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The National Endowment for Democracy:What It Is and What It Does

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Introduction

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) acts as the US government's "white gloves." It has long engaged in subverting state power in other countries, meddling in other countries' internal affairs, inciting division and confrontation, misleading public opinion, and conducting ideological infiltration, all under the pretext of promoting democracy. Its innumerable evil deeds have caused grave harm and drawn strong condemnation from the international community.

In recent years, NED has kept changing tactics and gone even further in acting against the historical trend of peace, development and win-win cooperation. It has become more notorious for its infiltration, subversion and sabotage attempts against other countries. It is imperative to unmask NED and alert all countries to the need to see through its true colors, guard against and fight back its disruption and sabotage attempts, safeguard their national sovereignty, security and development interests, and uphold world peace and development and international fairness and justice.

I. NED—the US government's "white gloves"

NED claims to be an NGO that provides support for democracy abroad. In fact, it acts as the US government's "white gloves" in carrying out subversion, infiltration and sabotage across the world.

1. NED is the implementer of CIA covert operations. In the early days of the Cold War, CIA supported opposition activities in socialist countries in Eastern Europe via "private voluntary organizations" to advance "peaceful evolution." After such activities were exposed in the mid to late 1960s, the US government began contemplating cooperation with civil society organizations to conduct similar activities. Hence the idea of setting up an organization of this kind. As William Blum, an American scholar, wrote, "The idea was that the NED would do somewhat overtly what the CIA had been doing covertly for decades, and thus, hopefully, eliminate the stigma associated with CIA covert activities."¹

2. NED was established under the auspices of the US government. In 1981, after he came into office, President Ronald Reagan intended to promote his "Project Democracy" abroad, and proposed a government-funded and privately-run foundation to openly support "democratic movements abroad." One of the purposes of NED, created in 1983, is to encourage the establishment and growth of democratic development in a manner consistent both with the broad concerns of US national interests and with the specific requirements of the democratic groups in other countries which are aided by programs funded by NED.

3. NED is funded by US government. On November 22, 1983, the US Congress passed the NED Act which reiterated the purposes of NED and clarified such issues as congressional appropriations, financial audit by the government, and the requirement to report to the Congress and the President. In 1983, the year when NED was established, the Congress provided US\$18 million to NED. Over the past 40-plus years, the volume of congressional appropriations has kept increasing in general. According to data from USAspending.gov, NED received an appropriation of US\$315 million in FY2023. As a report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace revealed, "Almost all the NED's funds come from the US Congress."^{II}

4. NED programs are run under the guidance of the US State Department and embassies abroad. As required by the enabling legislation for NED, NED should consult with the State Department on its program plans to seek foreign policy guidance. According to a USAID report "Democracy Promotion Programs Funded by the US Government," NED consults on an ongoing basis with the State Department, through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, with USIA and with US embassies abroad on programmatic matters.

5. NED reports to the US government on its work and accepts audit and oversight by the government. According to the NED Act, NED shall submit to the President an annual report for the preceding fiscal year no later than December 31 of each year. The report should include NED's operations, activities and accomplishments. Audit of NED is conducted annually by the US Government General Accounting Office. A report of each audit shall be made to the Congress, and a copy of each report shall be furnished to the President.

6. The US government has access to information on all NED-funded programs. According to the NED Act, NED or any of its duly authorized representatives shall have access to any books, documents, papers, and records of the recipient pertinent to assistance provided through NED. The US Comptroller General or any of his duly authorized representatives shall also have access thereto.

7. NED's mandate is endorsed by the US government. Philip Agee, a former CIA officer, said on a 1995 TV show, "Nowadays, instead of having just the CIA going around behind the scenes and trying to manipulate the process secretly by inserting money here and instructions there and so forth, they have now a sidekick, which is this National Endowment for Democracy, NED." In a report entitled "The National Endowment for Democracy: A Prudent Investment in the Future," Kim Holmes, former Assistant Secretary of State, argues that "Funding the NED is a prudent investment because it is far less expensive to aid friendly democrats than it is to defend against hostile dictatorships."

