

Headlines

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U.S. Democracy Crusade Falls by the Wayside

by William Fisher

NEW YORK - "America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof." So spoke U.S. President George W. Bush in his second inaugural address last January, vowing to help build democratic institutions and strengthen civil society in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Yet today, the Bush administration is substantially reducing funding for the organisations that are traditionally mandated to transform the president's vision into reality.

In budget requests to Congress, funding for democracy promotion in Iraq has been limited. Some organisations ran out of funds in April; others are trying to make their resources last through the summer.

At risk are projects to teach Iraqis how to create and manage political parties, organise and run think tanks, human rights organisations, a free press, and trade unions.

The decline in funding is being attributed to ballooning security costs, which have already caused the Bush administration to scale back its ambitious reconstruction programs designed to restore Iraq's infrastructure.

Administration officials admit they are requesting fewer dollars for traditional democracy-building programmes, but contend that their efforts to help Iraqis to run more effective ministries also contribute to democracy.

At the beginning of the Iraq war, money was not a problem for the organisations traditionally involved in promoting democracy.

For example, soon after the fall of Baghdad, the National Endowment for Democracy

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**Christopher J. Roederer, associate professor,
Florida Coastal School of Law**

(NED) received 25 million dollars to expand its Iraq programmes, and eventually received a total of 71 million dollars.

It distributed some of these funds to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and its sister organisation, the International Republican Institute, both affiliated with the United States' two main political parties.

Now the funding for both organisations has dried up. Their sole source of financing is special funds earmarked by Congress last year, as the result of an effort spearheaded by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat. The funds will be exhausted later this year.

"The solution to Iraq lies in the political process, and it's reckless for the White House to cut funds to strengthen democracy in Iraq at this time," Kennedy said.

The NED has received its final 3 million dollars, but no further funding source has been identified. "It does feel like everybody's getting squeezed in this area," Barbara Haig, the endowment's vice president, told the Washington Post, adding, "There probably is a commitment to these programmes in principle. I don't know how much commitment there is in specificity."

The Bush administration has included only 15 million dollars for the two party institutes in next year's budget. The total for democracy promotion in Iraq for 2007 is 63 million dollars, which would mean that most programmes would have to be cut. Another 10 million dollars for democracy promotion was included in the president's supplemental request to Congress. This is a tiny fraction of the tens of millions the U.S. spends in Iraq each day.

Jennifer Windsor, executive director of Freedom House, a non-profit advocacy group considered close to the administration, called the situation "a travesty" and said she is "appalled" that more is not being done.

"This is the time to show that democracy promotion is more than holding an election. The U.S. will be making a mistake if it can't see fit to fund follow-up democracy promotion at this time," she said.

Mary Shaw of [Amnesty International USA](#) agrees. She told IPS, "U.S. support for democratic institutions in Iraq is crucial to the future of human rights in that country. More than three years after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, conditions in that country are at a critical juncture, and the security of the Iraqi people hangs in the balance."

"The U.S. owes it to the Iraqi people to provide the means to rebuild and strengthen not only their civil infrastructure but their societal infrastructure as well. Only then will Iraq be truly liberated."

But another view is expressed by Christopher J. Roederer, associate professor at the Florida Coastal School of Law. Prof. Roederer told IPS, "It is not wholly surprising that funding for democracy promotion in Iraq is dwindling. Democracy promotion was not the reason for invading Iraq, not even the stated reason for going into Iraq."



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invasion and after the 'weapons of mass destruction' justification and the 'connections to al Qaeda' justification had been discredited," he added.

The White House and U.S. aid agencies have declined to discuss the budget cuts.

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