

**Statement of Tom Malinowski**  
**Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy Human Rights and Labor, and**  
**Member of the House of Representatives, New Jersey 7th District**

**Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability**  
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Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Crow, 35 years ago, on the night of June 3 and morning of June 4th, 1989, Chinese leaders sent tanks and troops into Tiananmen square in Beijing to crush the student led movement that had been demanding a transition to democracy in that country. I'm mentioning this up front because this is a tragedy we should remember, especially on this day, and because I hope the anniversary will remind us to focus today on things that are truly important. There is a struggle playing out in every part of the world between democracy and authoritarianism, and Congress should be giving the State Department the tools to keep America in that fight.

As you know, the State Department's efforts to support freedom and democracy around the world are led by its Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, or DRL. Before I was elected to Congress, I had the privilege to lead this bureau, and the extraordinary people who serve our country within it. Part of their job is to shape our diplomacy with other governments, often in friction with other parts of the State Department, to make sure that human rights stays front and center. But they also provide direct grant support to people and to non-governmental organizations who share our values in countries around the world.

When I ran DRL from 2014 to 2017, our annual grant budget was a little over \$100 million. Today, it's four times larger. These big increases were not requested by any administration. They were volunteered by Congress, with bipartisan support, though I'd actually give the most credit to Republican appropriators like Senator Lindsey Graham. Here's another statistic I hope you'll keep in mind: around 85 percent of this bureau's grant funds are earmarked by Congress, for specific countries like China, Sudan, Syria, and Venezuela, and for programs like internet freedom, anti-corruption, and women's rights. Congress created this bureau, and no part of the State Department operates with more Congressional support, guidance, and oversight than DRL.

I want to make sure everyone has a clear picture of what DRL grant programs do around the world. Here are just a few examples.

They support Chinese activists who've kept the spirit of the June 4th movement alive, helping them break through the Chinese Communist Party's censorship and propaganda efforts, and documenting crimes in places like Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, allowing us to sanction the Chinese leaders responsible.

They help smuggle news, books, TV shows, and movies to North Korea, so that the people of that closed Communist dictatorship will know what life is like in democratic countries, and they support North Korean defector-run organizations that expose what happens in that country's prison camps.

In Afghanistan, when our military left, DRL grants and grantees stayed — helping local organizations that advocate for women and girls, and keeping activists safe from the Taliban.

In Iran, they help dissidents safely access the global internet when the clerical regime tries to shut them off.

They help Cubans document human rights abuses by their government and press for the release of political prisoners.

They've empowered Christians, Yazidis, and members of other religious minority groups in Iraq win back land taken from them by ISIS.

Through a program I got started, they support anti-corruption investigators in every part of the world, including in Ukraine, where they're helping to ensure that our aid goes where it's intended, and in Africa, where DRL grantees have exposed multiple Chinese and Russian attempts to steal natural resources and corrupt local governments.

Russia and particularly China spend billions of dollars each year on covert influence operations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Our comparative advantage in these places is that their people associate America with ideas like human rights, the rule of law, and clean, honest government. State Department grants reinforce that association, and empower the forces in those countries fighting for those values. If we want to compete with our adversaries, we have to be willing to spend money on this; in fact, we should be spending a lot more.

And please remember how sensitive and hard this work is. These grants mostly go to people in repressive dictatorships who risk persecution and sometimes death for doing what they do. The staff who manage these grants have to focus on keeping people safe, and that's something they're very good at. DRL may also be the only part of the US government that can get grants to people facing emergencies — like having to get out of a country before they're arrested — in less than 48 hours. There is maximum oversight with minimum bureaucracy.

Precisely because these programs are effective, they are threatening to dictators around the world. There is a reason why Putin kicked State Department and AID programs out of Russia and has criminalized any association with them. There is a reason why many Russian and Chinese allies have passed copycat laws to prevent civil society groups from forging partnerships abroad. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians have been protesting against such a law in the last few weeks — they, and their pro-Russian government — know what's at stake.

What disturbs me most is that our authoritarian adversaries have turned to influence operations within the United States to discredit what the State Department has long done, with bipartisan support, to promote our values and help the people who share them around the world. Our enemies' propagandists gotten smarter about this task, stealing language from our own domestic culture wars, with references to wokeness and to George Soros and to deep state bureaucrats.

My colleagues on both sides of the aisle know that I don't mince words or dance around sensitive subjects. So I'm going to align myself with the Chairman of this Committee, my friend Representative McCaul, who recently said that "Russian propaganda" had made its way into the Congressional debate about America's support for our friends and allies in the world.

I will align myself with Senator Mitch McConnell, who recently warned us not to take our foreign policy cues from Victor Orban's Hungary, a country that he rightly said "serves as China's doormat to Europe" and that fawns over Russia and Iran.

I get why an authoritarian leaning government in Hungary might not like US government programs that expose its corruption and that broadcast uncensored media to its people. And I get why think tanks in the United States that have forged partnerships with Orban's government might want to turn us against such State Department programs. I don't get why any of us who care about promoting American interests and values would listen to them.

That doesn't mean that every grant decision made by DRL or other parts of the State Department is correct. If you asked me to review each of the thousand or so small and large grants that DRL manages each year, I'm sure I'd find a handful that I'd redirect elsewhere. And as a former member of Congress, I strongly believe in Congressional oversight — so long as Members remember that many of these programs were created by Congress in the first place and are governed by Congressional earmarks.

But we should also approach this question as serious people, cognizant of the stakes involved in the contest between freedom and authoritarianism in the world, and the risks people take in repressive countries to work with us. The last thing we should do is to gut or politicize this programming, or to disparage the hard working, non-partisan career public servants who implement it. That would be doing to ourselves what our adversaries have long tried, and failed, to do to us.