

THOMAS CAROTHERS,
**'PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND FIGHTING
TERROR',**

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PAULA J. DOBRIANSKY & THOMAS CAROTHERS,
'DEMOCRACY PROMOTION',

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**An American Debate: or, What Can Be Done In a True
Democracy?**

by Emanuel Raută

In the January/February 2003 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the theorist of democracy Thomas Carothers published an article suggestively entitled 'Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror'. The article presents a strenuous critique of the current US administration's tolerance of, and even support for, autocratic regimes around the world. The administration's response came in the form of an article by Undersecretary of State Paula J. Dobriansky – entitled 'Explaining the Bush Administration's Position' – which was published in a subsequent issue of the same magazine. The exchange represents a model of the kind of challenges that can be mounted by members of civil society to the policies of elected officials, and of the robust public debate that can ensue. It should be a lesson to the new democracies of South-Eastern Europe – and especially Romania – as to the importance of open public debate and the need for greater awareness of democratic and individual rights. However, for the United States, the events of September 11 inaugurated a policy dilemma: what is the proper balance between security and the guarantee of these very democratic rights?

The US asserts its presence in virtually every 'hot spot' in the world, often at the expense of one of its stated missions: the promotion of democracy and the preservation of human rights. The close US relationship with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, both of which are ruled by authoritarian dictators with longstanding records of human rights abuses, testifies to the value the US places on the kind of logistical support these countries can provide in this sensitive region. Meanwhile,

these autocratic leaders effectively exploit the situation in order to secure US economic and military assistance, which in turn helps them sustain and consolidate their brutal regimes. These are just a couple of the examples that Carothers adduces to demonstrate the contradictions in US foreign policy. Carothers suggests that the lack of interest in the project of nation building and the absolute priority placed on narrow security goals, by what he calls the 'realist' strain of US foreign policy, ultimately serve to undermine the fight for democracy. He cites as an example the conflicting results of US operations in Afghanistan: when the US decided to employ Afghan fighters as proxies against the Taliban regime, they in effect reinforced the country's tribal structure, creating conditions unfavorable to the consolidation of a new central authority in Kabul. Thus, in this case, military/security considerations, narrowly construed, served to undermine the ultimate objective of creating a stable democratic Afghanistan.

In addition, as Carothers points out, the fact that the US imposed restrictions on civil liberties at home has caused significant harm to democracy promotion around the world, sending the wrong signal to governments that are only too eager to seize the opportunity. Carothers notes several domestic policies that did unnecessary harm to the rights of citizens: the detention of immigrants, closed deportation hearings, and the categorization of some US citizens as 'enemy combatants'. Some countries – such as Cuba, Belarus and India – took advantage of this state of affairs to deploy repressive tactics in their own countries, in the name of the 'war on terrorism'.

However, Carothers also notes the rise of a second policy orientation of the Bush administration, which he calls 'neo-Reaganite', that entails a serious and principled commitment to protecting human rights and promoting democracy. Carothers credits the Bush administration with committing to a policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East, the obvious examples of which are the war in Iraq, as well as the continuous pressure on Iran and Libya. This agenda, which is promoted by trusted 'neo-conservative' advisors to the president, is being undertaken 'with fervor and force', in order to 'cut Islamic extremism at its roots'. This aggressive new policy entails enormous risks – for example, a rise in anti-Americanism in the Islam world – and obstacles – such as, the absence of any democratic tradition in the Middle East. The policy is especially vulnerable to the demonstrated 'lack of neoconservative will in the matter of nation building that undermines the democracy process'.

In outlining this 'split' policy personality, Carothers does not confine himself to negative criticism but offers constructive advice as well. He

understands the difficulties inherent to US foreign policy in today's complex world, but calls for a longer-term outlook that sees democracy promotion as in fact a crucial component in the battle against terrorism. In addition, Carothers points out that the US administration needs serious allies in the fight against terrorism and that it is extremely dangerous for the Bush administration to have alienated these allies through its unilateral realist foreign policy.

Undersecretary of State Paula J Dobriansky rejects the accusation of instrumentalization in America's foreign policy, insisting that Carothers' position is reductionist. According to Dobriansky, America cannot answer to only one imperative in its foreign policy but rather must engage on different levels: the US has indeed allied itself in the war against terrorism with countries with dubious records regarding respect for human and democratic rights, but the US is also constantly applying pressure, in a multitude of ways, to encourage these countries to adopt democratic ideas and practices. Dobriansky insists that only by communicating and engaging with them can the US influence authoritarians to step up their liberalization and democratization efforts. Current US policy tries to locate complementarities between security policies and human rights protection policies. The Undersecretary of State suggests that American foreign policy already, in fact, represents an effective synthesis of these two policy commitments.

The debate between Mr. Carothers and the Bush Administration cannot be concluded quickly and easily; it deals with one of the most important and vexing subjects currently facing the US and the world – i.e., the legitimate geopolitical role of the US after September 11. People around the world are confused and conflicted when asked whether America has the right to intervene by force to pacify entire regions. They are not privy to the internal mechanisms by which decisions on the American foreign policy are made, and hence cannot be sure if these are driven by an interest in democracy promotion or narrow national interest. In short, it is not clear which of the two ‘personalities’ Carothers outlines is the dominant one.

The exchange in *Foreign Affairs* makes clear that this question is still open, and is being debated within America as well, at the highest levels of government and civil society. Even if the answers are not clear, the fact that such debates are thriving in the United States reflects well on the vitality of American democracy and offers important lessons for politicians in country's like Romania, who refuse *a priori* to engage in debate or to accept any input from the civil society.