**The National Endowment for (Meddling in) Democracy**

March 8, 2018

By Daniel Lazare

The American Conservative

“They’re meddling in our politics!” That’s the war cry of outraged Clintonites and neocons, who seem to think election interference is something that Russians do to us and we never, ever do to them.

**But meddling in other countries has been a favorite Washington pastime ever since William McKinley vowed to “Christianize” the Philippines in 1899**, despite the fact that most Filipinos were already Catholic. Today, an alphabet soup of U.S. agencies engage in political interference virtually around the clock, everyone from USAID to the VOA, RFE/RL to the DHS—respectively the **U.S. Agency for International Development, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and the Department of Homeland Security.** The last maintains some 2,000 U.S. employees in 70 countries to ensure that no one even thinks of doing anything bad to anyone over here.

Then there is the **National Endowment for Democracy**, a $180-million-a-year government-funded outfit that is a byword for American intrusiveness. The NED is an example of what might be called “speckism,” the tendency to go on about the speck in your neighbor’s eye without ever considering the plank in your own (see Matthew 7 for further details). Prohibited by law from interfering in domestic politics, **the endowment devotes endless energy to the democratic shortcomings of other countries, especially when they threaten American interests.**

In 1984, the year after it was founded, it channeled secret funds to a military-backed presidential candidate in **Panama,** gave $575,000 to a right-wing French student group, and delivered nearly half a million dollars to right-wing opponents of **Costa Rican** president Oscar Arias—because Arias had refused to go along with our anti-communist policy in Central America.

A year later, it gave $400,000 to the anti-Sandinista opposition in **Nicaragua** and then another $2 million in 1988. It used its financial muscle in the mid-1990s to persuade a right-wing party to draw up a “**Contract with Slovakia**” modeled on Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America; persuaded free marketeers to do the same in Mongolia; gave nearly $1 million to **Venezuelan rightists who went on to mount a short-lived putsch against populist leader Hugo Chavez in 2002**; and then funded **anti-Russian** presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine in 2005, and the later anti-Russian coup there in 2014.

What all this had to do with democracy is unclear, although the **NED’s role in advancing U.S. imperial interests is beyond doubt.** Rather than “my country right or wrong,” its operating assumption is “my country right, full stop.” If Washington says Leader X is out of line, then the endowment will snap to attention and fund his opponents.

If it says he’s cooperative and well-behaved, meaning he supports free markets and financial deregulation and doesn’t dally with any of America’s military rivals, it will do the opposite. It doesn’t matter if, like Putin, the alleged dictator swept the last election with 63.6 percent of the vote and was declared the “clear” winner by the European Union and the U.S. State Department. If he’s “expanding [Russia’s] influence in the Middle East,” as NED President Carl Gershman puts it, then he’s a “strongman” and an “autocrat” and must go.

America’s own shortcomings meanwhile go unnoticed. Meanwhile, the NED, as it nears the quarter-century mark, is a bundle of contradictions: a group that **claims to be private even though it is almost entirely publicly funded, a group that says democracy “must be indigenous” even though it backs U.S.-imposed regime change, a group that claims to be “bipartisan” but whose board is packed with ideologically homogeneous hawks like Elliott Abrams, Anne Applebaum, and Victoria Nuland,** the latter of whom served as assistant secretary of state during the coup in Ukraine.

Historically speaking, the NED feels straight out of the early 1980s, when Washington was struggling to overcome “Vietnam Syndrome” in order to rev up the Cold War. The recovery process began with Ronald Reagan declaring at his first inaugural, “The crisis that we are facing today [requires] our best effort, and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds, to believe that together with God’s help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. After all, why shouldn’t we believe that? We are Americans.”

The U.S. was apparently not just a nation, but something like a religion as well. Additional input for the new NED in 1983 came from spymaster William Casey, CIA director from 1981 to 1987, who, after the intelligence scandals of the 70s, had swung around to the view that certain covert operations were better spun off into what the British call a “quango,” a quasi-non-government organization. “Obviously we here should not get out in front in the development of such an organization,” he cautioned, “nor do we wish to appear to be a sponsor or advocate.” It was a case of covert backing for an overt turn.

Others who helped lay the groundwork were:

Neoconservative ideologue Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan’s ambassador to the UN, famous for her argument that **“traditional authoritarian governments” should be supported against “revolutionary autocracies” because they are “less repressive”** and whose UN aide **Carl Gershman** would become NED president and serves to this day

Human rights Democrats who believe that America’s job is to enforce democratic standards throughout the world, however idiosyncratic and self-serving they may be

Old-fashioned pluralists who maintained that the power to succeed existed in different groups’ working separately toward a common goal, in this case, spreading democracy abroad

The result was an ideologically lethal package that assumed whatever Americans did was democratic because God is on our side, that old-fashioned CIA skullduggery was passé, and that the time had come to switch to more open means. “We should not have to do this kind of work covertly,” Gershman later explained. “We saw that in the 60s, and that’s why it has been discontinued. We have not had the capability of doing this, and that’s why the endowment was created.”

In the interests of pluralism, the NED adopted a quadripartite structure with separate wings for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the **AFL-CIO,** the GOP, and the **Democrats**, each working separately yet somehow together.

Pluralism helped tamp down debate and also shore up support on Capitol Hill. Liberal Democrats were initially skeptical due to the NED’s neocon tilt. Michigan Congressman **John Conyers Jr**. tried to kill it in 1985, and The Nation magazine complained a few years later that the group served as little more than “a pork barrel for a small circle of Republican and Democratic party activists, **conservative trade unionists**, and free marketeers who use endowment money to run their own mini State Department.”

But when the House voted unexpectedly to defund the agency in 1993, beneficiaries sprang to its defense. Major-league pundits like George Will, David Broder, and Abe Rosenthal “went into overdrive,” according to The Nation, as did the heavy hitters of the Washington Post editorial page. **Vice President Walter Mondale**, a member of the NED board of directors, worked the phones along with **Lane Kirkland**, George Meany’s successor as head of the AFL-CIO.

Ronald Reagan wrote a letter, while Senators Richard Lugar, Orrin Hatch, and John McCain pitched in as well. So did prominent liberals like **Paul Wellstone, John Kerry, Tom Harkin, Ted Kennedy, and Carol Moseley-Braun.** These people normally couldn’t bear to be in the same with one another, but they were of one mind when it came to **America’s divine right to intervene in other nations’ affairs.**

The anti-NED forces didn’t stand a chance. Twenty-five years later, the endowment is again under attack, although this time from the right. Gershman started the ball rolling when, in October 2016, he interrupted his busy pro-democracy schedule to dash off a column in the Washington Post accusing Russia of using “email hackers, information trolls and open funding of political parties to sow discord” and of “even intervening in the U.S. presidential election.” Since there was no question whom Russia was intervening for, there was no doubt what the article amounted to: a thinly veiled swipe at a certain orange-haired candidate.

