

# Role of NGOs in Promoting Neo-Colonialism

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Global Research, February 19, 2021

[Counter Currents](#) 16 February 2021

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Politics](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*There are literally thousands of NGOs, the better known being Oxfam, Greenpeace, and Amnesty International .*

NGOs are primarily a modern phenomenon, though The World Alliance of YMCAs was founded in 1855, and the International Committee for the Red Cross came into being in 1863. 1

According to one estimate, some 40,000 now qualify as international NGOs (with programs and affiliates in a number of countries) – up from less than 400 a century ago. 2

Political scientists often refer to NGOs as “pressure groups” or “lobby groups,” .

In the field of international relations, scholars now speak of NGOs as “Non-state Actors” (as are Transnational corporations). In recent years, they have successfully promoted new environmental agreements, greatly strengthened Women’s rights, and won important arms control and disarmament measures. NGO work on the environment led to the adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances Depleting the Ozone Layer in 1987.

The International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, an NGO coalition, was prime mover in the Mine Ban Treaty of 1997. The Coalition for an International Criminal Court was indispensable to the adoption of the 1998 Treaty of Rome and another NGO mobilization forced governments to abandon secret negotiations for the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in 1998.

In the late 1990’s, the NGO Working Group on the Security Council emerged as an important interlocutor of the UN’s most powerful body, while the Jubilee 2000 Campaign changed thinking and policy on poor countries’ debt. At the same time, an increasingly influential international NGO campaign demanded more just economic policies from the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. 3

But big powers, specially the US, ignore all such agreement

Governments finance NGOs and use them to promote their interest, often illegal such as promotion of unrest and overthrow of legitimate governments (discussed below).

NGOs are structurally undemocratic and unaccountable. The officials are not elected. On

paper, they are accountable to boards of directors etc, but so are the chiefs of the Wall Street Corporations, banks membership and international finance bodies.

## Financing

In the 1990's, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees expressed alarm that governments were increasingly channeling funds for humanitarian assistance to their own national NGOs rather than to multilateral agencies. 4.

NGOs sell products or services, just like a private company. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) is an extreme example of this tendency. In 1996 it had \$3.8 billion in gross revenue for supplemental health insurance and nine mutual funds with \$13.7 billion in assets. 5.

## Diplomatic Role

The rights of NGOs to a voice at the UN are guaranteed by Article 71 of the UN Charter and affirmed by many subsequent decisions. By 2000, about 2,500 NGOs had consultative status with the UN. 5

1400 NGOS were directly involved in The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 .The Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 in Beijing had 2,600 NGOs in the intergovernmental negotiations. 6

Third World Network, based in Malaysia, is an especially active example that addresses a very broad range of policy issues. The Philippine-based Freedom from Debt Coalition and the German NGO Network on Environment and Development, regional networks like ARENA, the Asian Regional Exchange for New Initiatives, or the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas, or AFRODAD, the African Debt and Development Network are others.

In India, the Consumer and Trust Society and the Center for Science and Environment are the most prominent. 7.

Whether a case was established against Osama bin Laden is in the realm of law is besides the point. But his whereabouts were found through an NGO. 8.

## The Arab and other Springs:

In December 2012, Egyptian prosecutors and police raided the offices of several groups, which called themselves "pro-democracy" NGOs. Four of them were based in the US government agencies. Forty three people, among them 16 U.S. citizens, were accused of not only failing to register with the government but also of financing the April 6, protest movement with illicit funds.

The U.S. sent a high-level delegation to Cairo and threatened to cut off up to \$1.3 billion in military and \$250 million in economic aid if the U.S. citizens were tried. One of them was Sam LaHood, the son of Obama's Transportation Secretary. Travel restrictions were placed on seven, including Sam. All but the seven fled the country on the first day of the case. They did not even deign to attend the court.

The ban on travel was lifted soon enough, and a US military plane took off with them. A day

after the ban was lifted a military plane removed the remaining seven U.S. citizens. The U.S. gave the Egyptian courts a sop of \$5 million in bail. 8.

The international community, instead of taking the US and its agents to task, accused the Egyptian military of paranoia of foreign interference so as to deflect attention from the slow pace of political and democratic reform. The Western News Media kept mum. 9.

The forty three defendants worked for four US based organizations; Freedom House; the National Democratic Institute (NDI); the International Republican Institute (IRI); the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Only one the ICFJ does not receive the majority of its funding either directly or indirectly from a government. 10.

