

'Civil society' NGOs set up to overthrow Serbia's Milosevic

by Edward Spannaus

At a July 29 hearing on "Prospects for Democracy in Yugoslavia" held by the European Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a U.S. State Department representative described in detail the efforts being made by the U.S. government to overthrow Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, using non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other means.

Special envoy Robert Gelbard first reiterated that the United States will provide no reconstruction assistance to Serbia. "Helping to rebuild Serbia's roads and bridges would funnel money directly into the pockets of Milosevic and his friends, prolonging the current regime and denying Serbia any hope of a brighter future," he said. "We must keep Milosevic isolated."

Gelbard—who is certainly not the originator of these programs—said that, in the past two years, the United States has spent \$16.5 million on "programs in support of Serbian democratization." This, he said, has been through agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and through U.S. NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

"I am working closely with the National Endowment family, including IRI and NDI, to explore the best ways to help the Serbian opposition and, crucially, to encourage all opposition groups to work together. The consensus among the experts is that opposition parties will be best served if we provide them with technical assistance and first-class political advice, the kinds that may seem commonplace to us but represent a whole different way of thinking to them."

Gelbard also cited the work of the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, which, he said, "has done good work with independent unions in Serbia and with our support is now readying a new program for interaction." He also put great emphasis on the "independent media," in regard to which he said that the United States is completing a "ring around Serbia" involving the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and other news programs, and that USAID is working to strengthen the independent news media inside Serbia.

The 'democracy promotion business'

The irony is that these programs, which in this case are being expressly used to overthrow Milosevic, are the same programs which USAID and the State Department use in countries whose governments the United States is supposedly assisting in a friendly manner, such as Russia.

USAID and similar programs have built up NGOs, and also use local government organizations in eastern Europe and Russia, as a way of bypassing the central governments, and of trying to buy support for unpopular austerity and privatization "reform" programs. In the name of "democracy," elected governments and parliaments are circumvented by Western-funded NGOs, which have been bribed to build support for so-called "market reforms" (see "The Fraud of 'Democratic Reforms,'" *EIR*, Aug. 6, 1999).

At a House hearing on U.S. aid to Russia on June 9, the State Department's coordinator for aid to the Newly Independent States, William Taylor, described this as a "bottom-up" approach, and said that U.S. assistance is designed to support "the expansion of lasting constituencies for reform." He gave the example of Ukraine, saying, "We have redirected our programs in Ukraine away from the central government toward pilot regions where we will work with the private sector."

Taylor said that, in both Ukraine and Russia, "our programs have focussed on mobilizing popular support for change and working with reformist regions."

"Our NGO programs," Taylor said, "have generally yielded successes. The number of NGOs in Russia, particularly in the regions, has grown dramatically. There are now over 65,000 registered NGOs in Russia; 54 USAID-supported NGO Resource Centers have directly supported thousands of NGOs across Russia through small grants and training."

At the House hearing, Harvard University's Prof. Marshall Goldman, who possesses an ill-deserved reputation as an expert on Russian economics, also urged that U.S. aid programs in Russia target the regions against Moscow—which he put in terms of supporting "those regions that promise to be the most vigorous in fighting the mafia and holding down corruption." Goldman added, "We should emphasize that entirely, and get out of Moscow."

Goldman said that the focus should be to build up "diversity of point of view." His model? "Do what George Soros did in his program in eastern Europe. Supply copiers or supply printing facilities. We worry, or have to worry, about undue interference in domestic politics, but we can apply the AID program by giving equipment and let as many people use that as possible."

The "best aid work has come from the private sector," Goldman said. The example he gave of the "impressive new businesses": McDonald's, which now has 49 restaurants in Russia.

