



The tyranny doctrine

(Published in *latimes.com*, May 24, 2006)

[Danielle Pletka](#) and [Michael Rubin](#)

Colaboraciones n° 1000

8 de junio de 2006

Last week, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced resumption of full U.S. diplomatic relations with Libya, citing Tripoli's renunciation of terrorism and intelligence cooperation. This ends a quarter-century diplomatic freeze. It also marks an effective end to the Bush doctrine.

At his second inauguration, President Bush declared: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."

Since that soaring pronouncement, the Bush administration has watched Egypt abrogate elections, ignored the collapse of the so-called Cedar Revolution in Lebanon and abandoned imprisoned Chinese dis-

sidents; now Washington is mulling a peace treaty with Stalinist North Korea.

The rhetoric of democracy, it turns out, comes more easily than its implementation. Washington worries that Egypt will bow out of the fight against Al Qaeda if the U.S. presses for reform. It worries that China will bar investment if Bush presses for the release of political prisoners. Are these fears realistic? No. These countries still have interests that parallel ours. But that won't be clear unless the president forces the tyrants to make a choice: reform or face isolation.

The case of Fathi El Jahmi, Libya's foremost democracy activist, is among the most poignant. When El Jahmi was briefly furloughed from

prison in 2004, Bush hailed his release as a sign of change in Libyan strongman Moammar Kadafi. But El Jahmi's freedom lasted just two weeks, and his name hasn't passed the president's lips again. Rice's announcement welcoming Libya back into the fold of civilized nations mentioned neither democracy nor El Jahmi.

In Egypt, where only last year Rice made herself a heroine to reformers by demanding competitive elections, the government has accelerated repression. It has imprisoned Ayman Nour, the leading opposition leader, on spurious charges. Where once the Bush administration threatened to withhold aid and won the release of a prominent democracy advocate, it is now silent. In early May, Egyptian police rounded up hundreds of demonstrators rallying in support of two judges who said that parliamentary elections were rigged. Yet Washington does not seek to reduce Egypt's \$1.8 billion in annual aid. Instead, this month it hosted President Hosni Mubarak's son (and anointed successor).

Pressure for changes also has lessened in Syria and Lebanon. In March 2005, in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese people rose up to demand democracy and reform. The Bush administration cheered, but it soon lost interest. A July visit to Beirut by Rice, replete with the "obligatory" meeting with the puppet president installed by Syria, sowed doubt about the U.S. commitment to Lebanese independ-

ence. Washington's blunders have ensured that a Syrian stooge will likely govern Lebanon for another year.

The same devotion to form over substance has been apparent in our China policy. Before his 2005 visit, Bush asked for the release of several political prisoners, including a New York Times researcher, Zhao Yan. The Chinese government ignored the request. The same polite query went to Beijing before President Hu Jintao's April visit to Washington. This time, Zhao was released, only to be indicted again once Hu's world tour was complete. Signs of White House displeasure? Not one.

Is it possible that the administration is questioning the wisdom of promoting democracy as a long-term solution to U.S. national security woes? "Realists" suggest that the president has finally woken up and smelled the coffee. They say democracy gave us an Islamist government in Iraq and Hamas in Palestine. It could give us the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Heaven knows what it would spawn in China or Libya. Better the devil you know.

But there is no sign the White House has done any strategic rethinking. The president continues to believe his own preaching, but his administration has become incapable of making the hard choices those beliefs require. Instead, it has been quick to embrace the showy, if transitory, political advantages that come from welcoming Kadafi into the family of nations and China's president on a tour of Boeing.

The many foreign dissidents and reformers who took Bush at his word are the first to pay the price for Washington's lack of backbone. They were told that if they took risks for freedom, the U.S. would stand with them. Letting them

down will make it all the more difficult to find democratic allies. Brave individuals are the real building blocks for transitions to democracy. Without them, as we have learned in Iraq, there are few alternatives to the tyranny that threatens us all.

[Danielle Pletka](#) and [Michael Rubin](#) are, respectively, vice president for defense and foreign policy and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.