Madeline Albright, a democrat and former US Secretary of State is the chairperson of NDI, and the IRI is chaired by Senator John McCain, former Republican presidential candidate.

The NDI and IRI, the Center for International Private Enterprise, which represents the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Solidarity Center of the AFL-CIO, make up the four “core institutions” of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

NED receives more than 90 percent of its annual budget from the U.S. government. Freedom House regularly receives the majority of its funding from the NED. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, associated with the Christian Democratic Union, receives over 90 percent of its funding from the German government. 11.

None of the five can thus be defined as NGOs.

Freedom House favors Free Markets and U.S. foreign policy interests. It claimed that in 2011, Venezuelans had the same level of political rights as Iraqis!!! 12

American-educated millionaire Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada initiated a sweeping privatization program. Bolivians protested. Gonzalo was removed from power. Bolivia’s status was reduced from ‘Free’ to ‘Partially Free’.

Even though it has the first government to recognize the rights of its indigenous majority, Bolivia is still rated by as only partially free and rated lower than Botswana where one party (the BDP) has been in power since the first elections were held there in 1965. 13.

A 1996 *Financial Times* article revealed that Freedom House was one of several organizations selected by the US State Department to receive funding for “clandestine activities” in Iran. Training and funding was provided to groups seeking regime change. 14.

The most egregious of the five organizations by far, are the IRI and the NDI. They receive NED grants “For work abroad to foster political parties, electoral processes and institutions, Free Trade Unions, and Free Markets and business organizations.” On March 6, a protest march was organized by American Civil Society Organizations at the NED offices in Washington, demanding: “No Attacks On Democracy Anywhere! Close The NED.” Union members and labor activists have protested and campaigned for years, demanding that the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center break all ties to the NED. 15.

Revolving Doors:

Chaired by Richard Gephardt—former Democratic Representative, now CEO of his own corporate consultancy and lobbying firm—NED’s board of directors consists of John A. Bohn, a former high level international banker and former president and CEO of Moody’s Investors Service, now Commissioner of the California Public Utilities Commission, and executive chair of an internet-based trading exchange for petrochemicals.

Kenneth Duberstein, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff under Reagan, now chair and CEO of his own corporate lobbying firm. Martin Frost is a former Congressperson who was involved in writing the 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act—also known as the Citigroup Relief Act, and William Galston, former student of Leo Strauss, is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran.

The Board also contains four of the founding members of ultra-conservative think tank Project for a New American Century: Francis Fukuyama (author of *The End of History*); Will Marshall (founder of the New Democrats, an organization that aimed to move Democratic Party policies to the right); former Congressperson Vin Weber (who retired in 1992 as a result of the House Banking Scandal and is now managing partner of a corporate lobbying firm); and Zalmay Khalilzad who, under George Bush Jr., served as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the UN. He is now president and CEO of his own international corporate advisory firm, which advises clients mainly in the energy, construction, education, and infrastructure sectors—wishing to do business in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. 16.

The NED was founded in 1983, when Washington was embroiled in numerous controversies relating to covert military operations and the training and funding of paramilitaries and death squads in Central and South America. It was formed to create an open and legal avenue for the U.S. government to channel funds to opposition groups against unfavorable regimes around the world, thus removing the political stigma associated with covert CIA funding. In a 1991 *Washington Post* article, “Innocence Abroad: The New World of Spyleless Coups,” Allen Weinstein (who helped draft the legislation that established the NED) declared: “A lot of what we [the NED] do today was done covertly twenty five years ago by the CIA.” 17.

In 1996, the Heritage Foundation published an article in defense of continued congressional funding, “The NED is a valuable weapon in the international war of ideas. It advances American national interests by promoting the development of stable democracies friendly to the U.S. in strategically important parts of the world. The U.S. cannot afford to discard such an effective instrument of foreign policy.... Although the Cold War has ended, the global war of ideas continues to rage.” 18

In addition to running campaigns of regime destabilization in states, such as Cuba and China, the NED has been repeatedly involved in influencing elections and overthrowing governments in left-leaning and anti-U.S. democratic regimes around the world. This is achieved by providing funding and/or training and strategic advice to opposition groups, political parties, journalists, and media outlets. As Barbara Conry of the Cato Institute wrote, “Through the Endowment, the American taxpayer has paid for special-interest groups to harass the duly elected governments of friendly countries, interfere in foreign elections, and foster the corruption of democratic movements.” 19.

