

**Opening Statement of Dr. Madeleine K. Albright before the  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
“The State of Democracy Around the World”  
March 10, 2021**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts on the state of democracy around the world. It is a topic I approach through the prism of my own experience, having come to this country in 1948 after my family fled both communism and fascism in Europe. I am a grateful American, and I was taught by my father to appreciate both the fragility of democracy and its resilience.

In the past quarter century, I have testified before this committee on many occasions. I have not always agreed with every Senator on every topic, but I do not recall ever having had a quarrel about the importance of democracy.

So today, in the interests of time, I will devote my remarks less to the widely reported symptoms of freedom’s decline than to the question of what we can and should do about it.

To that end, I will stress three points.

First, the United States must lead. Many countries can and do help, but no other nation has both the historic identification with liberty and the geographic reach to inspire and strengthen democratic institutions in every region.

If America is not out front, others will take our place: either despots who rule with an iron fist or extremists who acknowledge no rules at all.

This would leave the world with a choice between repression and chaos; we owe our children a better alternative than that.

My second point follows directly from the first. America must set the right example.

People across the globe won’t follow us if they don’t believe us, and they won’t believe us if we fail to match our words with actions.

I won’t dwell on the events of January 6, but you can be sure that our rivals will not soon let the world forget the spectacle of American democracy under siege from within.

Just recently in Myanmar, the military launched a coup because its leaders refused to accept the results of a democratic election. Sound familiar?

The truth is that autocrats in many countries have echoed the words of our past president when attacking their legitimate opposition, their courts, the independent press, and national legislatures.

Meanwhile, here at home, efforts are underway in many states to chip away at the right to vote, the very cornerstone of freedom.

To be clear, just as it is fraudulent for people to vote illegally, so it is fraudulent to deny citizens the best possible chance to cast their ballots within the law.

When it comes to holding fair elections, there is no comparison: denial of the franchise, not deception at the polls, is by far the bigger problem.

## AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

My third point is that building and sustaining democracy should be a first principle, not an afterthought, in U.S. foreign and national security policy. The reason should be clear to all of us.

Look around the world from South Asia to Central Europe and from the Middle East to parts of Africa and Latin America; democracy is steadily losing ground.

Not since the Cold War have we seen a broader or more ominous threat to human freedom.

What should we do? -- fall apart and retreat, or come together in defense of our core beliefs?

When I was secretary of state, I helped launch what we called the community of democracies, an effort that continued under the leadership of Ambassador Dobriansky in the Bush administration.

We were committed to the idea that democratic governments should assist each other in creating jobs, improving services, and countering threats. The time is right to revive that sense of solidarity.

For America that means helping to strengthen liberty's cause through the employment of every available foreign policy tool, including aid, trade, sanctions, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, and partnerships with advocacy groups and the private sector.

We must also apply the lessons we have already learned about the need for patience, inclusivity, a holistic approach, and remedies tailored to the individual circumstances of the countries involved.

The bipartisan National Endowment for Democracy and its four core institutes – NDI, IRI, CIPE and the Solidarity Center – are rich sources of wisdom on all of these points.

It has been my honor to be associated with these institutions since they were founded by President Reagan, and to have served as Chairman of NDI since 2001. I know they stand ready to work with this committee as it reviews and strengthens democracy programs.

Now, some will tell you that a democracy-centered foreign policy reflects a kind of starry-eyed idealism and that the only way to protect our interests is through hardheaded realism.

Is there some truth in that? Yes, I won't deny it.

But in the vast majority of cases, support for democracy serves both our interests and our ideals.

History has shown us that free countries make better neighbors, more reliable friends, and the only allies we can consistently count on.

That is why backing for democratic values must be the centerpiece of any strategy to create a more secure, stable, healthy and prosperous global environment – the kind of setting in which Americans can thrive.

A little more than a century ago, a U.S. president asked our armed forces to cross the ocean to make the world safe for democracy. Today, we must support democracy to make the world safe.

And we should do so with confidence.

Despite recent setbacks, we know that democracy is resilient and that so too is the United States. Our economy is one of the strongest and most innovative in the world because we have a system of government that supports the rule of law and protect the rights of individuals.

We know as well that, even now, no words speak more powerfully to the aspirations of all people than that singular pledge of “liberty and justice for all.”

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As President Biden wrote in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance issued last week, “we must prove that our model isn’t a relic of history; it’s the single best way to realize the promise of the future.”

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, there is much more I could say, but your time is precious and so I will stop now and look forward to any questions you might have.

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