Worldwide Democratic Development and American National Security
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It is simple common sense that America and other democratic nations are is more secure the more democracies there are in the world. The United States was the first country to declare that the power of government derives from the will of the people. It has increasingly found over its 250 years that other democracies are its strongest allies and partners, while dictatorships are its antagonists and most dangerous enemies. Most Americans and citizens in other democracies believe that citizens of other countries should be able to choose their leaders, as Americans they do. Beyond this simple and true conviction are other important reasons democracies strengthen American security and that of other democratic countries. Democracies are more attentive to domestic prosperity and development than are dictatorships. Democracies believe that a peaceful international environment favors domestic prosperity while aggression hurts it. Democracies are based on ensuring the rights of their own citizens, and this principle translates internationally into respect for the sovereignty and rights of other countries. These commonsense observations are supported by a careful analysis of the nature of American national security. The same analysis for other democracies around the world supports the same conclusions.

National security has many components. Geography is one, and the United States enjoys ocean barriers and friendly neighbors. Economic security - the size and growth rate of the economy, the level of technology, access to resources and dependence on international trade - is another. The United States has the world's largest economy, the most dynamic technology sector, a wide range of natural resources and low dependence on international trade. Military capability is a third factor, and the United States has the most powerful armed forces in the world. The fourth important factor is the international security environment, whether it is stable or under challenge. The most dangerous international security environment combines global economic adversity with authoritarian aggression. The more democracies there are in the world, the more secure is the United States across all these factors - geographic, economic, military and the international security environment. Consider each of these factors:

The friendly nature of America's border neighbors, Canada and Mexico, is strengthened by their democratic characteristics. In contrast, it is hostile Latin American dictatorships from Cuba to Venezuela that have been the enemies and security threats. American economic security has been enhanced by its democratic allies over many decades – mutual investment over long periods of time, free exchange of expertise and peaceful settlement of economic disputes. At early stages in their development, economic growth rates of

democracies and some dictatorships have been impressive, but the United States has maintained the highest growth rate among countries with mature, developed economies. In contrast, the economic interactions of dictatorships with the United States have been transactional, undependable and often hostile. Saudi Arabia has used its petro-power against the United States on many occasions. China has taken advantage of its trade with the United States to steal intellectual property, squeeze American companies and force political concessions. America's military capability has been reinforced by that of its allies in defensive alliances in both Europe and Asia. Hosting American forces on their territory has extended and strengthened US defenses.

Finally, an international security environment led by democratic countries is by nature more supportive of economic development, the preservation of peace, the respect for sovereignty and the resistance to aggression than are international security environments led by autocratic countries. The German and Japanese-led coalitions and empires of the first half of the 20th century and the Soviet Union-led coalitions of the second half both bear out this reality.

Since World War II, itself started by the Axis dictatorships, it has been authoritarian countries that have threatened their neighbors or attacked them: During the Cold War, North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950, North Vietnam's seizure of South Vietnam in the 1960s, Argentina's grab for the Falklands in 1982, and the Soviet Union's aggression by proxy in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. After the Cold War the smaller dictators have been aggressive: Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Serbia's aggression in the former Yugoslavia, Iran's proxy attacks in the Middle East, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There were attacks by democracies, notably the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, but they have been in unique circumstances and fewer. By and large it is dictatorships that play aggressive offense and democracies defense.

The preference for democracy in other countries and the huge advantage to the United States of more democracies in the world does not mean that the United States and other democracies should impose representative government worldwide by crusade. Such a course of action is not practical and has little chance of success.

Rather, the advantages to this country of a greater number of democracies mean that the United States and other democracies should consistently and persistently support transitions from authoritarian governments to democracies and resist authoritarian backsliding of democratic countries. The United States and other democracies should support positive change based on what it has learned about democratic development over decades.

Statesmen, soldiers, scholars and civil society organizations have all learned a great deal over the years about effective support for democratic transitions.
The most important lesson has been that a country's own people, institutions and leaders are most important in a democratic transition, with outside countries and organizations

playing a secondary role. Big powerful countries have proved unable to impose democracy on much weaker countries. Smaller countries have developed democratic governance despite the hostility and active interference of powerful nearby dictators. The spread of democracy across the world in three historic waves has been largely the result of the work of citizens of the transforming countries taking advantage of favorable circumstances for change.

The second important lesson has been that the path to democracy in each country is unique. For powerful dictatorships it often has taken massive economic or military failures to shake their grip on power and open the opportunities for democratic leaders and movements to emerge. Other countries have made peaceful transitions without crisis. It is simply not true that democracies can only develop in a country that achieves some level of economic development. Neither is it true that countries that reach a certain stage of economic development automatically become democratic. The interplay between economic and democratic development is complicated.

A third lesson is that democracy is much more than one, or even several, free and fair elections. In addition to elections, there must be other institutions – an independent judiciary along with competent police forces and well-run prisons, an independent but responsible press, a competent civil service. An autocrat in a country with weak institutions can win an election, then corrupt and use the institutions to consolidate his power.

A fourth lesson is that democracy is the best means to protect human rights around the world. Outside pressure on dictatorships and public exposure can on occasion relieve the oppression of some individuals and minorities, but bringing justice and rights to citizens over the long term is most effectively achieved by democratic transition.
A fifth lesson is that technology, especially information technology, can both help and hinder democratic development. Television and radio broadcasts into dictatorships undermined official propaganda and favored eventual democratic transitions. The internet initially held similar promise, but dictatorships, led by China, developed means to censor internet information in their own countries, and have even had some success in using the internet and social media to sow discord in and undermine civic trust in democratic countries. As artificial intelligence transforms information technology, the United States and other democratic nations will have to take intelligent and effective actions to make it a positive factor in promoting democracy worldwide.

All these lessons from history, along with many more, mean that an effective policy for democracy support must be based on different plans for individual countries. The plans will be based on supporting the people and organizations within a country that are working towards democracy and weakening those that support the dictator. The plans will be a combination of US government actions and private sector actions, both by US businesses and non-profit organizations. The plans should also be coordinated with those of other democracies, many of which have unique access and advantages in their relations

with transitioning countries.

In sum, support for democracy throughout the world reflects American beliefs and values, it enhances American security along with that of other democracies, in all its dimensions, and the United States has they have the experience and capability to carry it out practically and effectively.