From 1986 to 1988, the NED funded the right-wing political opposition to Nobel Peace Prize winner, President Oscar Arias, in democratic Costa Rica because he was outspokenly critical

of Reagan's violent policies in Central America. During the 1980's, the NED was active in "defending democracy" in France, due to the rise in communist influence perceived as occurring under the elected socialist government of Francois Mitterrand. In 1990, the NED provided funding and support to right-wing groups in Nicaragua. Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas were removed from power in an election described by Professor William I. Robinson as an event in which "Massive foreign interference completely distorted an endogenous political process and undermined the ability of the elections to be a free choice." 20

In the late 1990's, the NED provided funding and support to the U.S. backed right-wing opposition against the election campaign of progressive former president, and first democratically elected leader of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. When a coup removed Aristide from power for the second time in 2004, it was revealed that the NED had provided funding and strategic advice to the principal organizations involved in his ousting.

The involvement of the NED in the 2002 attempted coup against President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela has been well researched and documented. Immediately after the coup, however, then president of the IRI, George Folsom, revealed the Institute's role in the endeavor when he sent out a press release celebrating Chavez's ousting: "The Institute has served as a bridge between the nation's political parties and all civil society groups to help Venezuelans forge a new democratic future..." 21.

The IRI was also implicated in the 2009 Honduran coup amid claims that the organization had supported the ousting of democratically elected leader Manuel Zelaya because of his support of the Bolivian Alternative for the Americas (an anti-free trade pact including Honduras, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Cuba) and his refusal to privatize telecommunications. According to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, AT&T provided significant funding to both the IRI and Senator John McCain (its chair) in order to target Latin American states that refuse to privatize their telecommunications industry. 22.

A number of NED-backed activists have taken center stage in Arab Spring struggles and U.S. supported candidates have risen to occupy leading positions in newly established transitional governments. The most glaring example of this was Libya's transitional prime minister, Dr. Abdurrahim El-Keib, who holds dual U.S./Libyan citizenship and is former chair of the Petroleum Institute sponsored by British Petroleum, Shell, Total, and the Japan Oil Development Company. He handed the job of running Libya's oil and gas supply to a technocrat and according to the *Guardian*, has passed over Islamists expected to make the cabinet in order "To please Western backers." Tawakkul Karman, also of Yemen, who became the youngest ever recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, was leader of a NED grantee organization, "Women Journalists without Chains." 23.

In 2009, sixteen young Egyptian activists completed a two-month Freedom House New Generation Fellowship in Washington. The activists received training in advocacy and met with U.S. government officials, members of the Congress, media outlets, and think tanks. As far back as 2008, members of the April 6th Movement attended the inaugural summit of the Association of Youth Movements (AYM) in New York, where they networked with other movements, attended workshops on the use of new and social media and learned about technical upgrades, such as consistently alternating computer simcards, which help to evade state internet surveillance. AYM is sponsored by Pepsi, YouTube, and MTV. Among the luminaries who participated in the 2008 Summit, which focused on training activists in the use of Facebook and Twitter, were James Glassman of the State Department, Sherif Mansour

of Freedom House, National Security Advisor Shaarik Zafar, and Larry Diamond of the NED. 24.

Yet in September 2009, the U.S. authorities arrested Elliot Madison (a U.S. citizen and full-time social worker) for using Twitter to disseminate information about police movements to G20 Summit street protesters in Pittsburgh. Madison, apparently in violation of a loosely-defined federal anti-rioting law, was accused of “Criminal use of a communication facility,” “Possessing instruments of crime,” and “Hindering apprehension.” 25.

In June 2009, the State Department had requested that Twitter delay a planned upgrade so that Iranian protesters’ tweets would not be interrupted. Twitter subsequently stated in a blog post that it had delayed the upgrade because of its role as an “Important communication tool in Iran.” 26

A leaked 2008 cable from the Cairo U.S. Embassy entitled, “April 6 activist on his U.S. visit and regime change in Egypt,” showed that the U.S. was in dialogue with an April 6 youth activist about his attendance at the AYM Summit.

The dialogue proves that the funding of any youth organization associated with the April 6th movement by a U.S. organization since December 2008 had been done with Washington and the U.S. embassy in Cairo being fully aware that the movement’s aim was regime change in Egypt.

