

When, how and where should West promote

By Timothy Garton Ash

Democracy
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LONDON: Would you rather have democracies next door, or dictatorships? Democracies, right? If they are genuine liberal democracies, they are better for the people who live in them and for their neighbours. So, why not promote democracy in neighbouring countries? Or do you think we have obligations only to compatriots, and interests only within the frontiers of our nation-state? If you consider it a matter of complete indifference whether another country's rulers oppress, torture, poison and murder political opponents or ethnic and religious groups within the boundaries of their state, then you need read no further.

Then let's get to the real question: how? We know the wrong way: Iraq. But what's the right way? Which means of promoting democracy are effective and justified? There's a whole library on the criteria for military intervention; almost nothing on those for promoting democracy.

The question is prompted by contro-

versy about the role of western money in Ukraine's orange revolution, but it goes far beyond that. The Bush administration has put "the democratization of the wider Middle East" at the top of its foreign policy agenda for the next four years. Do we disagree with the end or simply Washington's proposed means?

To kick-start this important debate, here's a very preliminary attempt to lay out a few first principles:

① War is not justified simply to promote democracy. So, the Iraq war was wrong. It would have been justified, in my view, if Saddam Hussein had been committing a genocide against his people at the time we went to war, or if he really was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, but he wasn't, so it wasn't. Using the promotion of democracy as the main justification for that war risks giving democracy a bad name.

② Whether or not you think intelligence services are a necessary evil in a dangerous world, they should have

nothing to do with supporting democrats in other countries. CIA involvement can be the kiss of death — sometimes literally — for dissidents. And there's nothing the enemies of democracy-promoters like more than to tar them with the "spy" brush.

③ Maximum transparency. Those who give money to would-be democrats in non-democratic places are sometimes reluctant to say where the money is from and who they've given it to: perhaps because they are embarrassed by the source (which again raises the "spy" spectre); because the source is entirely respectable but prefers anonymity (as some old-fashioned millionaires still do); or, most legitimately, because revealing where the money went can threaten the freedom and even the lives of those who receive it. But, subject to that constraint, funders should reveal as much as possible as soon as possible.

Today, with a little digging, you can find the list of Ukrainian NGOs supported by the American National

Endowment for Democracy, and by George Soros's foundation in Kiev. The problem here is only partly the habits of discretion; it's also the plethora of givers and takers. I would like to read a comprehensive, independent study of funding flows into Ukraine. But it would have to look at both sides: Russian and western. And the Russian side doesn't publish many reports.

④ Context is all. So much depends on the kind of regime you are dealing with. What would plainly have been justified against Adolf Hitler was definitely not against Salvador Allende. Working to topple Milosevic in Serbia is not the same as toppling Mossadeq in Iran. As a country moves, one hopes, from outright dictatorship to full liberal democracy, the rules change. For example, in most western democracies, including the US, foreign funding of political parties and campaigns is banned or severely limited. (Britain may be something of an exception — indeed, our referendum on the European constitution will most likely

be decided by the single absentee ballot of an Australian American, Rupert Murdoch.)

Increasingly, these days, democracy-promotion takes place in states somewhere in-between, with semi-authoritarian, semi-democratic regimes of the kind that are known in Latin America as *democradura*. Gangsterish practices of blackmail or intimidation and biased television channels owned by friendly oligarchs are as important as formal instruments of state. In this grey zone, it's difficult to lay down clear rules of the road, but a starting point might be:

⑤ Proportionality. As with the "just war" arguments for humanitarian intervention, so with democracy-promotion. But what is proportionate? The US State Department recently said it spent some \$65m in Ukraine in the past two years. Other western governments and independent donors made significant contributions. I have before me an October 2004 report from the Soros foundation in Ukraine that says

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5. Proportionality. As with the "just war" arguments for humanitarian intervention, so with democracy-promotion. But what is proportionate? The US State Department recently said it spent some \$65m in Ukraine in the past two years. Other western governments and independent donors made significant contributions. I have before me an October 2004 report from the Soros foundation in Ukraine that says

it allocated \$1,201,904 to NGOs for "elections-related projects". The donors say this western money went to help create conditions for free and fair elections, not directly to the opposition; that, too, should be carefully examined. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that as much as \$200m came from Russia for the government side. Modern elections are usually won or lost on television, and most of the channels were clearly biased to the government. How much makes a level playing field?

6. Supporting, not manufacturing. Promoting democracy should be about encouraging people who want democracy, not dollars. Often those who have least democracy want it most. Comparative data suggests that people in Arab countries are more enthusiastic about democracy than we are. But it's obvious that pumping in large sums where there are few local initiatives can be distorting. Solidarity in Poland was a wholly authentic, home-grown movement that then got western sup-

port. Some subsequent east European initiatives seemed to start at the other end. One east European friend commented wryly: "We dreamed of civil society and got NGOs." In Arab countries, it will be even more vital, and difficult, to identify initiatives that are authentic and home-grown.

This is, I repeat, just a first attempt to rough out a few first principles. Before we go any further, we need more facts. "Facts are subversive," said the great American journalist IF Stone — and they can also be subversive of myths about subversion.

In the meantime, we must keep a basic sense of proportion. In the last week, Austrian doctors have put it beyond reasonable doubt that an attempt was made to poison the Ukrainian opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Anyone who thinks there is any moral equivalence between funding an exit poll and poisoning a political opponent needs their head examined.—*Dawn/The Guardian News Service.*