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Spreading Freedom Around the World

Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D.

We must never take for granted the march of freedom. As Heritage President Ed Feulner showed in his 1998 book of that title, the line is never straight, and the walk is never easy. In fact, it can be very costly and fraught with setbacks and disappointments.

If we need to be reminded of this fact, we need only to recall our own history. Think back, for example, to late 1776—November 18 in fact. It was the darkest hour in the Revolutionary War. Washington had just surrendered Fort Mifflin on the Hudson River, and thousands of his men were taken prisoner. A few days before, his army had been routed at Kip's Bay in Manhattan. There, Washington reportedly lost control as he watched soldiers run away, crying out as he brandished a pistol at them, "Are these the men with which I am to defend America?" Before that, he had been outmaneuvered and outsmarted by the British at the Battle of Brooklyn, where his army had been surprised in a night attack.

These were humiliating defeats. Washington had made mistakes. On November 18, 1776, New York was gone. It looked as if all was lost as Washington tried to escape across the frozen fields of New Jersey. Lord Rawdon, a British officer, concluded: "The fact is their army is broke all to pieces, and the spirit of their leaders and their abettors is all broken.... I think one may venture to pronounce that it is well nigh over with them."

These were the dismal events that inspired Thomas Paine to pen his famous words: "These are times that try men's souls." We know the end of that story: The

Talking Points

- The freedom agenda is a generational commitment and the next step of the Reagan revolution writ large at home and abroad.
- We must distinguish between our near- and long-term goals and face the challenges in the Middle East and Afghanistan.
- We must overhaul our entire public diplomacy machinery to reach the peoples of the world with more facts, explanations, and justifications about why we do what we do.
- We must support free trade and free markets by actively advocating policies that enable individuals to grab hold of opportunity and seek their prosperity.
- We must get serious about Russia and China, which have joined forces to undermine our freedom agenda around the world, not only in cooperating on controlling energy supplies, but also in slowing our efforts to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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Americans go on to win that war. But Paine and the others didn't know that in November 1776. They carried on despite the fact that almost everybody thought the war was lost.

Now, I relate this story to remind us that the march of freedom is no less straight today than it was in the 18th century. Happily for us, our ordeal is not nearly as onerous as Washington's. We can learn from his patience, his determination, and his sheer doggedness not to surrender even though others said the fight was not worth the effort. We can be thankful that much progress has been made in spreading liberty in the world in the last 15 years.

But we cannot rest. We cannot expect the wave of freedom we have witnessed to continue coursing across the continents. We cannot even take comfort. The spread of freedom today is being met with resistance and encountering backlash. Whether America continues the spread of freedom will depend to a great extent on the clarity and steadfastness of American leadership in the world and at home.

American Leadership: The Catalyst for Freedom

It has been the leadership of America—and of good friends like Lady Margaret Thatcher—that has been the cause of and the catalyst for the march of freedom. Consider how far we've come just over Heritage's lifespan.

- In 1975, Freedom House—a group that measures how politically free countries are around the world—found only 40 free nations in the world. Today, it cites 89, over twice the number in 30 years.
- Moreover, the number of unfree countries has dropped by one-third: from 65 to 45.
- What is more, the number of countries whose peoples have claimed freedom has nearly doubled over Heritage's lifespan—from 24 percent to 46 percent.

This surge for freedom is not just found in surveys of those who now hold elections. It is also reflected in our *Index of Economic Freedom*. In fact, for the first time since we've been measuring economic freedom, the average score for all the countries combined has climbed from the “mostly

unfree” category to “mostly free.” That's promising. In the past year alone, 99 countries—many of them former communist countries—have improved their scores.

This means that, slowly but surely, more countries today are allowing their people to keep more of what they earn, to build more businesses with less government interference, and to trade more freely. Some people call this globalization. I call it the march of economic freedom.

It is no less true that millions of people have been liberated from tyranny in recent years

- In Afghanistan, millions of people defied the threats from Taliban supporters and turned out *en masse* to elect a president in 2004 and their representatives to the new parliament last September.
- In Iraq, people defied insurgents' fear-mongering and voted to adopt a permanent constitution last October. And in December, over 75 percent of people eligible voted for their National Assembly.
- One year ago this month, Syrian troops pulled out of Lebanon after massive demonstrations in the Cedar Revolution that followed tainted elections and the killing of a popular leader.
- The people spoke in Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003, and the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia that brought Milosevic down in 2000.
- In Indonesia, we saw the largest turnout in history—117 million people—for elections in 2004. We welcome every step its diverse peoples take to build a democratic system.
- Even elections in Egypt last year, marred by problems, have opened the door for further democratic reforms.

