inspired Solidarity, the Velvet Revolution and other movements that lifted the Iron Curtain and ended Cold War security threats.

The democratic gains that followed in the 1990s inspired the enlargement of NATO and opened the door to EU expansion. They allowed us to work with our neighbors in this hemisphere more closely than ever to broaden prosperity, address social ills, and expand the rule of law. They enabled countries in the Asia-Pacific region – including Indonesia, India and South Korea – to achieve new levels of prosperity and become economic and strategic partners for the United States. And in Africa, the steady growth of democracy has led to improvements in development, health, and security across the continent.

When the Cold War ended, many felt democracy was in command and marching on the right side of history. But in the years since, that sense of euphoria has dissipated. The financial crisis, and growing gaps between rich and poor, have fueled anger and deepened doubts about the capacity of democracy to deliver on its

promises. Recent progress in a few key countries and regions has been overshadowed by renewed authoritarianism in Russia, democratic backsliding in places such as Turkey, the rise of illiberal populism in Europe, state collapse in an authoritarian Venezuela, and the breakdown of order in parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

While history's direction no longer seems so obvious, we know that America's security needs will be influenced greatly by whether freedom finds a foothold in nations where democratic forces are being repressed.

That is because while democracy may not provide a guarantee against aggression, it is the best political insurance available. Governments that are publicly accountable rarely start wars; while regimes that run roughshod over their own citizens are often indifferent to the rights of their neighbors.

Moreover, in today's world, destabilizing conflicts that threaten U.S. interests erupt more frequently within societies than between them. Here again, democracies have a clear advantage, because they embrace pluralism, encourage tolerance, and enable citizens to pursue change in a lawful and peaceful way.

It is no coincidence that the hotspots most likely to harbor terrorists, generate waves and refugees, and produce illegal drugs are in areas of the world that are nondemocratic. Meanwhile, democratic nations are more likely to support timely international action to fight terrorism, trafficking, and disease.

It is true that democratic transitions can produce disorder in the short term, but history tells us that over the long term the opposite is true. As the legacy of totalitarianism attests, it is the denial of freedom that points the way most often to civil conflict and war.

At its best, democracy can produce the kind of stability that lasts, a stability built on the firm ground of mutual commitments and consent. This differs from the illusion of order that can be maintained only as long as dissent is silenced; the kind of order that may last for decades and yet still disappear overnight.

Democracy also has the best record of fostering the stability, openness, and dynamism required for global economic growth, which is itself another important U.S. national security interest.

I have been in many arguments about which comes first, economic or

political development. But experience has taught us that democracy and development reinforce each other. Societies grow more quickly and strongly if people are free to express their ideas, market their labor, and pursue a better life.

For all these reasons, the health of democracy is clearly vital to America's interests. And my central message today is that promoting democracy is not just right; it is also necessary, smart, and cost-effective. After all, foreign assistance is only about 1 percent of the total U.S. budget; and democracy assistance represents just 4 percent of our foreign aid.

The question is how to go about promoting democracy. Because in any society, building democracy is never easy and never fully accomplished; it is something to be worked toward, step by step, country by country, day by day.

This is precisely the philosophy that has guided the National Endowment for Democracy and its four core institutes – NDI, the International Republican Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise, and the Solidarity Center.

As you know, NED and the party institutes grew out of President Reagan's speech to the British Parliament, in which he stated that "Our military strength is a prerequisite to peace, but let it be clear we maintain this strength in the hope it will never be used, for the ultimate determinant in the struggle that's now going on in the world will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of wills and ideas, a trial of spiritual resolve, the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated."

Those words remain true today.

I am proud to have served as NDI's founding Vice Chair, and after stepping away from NDI for eight years during the Clinton Administration, I became Chairman of the Board of the Institute in 2001 – a position I have held ever since.

My experience gives me a unique perspective on how NDI and the other core institutes of the NED have worked to help advance U.S. strategic interests around the world, along with the important efforts of USAID, the State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative of the Near East Affairs Bureau. I have seen the work of these organizations up close. They have developed relationships at the highest levels of government, across party lines and at the grass roots.

