

**Submitted Testimony of Former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright  
National Security Implications of the Rise of Authoritarianism  
House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence  
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The assault on democratic values around the world poses a direct threat to the national security interests of the United States. Understanding the forces driving this trend, and helping the U.S. government respond, must be a key priority of America's intelligence community and of this committee.

There are many reasons for my interest in this topic, including one that is personal.

As an infant in Czechoslovakia before the start of World War II, I was forced by the Nazis to flee with my parents to London, where we survived the blitz. In 1948, a Communist government took power in Czechoslovakia, once again driving my family from our home. We found refuge in the most generous nation on Earth, the United States, where I was given the priceless opportunity to grow up in freedom.

Later, as UN ambassador and secretary of state, I had confrontations with the false nationalists who perpetrated ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. And I was the most senior US official to negotiate with Kim Jong-Il, the authoritarian ruler of North Korea and the father of the current leader.

In more recent years, as chairman of the National Democratic Institute, I have been involved in the struggle between democracy and dictatorship every day. And as the democratic euphoria that greeted the end of the Cold War has dissipated, I have spent a lot of time thinking about what has happened and what we can do to get back on the right path.

The Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini observed that in seeking to accumulate power, it is wise to do so in the manner of one plucking a chicken – feather by feather.

Looking around the world today, there are a lot of feathers being plucked.

Warning signs abound across the globe: the discrediting of mainstream politicians, the emergence of leaders who seek to divide rather than unite, the pursuit of political victory at all costs and the invocation of national greatness by people who identify greatness only with themselves.

Most often, the signposts that should alert us are disguised: the altered constitution that passes for reform, the attacks on a free press justified by security, the invocation of national emergencies, the dehumanization of others, or the hollowing out of a democratic political system so that all is erased but the label.

History teaches us that authoritarianism and the tendencies that lead to it are subject to imitation.

Surveying the world today, we see apprentice autocrats copying repressive tactics that had their tryouts in Venezuela or Russia. We also see more and more countries employing squads of opinion-shapers to flood online sites and social media networks, where one can spread lies just as easily as truth.

So undemocratic practices are on the rise in, among other places, Turkey, Hungary, Poland and the Philippines – each a treaty ally of the United States.

Radical nationalist movements – some violent, some not – are achieving notoriety as they draw media attention, make parliamentary inroads, and push the boundaries of public discussion toward bigotry and hate.

Many of these parties receive support from Russia, a country led by a former KGB operative who has invaded Ukraine, undermined foreign democracies, exported corruption, and stands accused of conducting political assassinations.

Under President Xi, China has become another leading global champion of authoritarianism, actively using its economic might to shape the world in its image, while pioneering new methods for monitoring and controlling its population which some have dubbed “techno-authoritarianism.”

In his most recent worldwide threat assessment, Director of National Intelligence Coats called special attention to the growing alignment between Russia and China. The assessment says, and I quote, “we anticipate that [Russia and China] will collaborate to counter U.S. objectives, taking advantage of rising doubts in some places about the liberal democratic model.”

The global retreat of freedom has many causes, including the failure of democracy to meet expectations and the backlash against globalization and rapid technological change.

But this committee needs to be clear-eyed about the role that Moscow and Beijing are playing. Their tactics are distinct, but they are each investing heavily – and effectively – in efforts to covertly undermine democratic norms and institutions. And they are both using their own considerable intelligence and technological capabilities to weaponize information at home and abroad.

Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and their ilk want to turn autocracy into the driving force of this no-longer-new century. They may call it by a different name –using oxymorons such as “authoritarian capitalism” or “illiberal democracy” – but we should not be naïve about these troubling trends.

Because we are all affected, directly or indirectly, by political repression and by the human cruelty that rides alongside it. And make no mistake: America’s security needs are influenced greatly by whether democracy or authoritarianism prevails around the world.

For as long as I have been around, I have heard some people argue that the path to stability and order is to empower a single strong man or group.