President Bush has made the march of freedom the principal agenda of his Administration. In his new National Security Strategy, it is front and center. That's a significant change from four years ago, when it was a subset of the war on terrorism.

For the President, it is no feel-good strategy. It is based upon a hard-nosed understanding of history.

There can be no real security in America without the advance of liberty in the world. There can be no real security anywhere if we allow the forces of tyranny to fester and to foment violence.

The Expected Backlash

Now, backlashes to the freedom agenda should come as no surprise to anyone. There always will be a backlash when you try to change the status quo. But even though that is so—and even though there is more freedom today than there was 30 years ago—I would not belittle the challenges we face today to spreading freedom around the world.

We are, in fact, at a crossroads. How the United States handles the President's freedom agenda in the next few years will be critical for our security in the near and long term.

We all know the setbacks. Hamas has won elections. A radical Islamist won rigged elections in Iran. The radical Muslim Brotherhood picks up seats in elections in Egypt. I would argue that these were not real democratic elections, because they are not occurring under real democratic conditions. But the fact remains there are large segments of Islamic societies that, if given the chance, would use the ballot box to “vote once,” if you will, and create oppressive regimes that would deny democracy and freedom in the future.

The backlash is not confined to the Middle East, either. A venomous demagogue, Hugo Chávez, was elected in Venezuela. Amazingly, he recently received UNESCO's highest honors for freedom promotion—delivered by Fidel Castro himself! And one of Chávez's friends was elected last December in Bolivia on a similar platform of populist authoritarianism. Many people believe Chávez is trying to sway results as well in upcoming elections in Peru, Mexico, and Ecuador.

President Vladimir Putin is also backsliding on democracy. He has taken deliberate steps to limit the work of pro-democracy organizations, to restrain freedom of the press, to use Russia's oil and gas supplies as leverage on its neighbors, and to consolidate power in the central government.

China is more threatening toward Taiwan and attempting to constrain democracy in Hong Kong.

You can't find any better symbol of Beijing's anti-freedom agenda than the fact that it has gotten Yahoo and Google to agree to block Internet searches in China on the words “freedom” and “democracy.”

And in France, young people are demonstrating in the streets not for more freedom, but for more social protection from the state. They want to ensure that they cannot be fired from a job no matter how poorly they perform.

So let's not fool ourselves: Most people in the long run may yearn to be free, but an equally powerful desire for short-term social security can make them afraid and want to escape the uncertainties of freedom. We see this every day in our own country when liberals block Social Security reform or try to nationalize health care—which they know will consume more and more of the funding we will need to protect our freedoms.

Still, with all this backsliding, we should not give up on the cause. We are in fact winning the long war for freedom. Yet we should have a greater appreciation of freedom's complexities and its costs.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to be clearheaded. We need to make distinctions. We need to better understand this most American of all causes. Otherwise, we will underestimate its costs, confuse its goals and means, and perhaps even lose patience with it all together.

Next Steps on the March of Freedom

As Ronald Reagan said, “freedom is never more than one generation from extinction.” Indeed, it is true that, although the longing for liberty may be universal, it is not guaranteed. Its triumph in history is not inevitable. We conservatives are not historical determinists. However, we *are* optimists. We are confident that we can devise a workable course of action to ensure that the freedom that Lady Thatcher and President Reagan cherished survives not only for the next generation of Americans, but for other peoples as well.

So some principles are in order—some guidelines on how to think about spreading freedom around the world.

First, we must be clear about what we mean by the freedom agenda. This is a generational commit-

ment, the next step of the Reagan revolution writ large at home and abroad. It is, in fact, a commitment that Americans decades ago made when they liberated Europe from the Nazis and the Pacific from the Japanese imperialists. We understood then, as we must now, that we will ourselves be more free in the long run if other countries choose self-government that respects the rule of law, human and civil rights, religious freedom and economic freedom.