Never one to forget a slight, Trump got his revenge last month by proposing to slash the NED budget by 60 percent. The response was the same as in 1993, only more so. Uber-hawk Senator **Lindsey Graham** pronounced the cut “dead on arrival,” adding: “This budget destroys soft power, it puts our diplomats at risk, and **it’s going nowhere.”**

Gershman said it would mean “sending a signal far and wide that the United States is turning its back on supporting brave people who share our values,” while Washington Post columnist Josh Rogin moaned that the administration was guilty of an “assault on democracy promotion.” The ever-voluble Democratic Congresswoman **Nita Lowey** accused the administration of “dismantling an agency that advances critical goals.”

“The work our government does to promote democratic values abroad is at the heart of who we are as a country,” added Senator **John McCain.** America is democracy, democracy is America, and, as history’s first global empire, **the U.S. has an unqualified right to do unto others what others may not do unto the U.S.** Only a “Siberian candidate,” “a traitor,” or “a Russian stooge” could possibly disagree.

Daniel Lazare is the author of The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from The Nation to Le Monde Diplomatique, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as Jacobin and The American Conservative

**The NED’s Useful Idiots**

by Joyce Nelson

June 15, 2018

On Friday, June 8, MSNBC’s **Rachel Maddow** augmented her nightly Russiagate fetish by **extolling the merits of the National Endowment for Democracy** (NED), telling her huge audience that the NED, created in the 1980s by the Ronald Reagan administration, still does the “non-partisan hard work around the world, of promoting small D democracy and promoting the institutions of civil society that any culture needs in order to have a functioning democracy.”

By Wednesday, June 13, at least one progressive writer, **Bill Berkowitz**, had challenged Maddow’s viewpoint on NED as “naive”. He wrote: “Whatever else can be said about the NED and its affiliated organizations, it is hard to back up Maddow’s naive claim about its work re ‘promoting small D democracy.’ Because amid whatever success it may have had, the **NED is also notable for supporting anti-democratic organizations, and contributing to the overthrow of democratically elected governments. Along the way, it has provided a glut of disinformation, misinformation, and downright fake news in pursuit of its mission**.” [1]

Berkowitz correctly noted that NED and its spinoff institutions – the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, the International American Institute to Promote Private Enterprise, the International American Institute to Promote Labor Rights, and others – receive hundreds of millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars every year, and **largely use that money for “destabilizing governments”.**

Quoting USA Today columnist James Bovard, Berkowitz wrote: “**The organization [NED] ‘has been caught interfering in elections in France, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and many other nations,’ Bovard pointd out. ‘NED’s operatives helped spark bloody coup attempts in Venezuela [1999 to 2004] and Haiti; their efforts also helped topple the elected government in Ukraine in 2014 and ignite the ongoing civil war’,”**

As Tony Cartalucci wrote two years ago, “One of NED’s subsidiaries, Freedom House, is admittedly funded by multinational corporations including AT&T, defense contractors BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman, industrial equipment exporter Caterpillar, tech-giants Google and Facebook, and financiers including Goldman Sachs. NED itself – according to a 2013 disclosure – is funded by among others, **Chevron, Coca-Cola, Goldman Sachs, Google, Micrsoft, and the US Chamber of Commerce.** What do these corporations have to do with ‘the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world’?”

Rachel Maddow isn’t the only one who is “naive” about the National Endowment for Democracy and its spinoff institutions. Most North American know little if anything about them, and when they hear of an organization called Freedom House, they innocently assume that its title means it is benevolent. No doubt, the NED prefers us to remain such “useful idiots”.

But as writer William Blum has observed, “The NED, like the CIA before it, calls what it does supporting democracy. **The governments and movements whom the NED targets call it destabilization.”**

Currently, NED’s affiliated institutions **are funding the “regime change” protests in Nicaragua and Venezuela, along with destabilizing efforts in China and Russia.**

If nothing else, Rachel Maddow’s “naive” commentary about the NED has highlighted the prevailing North American ignorance about these Orwellian institutions that for the past thirty years have been causing chaos and war in the name of “freedom” and “democracy” promotion.

Fortunately, esteemed writer F. William Engdahl (based in Germany) has just published an astonishing book that provides much of the history of the NED and other private NGOs that have sparked so-called “color revolutions” (the Orange Revolution, the Rose Revolution, etc.) around the world. Focusing on the Orwellian doublethink, or cognitive dissonance, involved in “democracy promotion” that is anything but democratic, Engdahl’s book is entitled ***Manifest Destiny: Democracy as Cognitive Dissonance*** (mine.Books, Wiesbaden) and it is essential reading for everyone attempting to understand current events.

Engdahl has filled in much of the missing history of events like the “Arab Spring” and movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, but I was especially impressed with his chapters on the rape of Russia in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Western financiers and billionaires proceeded to loot Russia on a gargantuan scale until 1999, when the new Prime Minister Vladimir Putin put a stop to it. Not surprisingly, Putin has been hated ever since by the wealthy elites intent on unipolar corporate rule.

In the midst of an escalating Cold War 2.0, let me urge readers to buy this book and learn some very illuminating historical background. Our media have excised much of what we need to know in order to understand rapidly evolving geopolitics, but this book goes a long way to filling in those gaps. Engdahl’s Manifest Destiny is a tremendous book that took great courage to write. It deserves a large readership, especially in North America.

Joyce Nelson’s sixth book, Beyond Banksters: Resisting the New Feudalism, can be ordered at: http://watershedsentinel.ca/banksters.

**Trump is gutting the National Endowment for Democracy, and that’s a good thing**

By Stephen Kinzer March 14, 2018

Thank you, President Trump! Finally you have made a foreign policy recommendation that is logical, overdue, and in the long-term interest of the United States. Congress will probably reject it, but you deserve credit for making the effort.

Trump’s budget for the coming fiscal year proposes to gut the National Endowment for Democracy by cutting two-thirds of its budget. The endowment is one of the main instruments by which the United States subverts and undermines foreign governments. In a less Orwellian world, it might be called the “National Endowment for Attacking Democracy.” Cutting the budget would signal that we are re-thinking our policy of relentlessly interfering in the politics of other countries.

That kind of interference is the National Endowment’s mission. Whenever the government of another country challenges or defies the United States, **questions the value of unrestrained capitalism, limits the rights of foreign corporations, or adopts policies that we consider socialist**, the Endowment swings into action. It pours over **$170 million** each year into labor unions, political factions, student clubs, civic groups, and other organizations dedicated to protecting or installing pro-American regimes. From Central America to Central Asia, it is a vivid and familiar face of US intervention.

President Ronald Reagan established the program in 1983, following years of scandals that tarnished the Central Intelligence Agency. Soon it took over many of the tasks that the CIA used to perform. When the United States wanted to interfere in the Italian election of 1948, for example, the CIA did the job. Decades later, when Washington sought to push its favored candidate into the presidency of Nicaragua, our instrument was the National Endowment for Democracy. More recently, it has sought to influence elections in Mongolia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. “A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA,” one of the organization’s founders explained during the 1990s.

