

FINAL PAPER

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Thank you. It is a pleasure to address the annual conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy. The Center is doing extraordinary work to continue to spread open and transparent government throughout the Islamic world. I cannot stress how important your efforts are.

I am honored to share the stage tonight with Anwar Ibrahim, the Center’s Muslim Democrat of the Year Award winner. I applaud Mr. Ibrahim’s commitment to bring democratic reform in Malaysia. We at the State Department followed his case closely and consistently called for his release and it is a great pleasure to be with him here tonight.

I’d like to focus my remarks tonight on three key points: First the importance President Bush and Secretary Rice have placed on the spread of personal freedom and liberty across the globe. Second, how this vision has led to our support of nascent reform trends throughout the Islamic world. And finally, the challenges that we have faced in our effort to promote democracy.

Freedom, democracy and human rights are not solely American values. They are shared by people and democratic governments on every continent and by those who aspire to liberty around the world.

If there is one message you should take from these remarks tonight, the one I hope you remember is this: The United States has made a commitment to the expansion of personal liberty and democracy throughout the Islamic world. Promoting freedom and democracy is the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

The President’s vision of a world where freedom reigns has been clearly articulated throughout his tenure. The President in his 2004 inaugural address said, “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” We have learned from our darkest hours that the liberty of our land is tied to the promotion of liberty in other lands. Secretary Rice has echoed the President’s vision, “Freedom’s work has most assuredly just begun. In all that lies ahead, our nation will continue to clarify for other nations the moral choice between oppression and freedom, and we will make it clear that ultimately success in our relations depends on the treatment of their own people.”

We are persuaded that regimes that violate the rights of their own citizens are more likely to disrupt the peace and security in their region and create a reservoir of ill will that can

accrue to the detriment of the United States. The best guarantor of security and prosperity at home and abroad is respect for individual liberty and the protection of human rights through good governance and the rule of law.

How do we translate this vision into action?

We look outward for possibilities to expand liberty, knowing that other nations, with different histories and cultures and facing different circumstances, have successfully incorporated these core principles into their own systems of governance. There should be no doubt of the commitment of this government, of this administration, to bring about positive change. Many say this is impossible, I disagree. Many of those who question this commitment don't believe change is possible. In my Bureau's 25 years of democracy promotion in nations that are the worst abusers of human rights I can tell you that change is not only possible, but is inevitable.

These principles guide our decisions about international cooperation, the character of our foreign assistance and the allocation of resources, and they will guide our actions and our words in international bodies. The United States will stand beside any nation determined to build a better future by seeking the rewards of liberty for its people.

In the last year the U.S. Government invested over one billion dollars in democracy and human rights promotion throughout the world. A significant portion of this was invested in the promotion of democracy in the Islamic world. In addition to this investment we use a variety of tools to encourage democratic growth. We provide, or withhold, economic, financial or technical assistance that can be crucial to helping a government meet its obligations to its citizens.

Over the past quarter-century, a large number of nations have made a successful transition to democracy. Many more are at various stages of the transition. When historians write about U.S. foreign policy at the end of the 20th century, they will identify the growth of democracy--from 30 countries in 1974 to 119 today. The United States is proud to have had the opportunity to play a role, whether large or small, in these transitions. The United States remains committed to expanding upon this legacy until no one questions the fundamental right of a person to choose those who govern them through an ongoing civil process that includes free, fair, and transparent elections.

The past year has seen a dramatic shift in the world's landscape. Elections in Afghanistan, Palestinian Authority and Iraq have brought the dramatic first steps of democracy to populations that have lived under tyranny and oppression for too long. And change is spreading in Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon and perhaps Egypt as well.

Today, millions who had lived under brutal regimes are on the road to democracy. While a great deal still needs to be done in Iraq, Iraq's January 30 elections marked a critical step in that country becoming the first democratic nation in the Arab Middle East.

What these dramatic events graphically illustrate is that societies of free citizens must be founded on a commitment to the dignity of each individual. While citizens' desire for

individual freedoms and rights can be repressed for a time by authoritarian and corrupt regimes, history shows us that transition is possible and encourages our support of the inalienable rights of freedom loving people everywhere.

We recognize that each country has a unique history and traditions that will lead them on different paths to freedom. Whatever the path or pace however, the United States is prepared to stand with them.