The truth is in fact the opposite. The Taliban did not bring real stability to Afghanistan, nor Qaddafi to Libya, nor Assad to Syria, nor Chavez to Venezuela.

Dictators can create the illusion of order for a period of time. But almost inevitably, by blocking the path to peaceful change, they make violent, disruptive change more likely.

So it is no coincidence that the hotspots most likely to harbor terrorists, generate waves of refugees, and produce illegal drugs are in areas of the world that are nondemocratic.

It is true that democratic transitions can produce disorder in the short term. But at its best, democracy can produce the kind of stability that lasts, a stability built on the firm ground of mutual commitments and consent. This differs from the illusion of order that can be maintained only as long as dissent is silenced; the kind of order that may last for decades and yet still disappear overnight.

For all these reasons, the health of democracy is clearly vital to America's interests. And that is why, for almost as long as I have been alive, the world has been able to count on the United States to serve as the rock against which the forces of despotism run aground and break apart.

What concerns me is that we may no longer be able to make that claim.

In my travels abroad, I hear the same questions all the time: If America has a leader who says the press always lies, how can Vladimir Putin be faulted for making the same claim?

If America has a leader who insists that judges are biased and who calls the American criminal system a "laughingstock," what is to stop a repressive leader in Hungary or Southeast Asia from discrediting his own judiciary?

And if our political system becomes so dysfunctional that we cannot even keep the government open, how do we convince leaders in other countries that the democratic path is one worth following?

I will never forget meeting with parliamentarians in Egypt and talking to them about the need to compromise in order to govern effectively.

One of them looked at me and said, "Yeah, like you guys?"

Mr. Chairman, there are many elements involved in countering the threat of authoritarianism. But I want to emphasize today that our work must start at home, and in that effort both parties in Congress can and must take the lead. You are the bedrock of our democracy, and a co-equal branch of government established by Article I of the Constitution. 2019 is Article I time.

In recent years, we have become familiar with the slogan: if you see something, say something. I have decided to add a third element: See something, say something, but also DO something. And in that spirit, I would urge you to do the following things.

First, defend the constitution by protecting the free press and reinforcing the principle that no one is above the law.

Second, set an example for other democracies by governing effectively, fighting corruption, and combatting foreign influence on our elections and on our political system more broadly.

Third, vigorously support programs that strengthen other democracies.

We should not lose sight of the fact that democratic progress from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s was made possible by the strength, idealism, and energetic support of the United States and Western Europe.

I am proud of the work that the National Democratic Institute does, and the partnership it has formed with its counterpart, the International Republican Institute. We appreciate the support Congress has provided and believe that our joint mission is more important than ever.

Another effort I am involved in is a new Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Security and Prosperity which was launched at the Munich Security Conference with goal of rallying the democratic world on behalf of our common values.

More than seventy years have elapsed since the Atlantic Charter was issued and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Perhaps we started taking some of those principles for granted. So the time is right to renew our vows and to engage a new generation in freedom's cause. I am pleased that some members of this committee were in Munich and hope to work with all of you in supporting this bipartisan initiative by the Atlantic Council and the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

Even as we promote democratic values, media, and civic institutions, we also have to better understand and counter the growing influence of our authoritarian competitors. The United States must develop and execute a comprehensive strategy to counter Russia and China's anti-democratic campaigns.

This will mean ensuring that our intelligence community is properly organized and has the necessary resources to meet this challenge, working with our closest democratic allies.

It means investing in diplomacy and development to check authoritarian influence, and undertaking a concerted effort to fight the kleptocracy and money laundering which helps abusive rulers hold onto power around the world.

Finally, it means having a real discussion with technology platforms about how to guard against information operations and protect democratic discourse. One new

initiative of the National Democratic Institute, the Design 4 Democracy Coalition, is aimed at fostering just such a dialogue between technology platforms and democracy and human rights organizations.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, you will play a critical role in defending democracy and countering the rise of authoritarianism globally. I am grateful for the chance to speak to you about these issues, and to offer my full support in the important fights ahead.

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