By its own account, the Endowment is “on the leading edge of democratic struggles everywhere,” donating money to “groups abroad who are working for democratic goals.” Its central principle is that the only proper way to run a country is the American way. Governments that disagree become its targets.

Because its job is to shape the course of other countries, the Endowment has become a darling of Washington’s regime-change crowd. Shortly after ordering invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, President George W. Bush pushed to double its budget. That made sense, because bombing and organizing “peaceful” revolutions are two ways of achieving the same goal: forcing countries to bend to our will. **Both reflect our insistence on judging foreign governments, deciding which may survive and which must be attacked.**

Leaders of the Endowment include some of our country’s most militant interventionists. One of its board members is **Elliott Abrams**, who helped direct anti-Sandinista projects in **Nicaragua** during the 1980s and was later convicted of lying to Congress about the Iran-Contra affair. Another is **Victoria Nuland**, who as assistant secretary of state in 2016 flew to **Ukraine** to encourage protesters to overthrow their government.

Many grants are funneled through two sub-groups that reflect the bipartisan Washington consensus favoring intervention in foreign countries. One, the International Republican Institute, is run by a board headed by Senator John McCain, who never saw a war he didn’t like and salivates at the thought of deposing unfriendly regimes. Its counterpart, the National Democratic Institute, is headed by Madeleine Albright, who famously pronounced the principle that the United States should guide the world because “we are the indispensable nation, we stand tall and we see further than other countries.”

Abrams, Nuland, McCain, and Albright exemplify the interventionist mindset that has brought the United States and the world so much pain and grief. The National Endowment for Democracy is one of their cherished projects. McCain protested the proposed budget cut by saying group’s mission “is at the heart of who we are as a country.” So it is.

As soon as the leftist **Hugo Chavez** was elected president of Venezuela 20 years ago, the Endowment began **pouring money into Venezuelan opposition groups**. It has also subsidized groups working to undermine Presidents **Oscar Arias** of Costa Rica, **Jean-Bertrand Aristide** of Haiti, and **Manuel Zelaya** of Honduras, all of whom committed the sin of pursuing independent foreign policies. In 2013 the Endowment issued a report saying that “Russia remains the main priority country.” Soon afterward, the Russian government announced that it was banning the Endowment from operating on its territory.

In response, the organization has intensified its efforts build anti-Russia movements in nearby countries, focusing on **Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.** It provides training material and advice on how to publish newspapers, run computer networks, and organize political meetings. Once a group agrees to accept American money, the **Endowment hails it as an “independent” agent of freedom and liberation.**

American politicians and news outlets are howling about Russian interference in our last presidential election. Against this background, the National Endowment for Democracy seems more glaringly hypocritical than ever. Promoting democracy is a wonderful idea. We should begin at home. **If we want other countries not to meddle in our politics, we should refrain from meddling in theirs.**

Stephen Kinzer is a senior fellow at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University

**Trump administration wants to dismantle Ronald Reagan’s ‘infrastructure of democracy’**

By Josh Rogin

Columnist

 The Washington Post

March 4, 2018

Speaking to the British Parliament in 1982, President Ronald Reagan called on the United States “to foster the infrastructure of democracy” to help ensure that **people around the world were empowered to determine their own fates**. Now, at this increasingly fraught moment for freedom around the world, the Trump administration wants to dismantle that infrastructure.

Buried in the State Department’s fiscal 2019 budget request is a proposal not only to slash the budget of the National Endowment for Democracy but also to disassemble its relationships with its core institutes, including the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute. For the NED and those institutes, the proposal is an assault not only on their organizations but also on the **pro- ­democracy mission they are dedicated to.**

“If implemented, the proposal would gut the program, force crippling layoffs and the symbolic meaning would also be shattering, sending a signal far and wide that the United States **is turning its back on supporting brave people who share our values,**” said NED President Carl Gershman.

The Trump administration proposal would allow the NED to continue issuing small grants but move funding of its core institutes to the State Department, where the IRI and NDI would have to compete with private contractors. The organizations involved argue that keeping funding decisions at arm’s length from the State Department allows the NED network to do things on the edges of the pro-democracy movement that the U.S. government can’t or won’t, **such as supporting Chinese dissidents in ways that upset Beijing.**

“**USAID, the State Department and the endowment are a three-legged stool**,” said NDI President Kenneth Wollack. “Dismantling one of those legs would undermine a fundamental pillar of U.S. foreign policy — a policy that represents a convergence of our interests and values.”

The proposal initially came out of the Office of Management and Budget, even though the State Department did not formally ask for it. A senior OMB official told me the administration supports the NED’s mission but wants to consolidate the funding streams to improve oversight and accountability. But the White House didn’t provide any evidence that the current model is inefficient.

In December, five U.S. senators wrote to OMB Director Mick Mulvaney to warn that the proposal would run afoul of the 1983 law setting up the funding structure and would “undermine the will of its founders, including President Reagan and a supportive Congress.” Lawmakers simply don’t believe the Trump administration’s assertion that it is pro-democracy.

“This is just another example of the Trump administration using ‘restructuring’ or ‘realignment’ as a euphemism for dismantling an agency that advances critical goals,” said Rep. Nita M. Lowey (N.Y.), the ranking Democrat of the House Appropriations subcommittee on State, foreign operations and related programs.

Trump officials often affirm the need to support democracy, but the administration’s actions tell a different story. The State Department considered removing the reference to democracy from its mission statement. It downgraded U.S. participation in the Community of Democracies. Nobody has been nominated to be undersecretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights or assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor. And so on.

**It’s likely that Congress will reject the White House proposal to dismantle the NED**. But the Trump administration’s assault on democracy promotion can be expected to continue. The effects of it are already evident: Dictatorships are presenting their model as preferable for the developing world. Human rights abuses are rising. Basic freedoms are under attack. The signals that the U.S. government sends have real effects for millions of ­people struggling for dignity and self- ­determination.

It’s not that Trump’s people don’t believe democracy is the best system; **they just don’t believe it’s America’s business to push democracy abroad**. Trump’s otherwise hawkish National Security Strategy acknowledges that America’s rivals are attacking the idea of democracy, but it says the United States simply “serves as an inspiration” in resisting those attacks.

The struggle to support democracy is being fought at home as well. Last week, the plaza outside the Russian Embassy was renamed for Boris Nemtsov, the Russian dissident murdered in Moscow three years ago. Congress couldn’t pass the bill authorizing the change because of opposition from Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.). But the D.C. Council stepped in and got it done.

More broadly, the battle over the NED grants is a small but important piece of the ongoing struggle over America’s mission. “The work our government does to promote democratic values abroad is at the heart of who we are as a country,” Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), the chairman of the IRI’s board of directors, told me.

Are we a country that looks out for ourselves only, or one that will advocate for the oppressed in the nations our families escaped to come here? If we are the latter, then undermining infrastructure that Reagan established to execute that mission amounts to abandoning not only our interests and our values but also our very identity.