Pressure for political change has been mounting in the Islamic world for some time – and has led to some genuine advances. Such advances include legislative elections with women voters and candidates in Oman and a competitive, multiparty presidential contest in Algeria.

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the programs the United States has supported.

In Indonesia, the world's third largest democracy, an estimated 80 percent of eligible voters participated in the April 5, 2004 presidential election. We supported this election by providing technical assistance to national and regional election authorities, and supporting voter education programs and domestic and international monitoring initiatives to protect ballot integrity.

In Nigeria, the United States is committed to maintaining and strengthening ties with Nigeria's Muslim community. Nigeria is a country that has the largest Muslim community in Africa. Its religious diversity is one of its important strengths. The program the Center established there is an excellent example of the efforts needed to bring democracy to the Muslim world and my Bureau was proud to sponsor the Center's work there. This program brought together Islamic scholars from all over the world to work with Nigerian Sharia judges and democracy and human rights activists. EXPAND. This is one example of how you gathered here tonight – literally – are furthering the advancement of democracy.

Turkey is a functioning secular democracy with a constitutional government. Over the past five years, the Government has passed significant constitutional reforms that ease restriction on religious freedoms, freedom of association and freedom of expression. The United States has helped in these reforms supporting human rights and democracy programs in Turkey and encouraging further reform in the areas of religious freedom, rule of law and civil rights.

These are just three examples of countries where the U.S. is engaged in support of democracy in the Islamic world, and while advances have been made, many of these advances have been embryonic and fragmentary, but they have planted the seeds for future change. And these and other countries can follow a readily available blueprint for reform: eliminate limits on press freedoms, eliminate laws or regulations that limit political freedoms, and allow greater freedom of association.

The last area I want to address is the challenges the U.S. has faced in our effort to promote personal freedom and liberty in the Islamic world.

The first of these challenges is the belief that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Indeed, many have questioned whether Islam and Democracy can coexist. While much has been said and written about this, and I do not intend to relive the debate, I will say one thing, the belief of many Muslims that they must choose between Islam and democracy is a false choice. Some democratic principals have long been part of the Islamic tradition. Old interpretations no longer provide suitable answers to the difficult questions facing the Muslim world today. Democratic development is one way for Muslims to unlock their full future.

In addition to intellectual challenges, there are number of other issues that are testing the promotion of democracy. Many of these issues have been identified in the recently released UNDP Arab Human Development Report for 2004.

This report underscores the immediate need for reform. This reform is not cultural – as some allege – but rather a political undoing of centuries of repression and systematic suppression of reform-minded activists by government entities. The concentration of power in the hands of the executive has created a political ‘black hole’ that has prevented the development of forces for change within the Islamic community.

Terrorism and violence are perhaps one of the most dramatic impediments to the development of personal liberty in the Muslim world. Terrorism has become one of the greatest perils of freedom in our age, yet we cannot allow our “war on terror” to pose a threat to civil liberties and reform in the Islamic world. While many have pointed to abuses that have occurred in our own system, we must recognize that although abuses exist they are not tolerated. We have addressed our own shocking and horrific cases of abuse in an open and public manner. Independent media covers the story, perpetrators are charged and punished in a just legal system and a clear message is sent that this conduct will not be tolerated.

Democratic change can be promoted by external powers, but must be grown by indigenous forces. The global community must expand its view beyond a narrow focus of oil, terror and economic development and embrace the global vision of personal liberty and a world where individuals have peaceful means to express their views and have a stake in shaping their future.

We all need to encourage and support advocates for freedom. We must support those advocates of freedom who are now imprisoned and oppressed -- similar to that of our guest of honor tonight -- who stand for freedom. I think we can all agree that change must come, personal liberty must triumph, and freedom must be the hallmark of regimes throughout the world.

The United States has pledged support for individuals who seek to secure their unalienable rights. Across the globe, we will continue to stand in solidarity with the extraordinary men and women who take great personal risks to shed light on human rights abuses, and work to ensure democratic change.

Our fight for personal liberty will continue so long as regimes infringe upon the freedom of their citizens to build strong, democratic institutions of their own design that are capable of protecting their freedoms. Although this challenge is formidable, we are committed to upholding the principal and practice of democracy. Working together as

Americans and with our friends and allies in the community of democracies, we can forge a path toward freedom for all around the globe.