Having worked on these issues in an out of government, I can say that the pluralistic approach the United States has taken to democracy assistance has served it well. Funding by the NED has allowed the Endowment and its four core institutes to plan strategically, yet respond quickly and flexibly to emerging opportunities and sudden problems in rapidly shifting political environments. In addition, the NED has been able to operate effectively in closed societies where direct government engagement on democracy issues is more difficult.

The truth is that while the U.S. government – including the White House, State Department, Congress, and overseas embassies – must set the tone and provide needed resources for democracy assistance, much of the day-to-day democratic development can and should be carried out, with proper oversight, by nongovernmental organizations, which operate in the realm of people-to-people relations.

Although conducted at a distance from the U.S. government, these programs serve important U.S. strategic interests.

We see this in Iraq, where NDI has been on the ground for more than a dozen years. In recent months, NDI public opinion research has been identifying what kind of governing structures local residents want in post-liberation Mosul and elsewhere in the country.

This research is critical because experience has shown that military operations to root out terrorism will succeed over the long term only if they are followed by sustainable improvements in governance with institutions that enjoy the confidence of the public. The work that NDI is doing to understand the preferences and attitudes of Sunni, Shia, and minority populations, combined with our work in the field to empower local partners, can help enable those improvements in governance to take root.

The same is true across the border in Syria, where more than thirty NDI governance advisers are working each day helping to advise local citizen groups and administrative councils in dozens of communities across northern Syria. Thousands of consultations and training sessions have been conducted, reaching more than 500 council members and 7,000 civic activists. The growing relationships between citizens and these councils are, under challenging circumstances, improving living conditions and creating a culture of democratic

governance.

These civic groups and councils are also directly challenging extremist groups. As one regional observer put it, "you may think Syrians are condemned to an unpleasant choice between Bashar Al-Asad and the jihadists, but the real choice being fought out by the Syrians is between violent authoritarianism on the one hand and grassroots democracy on the other."

In the Middle East and elsewhere, the mission of U.S. democracy assistance is not to impose democracy. That is an oxymoron. Democracy is not a product or a service. It cannot be exported or imported. It must grow from within.

Still, there is no truth to the argument that democracy is not suited to certain regions. Democratic elements are present in every major culture. Similarly, no nation is unready for democracy, because no country is ready for dictatorship.

Yet if democracy is going to take root, we have learned that it must be accompanied by policies that will improve the living standards for the many, not just the privileged few. In short, the institutions of democracy must deliver. People want to vote and eat.

To that end, deepening democracy so that it can deliver tangible improvements to people's lives must become even more of a focus for U.S. democracy assistance.

The stakes for democracy's success are high in Ukraine, where NDI and its European partners have brought together all eight party factions in the parliament to agree on procedures that will make it easier to build consensus around economic and political reforms. The dialogue has taken place in Belgium, France, and Ukraine, and the feedback we have received has been positive. NDI is also supporting local civil society groups and larger national organizations who are pushing for economic and political change, and advocating for more women in elected office.

These efforts are producing results, as citizens without prior experience in activism are participating in decision-making in large numbers. Through NDI programs alone, more than 45,000 citizens have engaged directly in the national reform process, including a decentralization process that will ultimately give Ukrainians more opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives. These

are the kinds of bottom-up changes that, given time and continued support, can put down deep democratic roots.

There is nothing automatic or easy about democratic change. But American freedom, prosperity and peace depend, in large measure, on whether democratic institutions succeed around the world. That depends, in turn, on America's willingness to continue working with our partners to promote democracy. And that depends on whether the Administration and Congress provide the resources required for our most effective democracy-builders to do their jobs.

Thanks to the tremendous efforts of this committee, the omnibus appropriations act enacted by Congress last week provides full funding for democracy assistance and will enable NDI, the other NED-affiliated institutes and other groups to carry on vital work for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Republicans and Democrats alike have expressed strong support for elevating democracy and human rights in our foreign policy, including in a bipartisan letter sent to President Trump last week.

As welcome as these steps may be, there is much to be concerned about regarding the future of U.S. democracy assistance.

The so-called "skinny" budget proposal includes steep and arbitrary cuts to the State Department and international affairs budget which would inflict irreparable harm on democracy assistance, as well as other vital diplomatic and development programs.