**Trump’s Regime Change: Soros-style**

Wayne MADSEN | 05.07.2018

Strategic Culture Foundation

To listen to Donald Trump and his supporters, billionaire international hedge fund mogul **George Soros** was an inherent part of America’s “deep state” machinery, who financed and directed “regime change” operations around the world. Under Trump, the State Department reportedly severed links to Soros and his organizations, but something strange ensued. The Trump administration is still engaged in regime change operations around the world and, furthermore, it is using some of Soros’s favorite entities, such as the **National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to install pro-American governments in Nicaragua, Venezuela, and other countries.**

Simply put, America’s “deep state” has not gone anywhere. It is thriving under a U.S. president who revels in opaqueness and unaccountability.

NED has pulled out all the stops to overthrow the socialist governments of Venezuela and Nicaragua. These efforts recently received a boost after **Colombia** elected right-wing narcoterrorist-affiliated **Ivan Duque** as president. Duque recently met with Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who has become the new de facto leader of the Republican Party’s branch of NED, the International Republican Institute (IRI), following Senator John McCain being sidelined with brain cancer.

Rubio has called on Trump to subject new sanctions on the Nicaraguan Government, in addition to U.S. visa bans already imposed by Washington on Nicaraguan government officials, including members of their families. Rubio is tied closely to members of the Nicaraguan opposition, including several wealthy Nicaraguan businessmen who maintain expensive homes in south Florida and who contribute handsomely to Rubio’s political campaign coffers.

The other Republican Senator who has taken up the anti-Sandinista cause is Texas’s Ted Cruz. In June 2018, Cruz and Rubio hosted a group of Nicaraguan right-wing “civil society” activists in Washington, DC. “Civil society” is a notorious code phrase employed by Soros political meddlers around the world. **The Nicaraguans’ trip to Washington had been financed by the bank accounts of NED,** flush with anti-Nicaragua cash provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), a notorious cipher for the Central Intelligence Agency.

One of the largest recipients of anti-Sandinista USAID assistance in Nicaragua is the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP). Its Managua operations and structure **resemble the typical CIA front employed in Latin America’s dark past by Langley to disrupt political systems and economies.**

Calling out the Trump administration’s embrace of neo-conservative-style regime change in **Nicaragua**, the European Committee of Solidarity with the Popular Sandinista Revolution stated, that the Trump administration’s actions are “a new attempt from the right-wing and U.S. imperialism against a sovereign and independent free nation and against it's democratically elected president, Daniel Ortega." The European groups singled out “neo-liberal” forces, which include Soros’s regime change entities, in working hand-in-glove with the Trump administration in “attacking frontally” the Ortega Executive and the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

Trump and his alt-right surrogates rail against the influence of Soros on the international stage. Yet, Trump, a con-man and simpleton without peers among the crop of current world leaders, simply projects on to others for what he, himself, is guilty. Complementing Trump’s actions to topple the Daniel Ortega government in Nicaragua, is the Soros-funded Global Witness. The London- and Washington-based group has initiated a civil strife campaign among the Miskito indigenous people of the Northern Caribbean Autonomous Region. NED and Global Witness provocateurs are trying to convince the **Miskitos**, targets of similar manipulation by the CIA during the Contra-led civil war of the 1980s, that the Ortega government opposes indigenous rights, when the exact opposite is true.

Soros and Trump administration are coordinating their efforts to **fund anti-government Nicaraguan groups in the public sector, labor unions, student groups, religious organizations, and media.** The same scenario is being enacted by Soros and Trump in **Venezuela,** where the political opposition, flush with money from NED and Soros-funded groups, have all but paralyzed Venezuela’s political system and economy.

Trump, who has lied about his opposition to George W. Bush’s invasion and occupation of Iraq, appears prepared to conduct his own invasion of Venezuela. According to a July 4, 2018 Associated Press report out of Bogota, Colombia, in August 2017, Trump, in an Oval Office discussion with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Adviser Lt. General H. R. McMaster about increasing sanctions on Venezuela, asked the two advisers why the United States just couldn’t invade Venezuela and overthrow its president, Nicolas Maduro. Trump told both officials, who warned against an invasion, that it worked for **Ronald Reagan in Grenada** in 1983 and **George H. W. Bush in Panama** in 1989.

Trump continued to harbor a desire to invade Venezuela, pressing the issue with Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos at a dinner held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly plenary session in September 2017. Also cajoled by Trump at the dinner were presidents Michel Temer of **Brazil**, Juan Carlos Varela of **Panama**, and **Peru** Pedro Kuczynski of Peru. All four Latin American presidents refused to join Trump in an invasion of Venezuela and they warned him that the United States would face unprecedented blowback across the Western Hemisphere from such an action. **Argentine** president Mauricio Macri, a real estate partner of Trump in a building project in Buenos Aires, **joined his right-wing Latin American colleagues in warning Trump against military action against Venezuela.**

Nicolas Maduro, Jr., the son of Venezuela’s president, using language only in insane bully like Trump could understand, told the Venezuelan Constituent Assembly, “If Venezuela were attacked, the rifles will arrive in New York, Mr. Trump . . . We will take the White House.”

Latin America has witnessed a rightward turn in the last few years, with right-wing governments taking power in **Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras**. The July 1, 2018 election of left-wing populist **Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador** (AMLO) as president of Mexico reversed the trend in one of Latin America’s most powerful countries. An all-but-inevitable confrontation between AMLO and Trump will provide breathing room for Nicaragua, Venezuela, and two other joint Trump-Soros targets, **Bolivia and Cuba**. AMLO, unlike his hapless two predecessors, is no shrinking violet when it comes to dealing with the “gringos” of the North. A face off is certainly inevitable over Trump’s splitting apart the families of asylum-seekers from Central America and Colombia.

On the other hand, Trump has an ally in Colombia’s Duque, a right-winger with strong links to that nation’s paramilitary narco-terrorists, individuals who are willing to launch military forays into Venezuela for the right price.

Trump’s supporters in the alt-right community are fond of claiming that Trump is battling against some nebulous and amorphous American “deep state” that seeks to change foreign governments at the flip of a switch. Now, these same alt-right forces are openly calling for “regime change” in Iran. Their heroes include former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, both of whom recently addressed a meeting of the anti-Iranian cult-like terrorist organization, Mohajedin-e-Khalq (MEK), at their annual confab in Paris. Another MEK supporter, Trump National Security Adviser **John Bolton**, is leading Trump’s efforts to bring about regime changes in countries around the world, including Iran.

On December 7, 2016, president-elect Trump delivered a speech in North Carolina that laid out his foreign policy. He declared: “We will stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about, that we shouldn’t be involved with.” Trump’s words, along with his other rhetoric, were and remain as hollow as his personal integrity and ethics. But they are music to the ears of the military-intelligence-industrial “deep state” that Trump claims he abhors.