Another witness at the House hearing was Paula Dobrian-

sky of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, who admitted that U.S. policies toward Russia have contributed to “the unprecedented growth of both anti-Americanism and anti-democratic sentiments,” and that most Russians “blame the United States for allegedly seeking to inflict misery and humiliation on the Russian people.” Nevertheless, Dobriansky’s proposal was for more of the same. We should *not* get out of the “democracy promotion business,” she argued, but rather, U.S. aid should be targeted to build up NGOs and reform-minded local leaders. She proposed that “the bulk of American aid to Russia should be slated for such pivotal tasks as democratic institution-building, the fostering of the rule of law, and various institutions of civil society.” She proposed that that most of the funds go to Russian NGOs, and that U.S. aid should rely more on organizations like the NED.

In fact, this is almost identical to the approach being taken in Yugoslavia—but there, the objective of overthrowing the existing government is openly declared.

U.S. policy shift on Croatia

In Croatia, where the government of Franjo Tudjman has gone after George Soros’s Open Society Institute, U.S. policy has apparently shifted to target the government. OSI spokesman John Fox was also featured at the Senate hearing, and he described what has been done in Croatia “just in the past year with an activist U.S. Ambassador and a complete change of policy toward the opposition there.”

“One year ago, the policy changed,” Fox said. “Resources went in, NGOs were brought in. The IRI-NDI program was stepped up. Ambassador Montgomery has taken a very hands-on approach there, and much more active attention to the [war crimes] tribunal—a variety of aspects to this. But it was good, old-fashioned basic baseball democratization: campaign assistance; they’ve worked with that coalition, whipping them into shape, providing resources.”

Infrastructure is humanitarian

At the Senate hearing, a contrary voice was presented by Father Irinej Dobrijevic, of the Office of External Affairs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who is based in the United States.

Father Dobrijevic challenged Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and others on the notion that some distinction can be made between “humanitarian” aid and rebuilding infrastructure. He asked, “Of what use is it for a hospital to receive medical commodities, to receive food and bedding and so on, and not have electricity, not have running water?” He also noted that people who need to cross a river to get to work, can’t earn a living if they can’t get to work.

“This is part of breaking that vicious cycle,” Father Dobrijevic said. “This is why I see the need for economic assistance. Infrastructure is intrinsically tied to the question of humanitarian aid, and the question of rebuilding Serbia.”

Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) asked about the view expressed by some people, that if the infrastructure is not rebuilt, this will accelerate the demise of Milosevic. “Quite the contrary,” Father Dobrijevic answered. “I would disagree. I think it would so clearly demoralize the people that they would not be able to rise up against him. You can’t starve someone into submission.”

Failure of Afghan talks signals new war danger

by Ramtanu Maitra and
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The two-day talks among the warring Afghan factions, under UN supervision, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on July 19-20, yielded nothing. What became evident is that the Taliban, who control about 90% of Afghanistan, and the Northern Alliance, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud and whose militia controls about 5% of Afghanistan, are preparing for yet another major clash, and it is not unlikely that some new elements may be joining the fight.

The talks were held at the behest of the six countries that border Afghanistan—China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. (The talks go under the name of the “6+2” formula, because, in addition to the six neighboring countries, Russia and the United States are also involved.) But, unlike earlier Afghan talks, which had also failed, this round drew the attention of many because of the developments taking place around Central Asia. In the United States, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), in his Silk Road Strategy Act, S. 579, urged lawmakers to assist “regional military cooperation among the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia through programs such as the Central Asia Battalion and the Partnership for Peace” of NATO. His initiative, though ostensibly favorable to development of the Silk Road, is a not-so-veiled proposal for NATO intervention into the volatile region. Any such intervention, whether directly by NATO, perhaps through Turkey in cooperation with Israel, would set the region afire. Russia has let it be known that NATO expansion into the Caucasus and Central Asia is considered a “red line”; if it is crossed, a major strategic confrontation will be on the agenda. At the same time that Brownback was peddling his wares to the Senate, developments in Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan seem indicative of a new pattern which is being woven—one that would have NATO embroidered boldly on the weave.