In April 2011, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Uprisings” in which it openly stated that, “A number of the groups and individuals directly involved in the revolts and reforms sweeping the region, including the April 6th Youth Movement in Egypt, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and grass-roots activists like Entsar Qadhi, a youth leader in Yemen, received training and financing from groups like the IRI, the NDI, and Freedom House.” 27.

According to the NED’s 2009 Annual Report, \$1,419,426 worth of grants was doled out to civil society organizations in Egypt that year. In 2010, the year preceding the January-February 2011 revolution, this funding increased to \$2,497,457. Nearly half of this sum, \$1,146,903, was allocated to the Center for International Private Enterprise for activities such as conducting workshops “To promote corporate citizenship” and engaging civil society organizations “To participate in the democratic process by strengthening their capacity to advocate for Free Market legislative reform on behalf of their members.” Freedom House also received \$89,000 to “Strengthen cooperation among a network of local activists and bloggers.” 28.

According to the same report, various youth organizations and youth orientated projects received a total of \$370,954 for activities, such as expanding the use of new media and social advertising campaigns among young activists, training and providing ongoing support ” 29

After the revolution, the NDI and IRI massively expanded their operations in Egypt, opening five new offices between them and hiring large numbers of new staff. According to Dawlat Eissa, a 27-year-old Egyptian-American and former IRI employee; the IRI used employees’ private bank accounts to channel money covertly from Washington, and an IRI accountant stated that directors used their personal credit cards for expenses. Sam LaHood reportedly told employees to collect all of the organization’s work related paperwork for scanning and shipping to the U.S.

It is clear that NDI, IRI and Freedom House were training and funding the youth movement in Egypt while the U.S. government and its Cairo Embassy were fully aware that the youth movement aimed to remove Mubarak from power. If China or Cuba were funding similar opposition groups in the U.S., those involved would be facing far harsher sentences than the forty three who stood now trial in Egypt. Yet they continue to hide behind the tattered guise of being NGO employees.

Ukraine:

The civil war in the country is a product of the strategy of the US and EU to install a pliant regime which would bring Ukraine into the European Common Market and NATO as a subordinate client state. Negotiations between the EU and the Ukraine government proceeded slowly. They eventually faltered because of the onerous conditions demanded by the EU and the more favorable economic concessions and subsidies offered by Russia. Having failed to negotiate the annexation of the Ukraine to the EU, and not willing to await scheduled constitutional elections, the NATO powers activated their well-financed and organized NGOs, client political leaders and armed paramilitary groups to violently overthrow the elected government. The violent putsch succeeded and a US-appointed civilian-military junta took power. 30.

Human Rights Watch as the example of Hypocrisy:

The term NGO is used deliberately to create an illusion of innocent philanthropic activity.

Human Rights Watch characterizes itself as “one of the world’s leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights.” However, HRW’s close ties to the U.S. government call into question its independence. HRW’s Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, previously served as a special assistant to President Bill Clinton and as a speechwriter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In 2013, he left HRW after being nominated as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights & Labor under John Kerry. 31.

In her HRW.org biography, Board of Directors’ Vice Chair Susan Manilow describes herself as “A longtime friend to Bill Clinton” who is “Highly involved” in his political party, and “Has hosted dozens of events” for the Democratic National Committee. 32.

Malinowski contended in 2009 that “Under limited circumstances” there was “A legitimate place” for CIA renditions, the illegal practice of kidnapping and transferring terrorism suspects around the planet”. 33.

In a 2012 letter to President Chávez, HRW criticized the country’s candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council, alleging that Venezuela had fallen “Far short of acceptable standards” and questioning its “Ability to serve as a credible voice on human rights.” But at no point has U.S. membership in the same council merited censure from HRW, despite Washington’s secret, global assassination program, its preservation of renditions , and its illegal detention of individuals at Guantánamo Bay. 34.

In February 2013, HRW described as “Unlawful” Syria’s use of missiles in its civil war. But HRW remained silent on the clear violation of international law constituted by the U.S. threat of missile strikes on Syria in August or the Drone strikes killing women and children in Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. 35

Syed Ehtisham is a retired surgeon who has worked in various HR and Socialist groups in the USA. He has published two books ,: "A Medical Doctor Examines Life on Three Continents," and , "God, Government and Globalization", and is working on a third, "An Analysis of the Sources and Derivation of Religions".

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