**NED according to NED**

**[Material from the NED home page illustrates that NED is active all over the world in spreading USA’s influence and “values” – Martin Hittelman]**

*The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world. Each year,* ***NED makes more than 1,600 grants to support the projects of non-governmental groups abroad who are working for democratic goals in more than 90 countries.***

*Since its founding in 1983, the Endowment has remained on the leading edge of democratic struggles everywhere, while evolving into a multifaceted institution that is a hub of activity, resources and intellectual exchange for activists, practitioners and scholars of democracy the world over.*

*A Unique Institution*

*NED is a unique institution. The Endowment’s* ***nongovernmental character*** *gives it a flexibility that makes it possible to work in some of the world’s most difficult circumstances, and to respond quickly* ***when there is an opportunity for political change****. NED is dedicated to fostering the growth of a wide range of democratic institutions abroad, including* ***political parties, trade unions, free markets and business organizations****, as well as the many elements of a vibrant civil society that ensure human rights, an independent media, and the rule of law.*

*This well-rounded approach responds to the diverse aspects of democracy and has proved both practical and effective throughout NED’s history.* ***Funded largely by the U.S. Congress,*** *the support NED gives to groups abroad sends an important message of solidarity to many democrats who are working for freedom and human rights, often in obscurity and isolation.*

***Who NED Funds***

*NED funds only nongovernmental organizations, which may include* ***civic organizations, associations, independent media, and other similar organizations****.*

*NED encourages applications from organizations working in diverse environments* ***including newly established democracies, semi-authoritarian countries, highly repressive societies and countries undergoing democratic transitions.***

*NED does not make grants to individuals, governmental bodies, or state-supported institutions such as public universities.*

*What Type of Programs NED Supports*

*NED is interested in proposals from local, independent organizations for* ***nonpartisan programs*** *that seek to:*

*Promote and defend human rights and the rule of law*

*Support freedom of information and independent media*

*Strengthen democratic ideas and values*

*Promote accountability and transparency*

*Strengthen civil society organizations*

*Strengthen democratic political processes and institutions*

*Promote civic education*

*Support democratic conflict resolution*

*Promote freedom of association*

***Strengthen a broad-based market economy***

***LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN***

*For Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016 was no ordinary year. The signing of the peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC and the passing of Cuba’s dictator, Fidel Castro, were among the seminal events that will shape the political landscape for years to come.*

*Significant developments in regional bodies reflected deeper changes in the hemisphere’s commitment to democratic governance and principles. Under new leadership, the Organization of American States (OAS) for the first time invoked the Inter-American Democratic Charter* ***against the Venezuelan government*** *for the systematic alteration of the country’s constitutional order. The new leadership in the OAS and Mercosur has shown a determination to reassert the organizations’ roles as institutional safeguards for democracy and human rights in the Americas.*

*The region overall, however, continues to face broad challenges. The erosion of democratic institutions stemming from non-democratic governments, corruption, and transnational organized crime is ongoing. In 2016, human rights defenders, environmental and community activists, journalists, and media owners were harassed and even murdered by hostile federal and local governments and criminal actors. In the face of these challenges, NED grantees continued to work fearlessly to advance human rights and improve democratic governance.*

*After many obstacles and delays,* ***Haiti*** *finally held presidential elections. Jovenel Moïse – who was former President Martelly’s handpicked successor – won with more than 50 percent of the vote, averting a run-off. Yet unresolved electoral tensions coupled with weak and fractured civil society and media sectors do not bode well for Haiti’s democratic stability. NED supported programs encouraging the participation and inclusion of youth and women in civic and political spaces, increasing citizen oversight and demand for human rights and the rule of law, and fostering dialogue and conflict mediation as an avenue to resolving political differences.*

*Support for* ***Mexico****’s current administration has been weakened by corruption, human rights violations, and failure to halt organized crime, which have stalled the government’s reform agenda. NED grantees worked to assist victims of human rights violations; promote access to information and oversight of government institutions; and foster the political inclusion of vulnerable groups.*

***Guatemala*** *has regained some stability after an intense period of citizen mobilization and judicial activism in 2015 that resulted in the resignations of numerous government officials. In addition to significant challenges to transparency and accountability, Guatemala struggled with some of the highest homicide and citizen insecurity rates in the region. In 2016, the Endowment supported civil society organizations that promoted government transparency and accountability, citizen oversight of social programs at the national level, and environmental justice in the Petén region of the country.*

***Honduras*** *also faces extremely high levels of violence, citizen insecurity, and corruption, as well as widespread poverty. NED-funded programs focused on promoting dialogue and consensus building among different political and social actors; engaging youth leadership on conflict prevention; citizen monitoring of the legislative process; access to information; and government transparency.*

***Nicaragua*** *experienced a significant regression toward authoritarianism in 2016. In anticipation of the November 2016 presidential and legislative elections, the Ortega-controlled Supreme Court stripped the main opposition coalition of legal representation and all opposition parliamentarians were removed from their seats and replaced by government loyalists. Ortega appointed his wife as his vice-presidential running mate, and both competed virtually unopposed and with no international or domestic electoral observation. NED supported initiatives* ***that helped democratic forces defend democratic space in Nicaragua,*** *encouraged greater participation of women and youth, sustained freedom of expression, and promoted civic values.*

*In* ***Argentina****, the government achieved a major victory with the September 2016 approval of the country’s first access to public information law, which will enhance government accountability and transparency. The new government has pledged to uphold international human rights and democracy standards, and NED partners are optimistic that this is an opportunity to strengthen democratic institutions, including restoring an independent judiciary and the rule of law, promoting transparency, and sustaining democratic efforts throughout the region.*

*In* ***Bolivia****, President Evo Morales lost a referendum that would have allowed him to run for a fourth consecutive term. However, the government continued to restrict space for civil society participation, while the economic downturn led to an increase in social protests. NED partners focused on promoting the rights of women and indigenous peoples, media independence, independent socioeconomic analysis, and political engagement among youth.*

*After 60 years of armed conflict, the* ***Colombian*** *government and the FARC reached an agreement for peace. In response to these developments, NED partners began to focus on programs for a post-conflict era, which includes projects to oversee the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms; promote anticorruption initiatives at the local, regional, and national levels, as well as civic education and leadership initiatives targeting Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations. In addition, the Endowment continued to sustain innovative digital platforms promoting investigative journalism to inform citizens about loc****al and national politics.***

***In Ecuador,*** *the administration of President Rafael Correa continued to concentrate power in the executive branch and limit the independence of the legislature and the judiciary. NED supported organizations that monitored violations of human rights and freedom of expression, provided independent news and information, worked to increase the transparency of the judiciary, and promoted government accountability at the local level.*

***Paraguay*** *continued to face numerous challenges to its democratic development that contributed to low support for democracy and a low level of citizen interest in politics as a whole. NED sustained organizations focused on enhancing transparency and accountability, improving access to justice, fostering youth participation, and promoting the consolidation of the country’s emerging civil society.*

***MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA***

*In most of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), prospects for democratic progress and reform were devastated by mounting turmoil, conflict, and terrorism in 2016. Security and stability have become urgent needs, eclipsing the government reform agenda in almost every country.*

*Civil society throughout MENA – including a wave of* ***newborn civic groups, coalitions, and political organizations*** *– struggled on. Despite their inexperience and limited capacity, a younger generation of organizations remained committed to a long-term vision of reform and renewal. They persisted in their work of formulating alternatives to authoritarianism and mobilizing a wide range of social sectors, including small business and community-based groups.*