We must distinguish between elections and democracy, and between populism and freedom. Frankly, there may be times when supporting overseas elections may not be advisable. And not every populist movement desires liberty. Even despots and terrorists can get elected in some circumstances. We have only to look at Belarus or the Palestinian elections.

It is true that free and fair elections are important agents for change, but they are not everything. They must be supported by democratic institutions and the constitution of liberty. They must be buttressed by the rule of law, an independent judiciary and media, civil society, and pluralistic and responsible political parties. There must be protections for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, and freedom to own property.

Second, we must distinguish between our near- and long-term goals. We cannot accomplish everything overnight. We cannot do everything with the U.S. military. And we cannot do it alone. We will need allies, and in some cases we will need to work with regional and international organizations.

Third, we must face the challenges in the Middle East. That means making Iraq work! We intervened in Iraq to free ourselves of a future security threat. That was achieved with the removal of Saddam Hussein. But now we must succeed in helping the Iraqis establish a stable government, hopefully as the foundation for the evolution of freedom and democracy.

Likewise, we must continue to promote progress in Afghanistan, especially as tests of its new constitution—like the recent one on religious freedom—unfold. And we must prevent Iran from going nuclear. Of all the countries *least* responsible with

nuclear weapons, it is Iran—the country that most sponsors terrorism.

Fourth, we need to drastically improve public diplomacy. We can't leave the task of explaining our foreign policy to diplomats. We must overhaul our entire public diplomacy machinery to reach the peoples of the world with more facts, explanations, and justifications about why we do what we do. We should not confuse this effort with trying to convince people to like us as Americans or even to explain better who we are as a people. No, our public diplomacy should be focused on explaining why we take the positions we do and how they benefit not only us, but the entire world.

Fifth, we must support free trade and free markets by actively advocating policies that enable individuals to grab hold of opportunity and seek their prosperity. We need to do this in the Doha Round of trade negotiations, through free trade agreements, and by encouraging a Global Free Trade Association.

And last, we must get serious about Russia and China. They have joined forces to undermine our freedom agenda around the world, not only in cooperating on controlling energy supplies, but also in slowing our efforts to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb.

These are major efforts that cut across the activities of the Davis Institute and the Thatcher Center. They are our agenda—The Heritage Foundation's freedom agenda. And therein lies a strategy not only to provide more prosperity for the American people, but also to protect the homeland and even civilization as a whole from terrorism and totalitarianism.

Conclusion

What Ed Feulner wrote in the Introduction to *The March of Freedom* in 1998 still holds true today: We must continue the good fight until “freedom no longer needs champions.”

Ladies and gentlemen, that time is not likely to come in our lifetime, or even in that of our children. We must expect setbacks and even hard times. Our ancestors faced far more difficulties than we do today, and they surmounted them. The only way we can fail is if we lose confidence in ourselves.

This is not about weak-minded idealism or dreamy utopianism. Nor is it about arrogance or a “refusal to face reality,” as some of the President’s defeatist critics allege. No, it’s about what history has shown can work and what we as a people can do when we put our minds to it. We need to know our limitations, to be sure; and we should expect excellence from our leaders, and if they make mistakes, we should have the courage to tell them so.

But we should not lose faith in ourselves. Our history has shown that we are defeated only when we allow ourselves to be discouraged, as we did during the Vietnam War, or if we refuse to pick ourselves up and fight back when we are whipped—as George Washington refused to do after he was run out of New York City. You’ll recall that only a few months later he made quite a comeback, surprising the Hessians at Trenton and beating the British at Princeton. That turned the tide of the Revolutionary War, and the rest is, as they say, history.

One of Washington’s great strengths as a leader was seeing the world as it was, and not as he

wished it to be. That was the secret to his resolve. We need to be equally clearheaded about what faces us in the world today—and that is no less true in Iraq.

I have no idea whether the Iraqis will be able to form a stable government in the next few weeks. I can’t honestly tell you if real democracy will come to that country even in the next decade. But I can tell you this: If we were to pull out tomorrow, there is no chance at all of either democracy or security in the Middle East. The alternative is even more war and even more terrorism that will surely come to our shores again.

And that is, as Washington might say, the world as it is, not as we wish it to be.

—Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D., is Vice President of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies and Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation. These remarks were delivered at the annual meeting of the Heritage Board of Trustees in Miami, Florida.