At the same time, the cement appears to be hardening on a new global split between democratic and undemocratic forces. On one side is our Community of Democracies, on the other is a Community of Dictators. More than 25 years after the Cold War, we do not want Vladimir Putin – rather than the likes of Havel, Walesa, or Mandela – to point the way to the future.

We must not provide these undemocratic forces encouragement, and that means the United States must not make the mistake of casting aside issues of democracy and human rights when it conducts its foreign policy.

I am nearly 80 years old, without stars in my eyes. I understand that no system of government, not even democracy, guarantees prosperity or peace. Our leaders must weigh a variety of factors when deciding which foreign governments

to support. It is sometimes necessary to make alliances of convenience with countries that do not share our values.

Even when we make such arrangements, we should never lose sight of our long-term interests in promoting and sustaining democratic governance, which is ultimately the best guarantor of peace, prosperity and stability. This means democracy and human rights must always be a pillar of our national security strategy and a part of our bilateral agenda, even with those countries where they are in short supply. And that agenda includes the types of programs we are discussing today.

Moving forward, we must remember that the alternative to support for democracy is complicity in the rule of governments that lack the blessing of their own people. That policy would betray those who are most sympathetic to our values and reveal a preference for the sterile order of repression over the rich and self-correcting sustainability of a free society. Such a preference might be expected of leaders from Moscow or Beijing, but not America or the community of democratic nations.

The truth is that our values and our interests are not in conflict with each other. Our principles and our interests coincide, and if we do not act accordingly, we will serve neither effectively. If America is lukewarm or transparently hypocritical in its support for democracy, we will do more damage to our long-term interests than any short-term gains secured by a cynical approach. The more democracy is challenged, the more its champions must insist on its validity as the best system of governments humans have devised.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee: your leadership is essential if America is to continue to lead the roster of democracy's champions. And much depends upon whether we do. Because the defining struggle of the 21st century is not, as many predicted, a clash of religious civilizations; it is instead a competition between democratic and autocratic systems of government.

Our adversaries are determined to exploit democracy's openness, as we have seen with Russia's attempts to interfere in democratic elections around the world. But those who wish to tear democracy down can succeed only if democracy's guardians are too complacent, too divided, too timid, or too stuck in the past to stop them.

The mission for small "d" democrats like us therefore begins with continuing our support for countries such as Ukraine, Burma, and Tunisia that are in the midst of a democratic transition and in need of outside support; but it cannot stop there.

Ultimately, our ability to promote democracy successfully depends on the credibility and appeal of our example. It is hard to persuade others to follow our lead when all they see is gridlock and partisanship. But in a free country, the solution to setbacks can be found – not by bowing to the false gods of nationalism and tyranny – but by building better, more flexible and responsive institutions.

To lead successfully, we must adjust to the ubiquity of social media, the changing nature of the workplace, and the desire that people everywhere have for sources of constancy in their lives.

We must place a priority on ways to stimulate economic growth while simultaneously narrowing the gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural, women and men, skilled and unskilled.

We must work across borders to respond to transnational challenges, including terrorism, climate change, sectarian violence, and too many people chasing too few jobs.

Above all, we must recognize that democracy's unique virtue is its ability – through reason and the kind of open debate that is the hallmark of the U.S. Congress – to find remedies for its own shortcomings.

That job is within our power to do, and we had better get on with it before it is too late.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee: make no mistake, building democracy at home and supporting democratic institutions abroad is the continuation of heroic work. Without this commitment, American foreign policy would lose its moral compass, its most compelling claim to global respect, and ultimately, the support and understanding of the American people. Shedding our support for democracy would put in jeopardy our long-term economic, political, and security interests.

Freedom is perhaps the clearest expression of national purpose ever adopted, and it is America's purpose. Like other profound human aspirations, it can never

fully be achieved. It is not a possession; it is a pursuit. And it is the star by which American foreign policy must continue to navigate in the years to come.

I want once again to thank each of you for the efforts you make every day on behalf of our nation and the principles we have cherished for more than two centuries.

I appreciate deeply the opportunity to testify before you, and I look forward to your questions.

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