*Afghanistan remained a high NED priority, as the country’s nascent civil society faced more challenges and fewer opportunities. In response, NED supported groups promoting national coordination on shared priorities, independent media and free access to information, democratic ideas and values – including the compatibility of Islam and democracy, the rule of law, civic education, and raising awareness of women’s rights under Afghan law.*

*Despite threats from extremist groups,* ***Tunisia’****s transition proved resilient and its civil society groups remained highly committed to enhancing democratic gains. NED expanded its support to include a wide range of civil society initiatives on good governance, transparency and accountability of public institutions, and pluralism.*

*Morocco’s modest political reforms remained on course. Its newly elected parliament and recent legislation provided civil society groups additional space for advocacy and effective participation in local policy-making. NED expanded its support to civil society, engaging youth in decision-making and the policy process, and creating coalitions to tackle legislative reform and government accountability.*

*While the* ***West Bank and Gaza*** *are challenged by political stagnation and security concerns, NED grantees persisted in their efforts to foster meaningful public demand for political reform and active citizen participation. In* ***Jordan****, NED grantees have been addressing ethnic and religious cleavages, and building bridges between communities threatened by these divisions.*

***Lebanon*** *struggled to cope with a million Syrian refugees while addressing public demands to fix endemic corruption and public mismanagement. The Endowment supported* ***independent civic actors*** *as they championed evidence-based monitoring of national and local government, expanded space for independent journalism and alternative voices, and promoted youth leadership in civic and political spheres.*

*With NED support, human rights defenders from Iran, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia used digital technology to raise awareness, break state monopolies over mass communications, and promote new media organizations, bloggers, and citizen journalists.*

*Egypt moved aggressively against foreign assistance to independent civil society groups. In March 2016, the government reopened its criminal case targeting foreign organizations and foreign-funded* ***Egyptian*** *NGOs. This further quashed dissent as reform-minded Egyptians feared becoming targets of the state security apparatus. In response, NED extended a lifeline of support to embattled local rights and media groups, and helped to connect local rights groups through regional programs.* ***NED support prioritized efforts to address systemic governance failures and weak local and national institutions.***

*In* ***Turkey****, independent media and civil society faced a wholesale rollback of democratic norms and a campaign of reprisals against peaceful dissent. NED increased its support to meet needs focusing on platforms for citizen-state dialogue, anti-discrimination campaigns, and* ***independent journalism****.*

*NED expanded support for initiatives to foster solidarity among civic-minded actors across the region and create opportunities to learn about and apply innovative approaches to tackling governance challenges.*

***Asia***

*Across Asia – a vast and politically diverse region – democratic norms and ideals faced intensified pressure in entrenched authoritarian states and established democracies alike. Governments, including electoral democracies, introduced laws and regulations to control civil society and pursued law and order policies at the expense of fundamental human rights. Extremist groups used violence and intimidation to limit free speech and association, and majoritarian nationalist groups grew in strength and number. The authoritarian states increased their efforts to offer a counterbalance to the establishment of democratic norms in the geopolitics of the region.*

*Despite these challengess, the region as a whole remains balanced among authoritarian governments, vibrant democracies, and partially free states. In all but the most authoritarian environments, opposition parties, civil society organizations and independent media continue to push back against the authoritarian resurgence.*

*The Endowment’s Asia program concentrated its resources in five key countries:* ***Pakistan, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, China (including Tibet and Xinjiang), and North Korea****. Not only do these five countries each face daunting domestic challenges, but their democratic prospects also have repercussions for the region as a whole.*

*In addition to these priority countries, the Endowment invested heavily in efforts to strengthen regional cooperation among the seven leading Asian democracies in defense of democratic norms and values.*

*In* ***Pakistan****, Endowment funding for human rights and democracy is increasingly important. The combination of shrinking civil society space, ongoing threats from extremist groups, and the retreat of international support for democratic reform is taking its toll.*

*Elsewhere in South Asia, the Endowment expanded its work in* ***Sri Lanka*** *to capitalize on the 2015 elections that ended a decade of increasingly authoritarian rule. The Endowment concentrated on reinforcing democratic values and ideas, promoting respect for human rights and accountability, and empowering citizens to engage in the democratic process. The Endowment also supported modest programs in* ***Nepal and Bangladesh.***

*In Southeast Asia, now one of the least democratic regions in the world, the Endowment expanded its efforts in* ***Thailand,*** *supported robust programs in* ***Burma****, and continued to engage in* ***Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia****.*

*In the three years since it seized power,* ***Thailand’****s military has shown little interest in loosening restrictions on civil and political rights or fast tracking a return to civilian rule. The Endowment’s efforts in Thailand have concentrated on monitoring and reporting on civil and political rights abuses,* ***fostering civil engagement and political participation,*** *and bolstering the capacity of civil society groups that represent a diverse range of citizen voices.*

*Meanwhile, in the* ***Philippines,*** *the Duterte administration represents a sharp break from the Aquino administration and its emphasis on good governance. The Endowment focused its work in the Philippines on* ***bolstering key democratic institutions****, expanding understanding and appreciation of democratic values among the public, and fostering continued civic engagement. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism used NED support to hold seminars on investigative reporting and campaign spending, which resulted in important,* ***in-depth research and reporting on the 2016 elections.***

*In* ***Burma****, democratic development remains in its early stages. Constitutional provisions provide the military with 25 percent of the seats in Parliament, and give it control over other key governmental bodies. Ethnic conflict continues in Shan and Kachin States even as the National League for Democracy government pursues a nationwide peace agreement. Moreover, conditions in Rakhine State – and for the Rohingya in particular – remain alarming and have the potential to ignite violence elsewhere. The Endowment’s Burma partners concentrated on expanding civic engagement,* ***improving governance, and establishing an environment that allows democratic institutions to flourish.*** *The Yangon School of Political Science conducted its “Introduction to Political Science” program, with participants from political parties, civil society organizations, media, and government staff in attendance. Other NED grantees worked to address key structural and economic shortcomings that impede democratic consolidation, and to ameliorate ethnic, religious and political divisions.*

*In* ***China,*** *the Chinese Communist Party waged an ideological campaign to eliminate discussion of constitutionalism, civil society, and liberal democracy from public and academic discourse. The government also blocked news outlets, censored stories, and cracked down on online activities that presented a challenge to the increasingly coercive environment. Moreover, China’s nascent civil society is under ongoing threat: arrests of prominent lawyers and activists continue and the new foreign NGO management law, which took effect on January 1, 2017, will further restrict civil society development . The Endowment responded by working to expand access to independent information, and to* ***strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to uphold the rule of law and safeguard fundamental human rights.*** *The Endowment also prioritized the protection and promotion of the rights of ethnic minorities and other marginalized communities. The* ***Tibet*** *program concentrated on expanding the free flow of independent and credible information and improving understanding among Chinese – in China and abroad – of Tibet. In 2016, the Endowment honored the late Tenzin Delek Rinpoche with its Democracy Service Medal. Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was a Tibetan Buddhist leader widely known for working to develop social, medical, educational, and religious institutions for Tibetans in eastern Tibet, as an advocate for environmental conservation, and as a mediator between Tibetans and Chinese. He died as a political prisoner in 2015 after languishing for 13 years in prison.*

*In* ***North Korea****, Kim Jong Un amassed near absolute authority, but NED grantees forged on. While the global community has focused on Kim’s military posturing, NED partners have worked to* ***highlight the regime’s gross human rights violations and to increase international pressure in support of human rights****. NED partners also worked to meet the rising demand for outside news and information inside North Korea, and to improve global understanding of what is happening in the Hermit Kingdom. In 2016, NED grantee Daily NK completed a three-year research project utilizing its in-country networks to provide the international community with* ***detailed information on the development of private markets in North Korea.*** *These informal markets are important drivers of social change and opening in North Korea because they enable North Koreans to access information about the outside world and engage in informal market exchanges outside the control of the regime. Now, Action, and Unity for Human Rights (NAUH), based in Seoul, has made a significant contribution in stimulating South Korean interest in the lives of North Koreans through its successful public re-creations of these markets. NAUH’s first interactive exhibition in downtown Seoul attracted nearly 3,000 people and was covered by two of South Korea’s largest media outlets. By focusing on the stories of average people, NAUH’s events* ***have helped to break down negative stereotypes of defectors in South Korean society and raise awareness of the realities of North Korean daily life.***

***Europe***

*Europe’s crisis deepened in 2016. Internal and external social, political and economic pressures shook the integrity and threatened the future of the European Union. In the EU and beyond,* ***support for traditional political parties, trade unions, and political institutions declined.*** *The media space became increasingly polluted, fueling polarization and xenophobia. These trends* ***weakened liberal democracy across the region.***

*In Central Europe, political polarization increased and hard-won foundations of democratic governance were threatened by insular, divisive, and reactionary politics and policies. Compounding the region’s specific post-communist and post-conflict challenges were the common problems of corruption and poorly performing state institutions. Across the region, the space for independent media shrank. These difficulties were exploited by Russia, which increased its hard and soft power attempts to destabilize new democracies, reverse transitions, undermine the EU, and divide the U.S. and Europe.*

*The Endowment’s country priorities for the Europe region were those whose transitions are at a critical juncture between progress and backsliding –* ***Ukraine and Moldova*** *– and those whose governments continue to be autocratic, illiberal, or dysfunctional –* ***Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Serbia.*** *NED began reengaging with partners in Central and Eastern Europe to defend the democratic consolidation that has taken place since 1989 and counter Russia’s attempts to destabilize the region. The Endowment increased its support for regional programs that address challenges common across the region.*

*Given its importance for the region and the challenges it faces,* ***Ukraine*** *remained the Europe section’s top priority. Government reform efforts were hampered by low administrative capacity and a weak governing coalition. But civil society remained energized, and NED assisted established organizations and post-Maidan civic groups in pushing for real reform.*

*In* ***Belarus,*** *an economic crisis and Kremlin pressure pushed the government into a balancing act between Russia and the West. President Lukashenka sought to lessen the stigma of “Europe’s last dictatorship” by limiting repression, offering Belarus’ capital, Minsk, for the ceasefire talks on Ukraine, and allowing two opposition figures to win seats in the September parliamentary elections. Russia continued to exploit Belarus’ economic dependence and bombard the country with aggressive propaganda. In response, NED* ***assisted independent sources of information providing an objective viewpoint on the country’s political, economic, and international challenges.*** *NED also strengthened the capacity and outreach of civil society groups outside Minsk, and supported organizations monitoring and promoting human rights. Ahead of the elections,* ***NED assisted voter education and mobilization initiatives, as well as monitoring efforts.***

***Bosnia and Herzegovina*** *continued to face governance challenges, and* ***Moldova’s*** *democratic transition remained in doubt. See opposite page to learn more about both.*

*After thousands of citizens took to Macedonia’s streets in 2015 to protest against rampant corruption, an internationally brokered political deal mandated early parliamentary elections. Prior to the elections, NED grantees, such as the Ohrid Institute, promoted a freer and fairer contest while broadening the space for citizen input in political and decision-making processes. NED also supported long-term non-partisan programs strengthening interethnic and cross-party dialogue.*

*Although negotiations with* ***Kosovo*** *moved forward,* ***Serbia*** *continued to backslide on media freedom and the rule of law. To counter growing political and financial pressure in the media sphere, NED continued* ***to support investigative journalism and independent media****, such as the award-winning Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (OCCRP). At the same time, NED supported initiatives advancing transitional justice and promoting historical understanding, particularly among youth.*

*Divisive political controversies – including opaque, high-level negotiations with Serbia – impeded Kosovo’s transition, while troubling levels of distrust among ethnic groups limited the political integration of minorities. NED grantees promoted public dialogue on the negotiations; others, such as the Oral History Initiative, advanced minority integration through storytelling and education. Support to watchdog initiatives and independent media remained critical to advancing political accountability and curbing corruption.*

*Although* ***Albania*** *made modest progress in adopting long-awaited legislation on judicial reform and decentralization, allegations of widespread corruption continued to impede critical reforms. In this context, NED grantees worked to promote public oversight at the local and central government levels by* ***strengthening independent investigative media and promoting multipartisan dialogue on issues of transparency and accountability.*** *Grantees such as the Women’s Network for Equality in Decision Making worked with women leaders to improve their presentation and leadership skills.*

***Eurasia***

*Eurasia saw the trends of the last several years intensify in 2016, making the work of NED grantees both more challenging and urgent. Closing political space, the aggressive spread of illiberal norms, rising social tensions, economic crisis, and strained relations with the international community continued to define events in the region.*

*All the countries of the region experienced serious economic problems stemming partly from the low price of oil and partly from the ripple effects of Russia’s economic troubles. Laborers returning from Russia contribute to political instability in Central Asia;* ***Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan*** *have devalued their currencies; and even the* ***Georgian and Armenian*** *economies have been impacted by the low ruble and low employment in Russia.*

*Across the region, grantees are bracing for increased repression against civil society, the possibility of civil unrest, or armed conflict. While the extent and nature of authoritarian pushback varied by country, the fundamental struggle intensified in 2016 and* ***threatened to undo decades of work supported by the Endowment and other donors****. Nevertheless, civil society remains strong and committed, and the Endowment actively adapted to deteriorating conditions and new restrictions.*

*As* ***Russia*** *becomes increasingly belligerent internationally, it also grows ever more authoritarian at home. In 2016, the Kremlin continued to introduce even more repressive legislation in an attempt to close off the last vestiges of free media and an open Internet; to apply even greater pressure on NGOs, lawyers, and activists; and to sever independent organizations from international funding. Nevertheless****, independent media outlets, human rights organizations, and civic education programs continue to do important work****.*

***Azerbaijan*** *also consolidated its authoritarian turn, moving to eliminate any criticism of the regime, close international NGOs, restrict basic freedoms, and jail government critics. The year ended with over 100 political prisoners in the country, including some of its best journalists, human rights activists, and lawyers. Although this unprecedented crackdown has substantially weakened the country’s civic sector, civil society continues to advocate for their rights and those of their fellow citizens.*

***Armenia*** *experienced a volatile 2016, with* ***major public protests*** *in July against the governing elites occurring almost exactly a year after 2015’s “Electric Yerevan” protests against hikes in electricity prices. The four-day war with Azerbaijan in the spring exposed the extent to which government corruption threatens Armenia’s national security; the issue has galvanized civil society and political activists ahead of the 2017 parliamentary elections. The Endowment continued to prioritize support for programs that help disparate groups coalesce around common goals and strategies on behalf of democratic reform.*

*The* ***Kyrgyz Republic*** *is currently facing the most significant challenges to its continued democratic consolidation since 2010. The most worrying development is the recent passage of controversial amendments to the 2010 constitution. These amendments undermine the independence of the judiciary, remove the primacy of international law and the country’s international treaty obligations, and strengthen the role of the Prime Minister. They also weaken Parliament’s oversight role. The amendments are a blow against the democratic development of the country while the economic situation continues to worsen. Moreover, attacks against civil society and independent media have intensified over the past year. Individual human rights activists have been singled out for invective by the President and targeted by state surveillance, as well as threatened and harassed by non-state actors. The Endowment continues to support local civil society as it promotes good governance and basic human rights, defends civil society and human rights activists, and fosters regional cooperation against anti-democratic trends.*

***Kazakhstan*** *has continued to restrict the operating environment for civil society by passing several new laws aimed at introducing greater control over its independence. The “Law on Payments” was quietly adopted without advance discussion in August 2016. This law introduced draconian new controls on civil society groups. Following widespread public protest against proposed changes to the land code in the spring, the government cracked down even further on civic activism and freedom of assembly. The government restricted public gatherings and pushed activists into politically motivated judicial trials. Despite these developments, there is nonetheless some limited space left for civil society groups.*

***Tajikistan*** *continues to face its biggest crisis since the end of the civil war. The economic downturn throughout the region has been particularly acute here, where remittances from Russia are down, social discontent is on the rise, and the fear of returning migrants radicalized in Russia is growing. After banning the country’s main opposition party in September 2015, the government launched an unprecedented crackdown on all forms of dissent and opposition, including arrests of political activists, denial of legal representation, widespread torture, and even extrajudicial killings. A controversial constitutional referendum in May 2016 removed term limits for President Rakhmon and enshrined him as “leader of the nation.” In this increasingly repressive context, the Endowment continued to stand with civil society.*

***Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan*** *remain among the most authoritarian countries in the world. President Karimov’s death in September 2016 offered nothing but ephemeral hope for meaningful reforms. Shavkhat Mirziyoyev, who was Prime Minister under Karimov, won elections in December that were neither free nor fair. Despite the release of two long-term political prisoners and signs of improved relations with neighboring countries, Mirziyoyev does not appear to be interested in any meaningful reforms.* ***NED’s discretionary program supported human rights, independent media, and NGO development.***

***Africa***

*Across Africa, the struggle for democracy resonates like never before. In 2016, citizens in* ***Ethiopia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Gabon, Congo, Cameroon, Mali, and the Gambia*** *took to the streets to demand democracy and an end to the corruption, poor governance, and repression that have robbed them of their rights and left them impoverished. Elections in* ***South Africa, the Gambia, the Central African Republic, Tanzania, Malawi, and Ghana*** *all clearly reflected the electorate’s demand for change. Afrobarometer polling confirms that the great majority of Africans reject authoritarian rule, and* ***NED grantees are focused on supporting this rising democratic spirit through a variety of strategic programs.***

*In* ***West Africa****, NDI and many of NED’s partners in Cote d’Ivoire advanced women’s rights; in Burkina Faso, CIPE encouraged the role of the business community in democratic reform, and other NED partners strengthened the participation of youth; in* ***Guinea****, NED partners trained women and youth on a range of human rights and political issues. NED partners in Mali attempted to shore up the fragile peace process there and improve governance; IRI helped to strengthen the parliament. In Liberia, the Solidarity Center supported trade unions to protect labor rights and start mobilizing members for national elections in 2017; other NED partners* ***provided education on the elections and the upcoming constitutional referendum.*** *NED’s 26 partners in Nigeria strove to advance the rights of marginalized communities, strengthen the rule of law, and promote government accountability. CIPE worked with business associations to promote economic reform and fight corruption in the Lagos Port system, and the* ***Solidarity Center helped trade unions*** *contending with the violence of Boko Haram in Borno State.*

*For well over a decade, the* ***Democratic Republic of the Congo*** *has remained NED’s top priority in Africa.*

*NED partners in* ***Cameroon*** *campaigned to lower the voting age. In* ***Equatorial Guinea,*** *they expanded civil society space. In* ***Rwanda*** *they pushed for greater freedom of expression. In* ***Burundi*** *they monitored ongoing human rights abuses. In* ***Angola and Congo-Brazzaville*** *they fought corruption and human rights abuses. NDI assisted civil society organizations in the* ***Central African Republic*** *with peace-building.*

*In the Horn of Africa, NED supported activists in* ***Ethiopia*** *struggling to reverse the decline in freedom of assembly and expression, even as a massive popular uprising in the Oromia region was brutally crushed. CIPE engaged with the Ethiopian business community, and the Solidarity Center worked with the trade union confederation to foster dialogue with the government. NED also supported intrepid human rights activists trying to pry open the totalitarian regime of Eritrea. In Somaliland, NED’s partners defended freedom of expression and resisted the country’s democratic backsliding. In* ***Somalia****, NED supported* ***radio stations, think tanks, and civil society organizations*** *to promote democratic values, fight corruption, strengthen local governance, and inform citizens and policy makers.*

*NED’s 15 partners in* ***Sudan*** *promoted national reconciliation, defended human rights, and advanced freedom of speech and assembly. Meanwhile,* ***South Sudan*** *plummeted further into a nightmare of massacres, atrocities, refugees, and famine. NED’s partners there struggled heroically to promote peace, human rights, and democratic norms.*

*NED’s partners in* ***Kenya*** *focused on the upcoming elections and newly devolved county government structures. As political space shrank in* ***Uganda****, NED partners worked to increase political participation and to improve governance in the legislature and local government.*

*NED intensified its commitment to* ***democratic reform*** *in* ***Zimbabwe****, supporting 16 partners* ***who trained youth and women on political participation,*** *fought corruption in the mining sector, promoted freedom of expression through satire and other alternative media, and began* ***coordinating new strategies and policies for democratic transition****. Partners in* ***Swaziland*** *strengthened civil society. At the pan-African level, NDI supported youth leadership in the African Union, IRI continued building its GenDem network of young African political leaders, the Solidarity Center fought corruption, and NED’s discretionary partners expanded various networks of human rights and youth activists.*