II. Instigating color revolutions to subvert state power in other countries

1. Attempting to overthrow the Iranian government. In September 2022, protests against hijab rules broke out in Iran. Masih Alinejad, a reporter for the Voice of America Persian Service, released batches of unverified information and pictures to incite public sentiments. According to Al Mayadeen, a Lebanese news channel, between 2015 and 2022, Masih Alinejad received US\$628,000 in funding from NED and some other American institutions. *Iran Daily* cited a document from Iran's Revolutionary Guards as saying that NED used its ties with Masih Alinejad to interfere in Iran's internal affairs during the hijab protests. In the meantime, NED also supported the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) and the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) in their fabrication of fake news, and supported dissidents in working with anti-government organizations and media outlets to stage smear campaigns. NED regularly published commentaries on its *Journal of Democracy* to call for a regime change in Iran through human rights movement. NED is dubbed by Iranian media as a "National Enemy for Democracy" and "the NED Trojan" disrupting order and inciting unrest in Iran.

2. Using various tactics to infiltrate Arab countries. Since the start of the Arab Spring, NED has made extensive use of social media platforms and funded NGOs for releasing multimedia content and providing online training, in a bid to instigate color revolutions. NED has also run a talent reserve program for democratic transition in the region, funded NGOs to help "supporters of democracy," "human rights activists" and "dissidents" in exile, encouraged local trade unions to strengthen capacity building, and supported scholars and activists in plotting "constitutional reforms" in various countries.

3. Playing a part in Ukraine's "color revolution." During the 2004 Orange Revolution, NED provided US\$65 million to the Ukrainian opposition. Between 2007 and 2015, NED allocated more than US\$30 million to support Ukrainian NGOs and promote "civic participation." During the 2013-2014 Euromaidan, NED financed the Mass Media Institute to spread inflammatory information. NED also spent tens of millions of dollars in the use of such social media platforms as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram to spread disinformation, heighten ethnic tensions in Ukraine, and stir up ethnic antagonism in eastern Ukraine.

4. Attempting to overthrow the DPRK government. In July 2002, NED President Carl Gershman told the media that NED was working with the Congress to carry out activities through a number of NGOs and sway public opinion regarding the DPRK, with a view to undermining the DPRK system. In July 2021, Gershman told the media that thanks to NED-funded human rights programs, "The totalitarian system [in the DPRK] is beginning to erode, and eventually this will bring about the system's unraveling."

III. Colluding with all sorts of elements to meddle in other countries' internal affairs

1. Cultivating pro-US forces in target countries

◆ According to its 2021 Annual Report, NED supported pro-US media outlets, cultivated "democracy activists," and financed groups for "democracy and freedom" in Arab countries.

◆ In May 2021, NED President Carl Gershman said that despite being prohibited from Russia, NED funded the operation of a large number of organizations in Russia and supported Russian opposition figures in exile in their struggle against the Russian government at important political junctures, such as the State Duma, presidential and local elections.^{III}

◆ NED has long been infiltrating Europe and co-opting EU officials. It has been encouraging voice for transatlanticism within EU institutions while suppressing voice for strategic autonomy, and financing “independent media” in Europe to tilt public opinion in favor of the US.

◆ Taking Mexico as a major target country for infiltration, NED has supported organizations like the Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity (MCCI) and the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO), and obstructed the electricity reform in Mexico. In 2021, the Mexican government sent a note to the US government condemning NED’s funding of anti-government organizations in Mexico as “an act of interventionism” “promoting a coup.”

◆ Since 2017, NED has funded 54 anti-Cuba organizations. In 2018, the Cuban Democratic Directorate, an anti-government organization, said that it had received “democracy funds” from the US and paid US\$48,000 to its employees, agents and contractors in Cuba.

◆ Over the years, NED has been funding scholars and journalists to promote “democratization reforms” in Iran and carry out cultural infiltration against Iran.

2. Misrepresenting the human rights situation in other countries

◆ The NED-sponsored *Journal of Democracy* habitually holds developing countries to the standard of American-style democracy and criticizes their presidential elections, economic policies, human rights situations, and democratic transitions.

◆ In July 2023, the *Journal of Democracy* published five articles on Indian democracy under the theme of “Is India Still a Democracy,” claiming that since Prime Minister Narendra Modi rose to power, his government has engaged in what is, by some accounts, a wholesale dismantling of democratic institutions, norms, and practices. In April 2024, the *Journal of Democracy* published an article “Why This Election Is India’s Most Important,” claiming that democratic governance in India has been steadily eroding since Modi’s second term began and that the future of India as a plural, secular democracy could be on the line if Prime Minister Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party win a third consecutive term.

◆ Having classified members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as “dictatorships,” NED has continued to export its values to those countries through academic, cultural and media activities. According to the NED website and other sources, NED launched 11 programs in the GCC countries in 2021 with an investment of US\$1.8 million, to support “democracy activists,” slam the human rights record of those countries, and stoke social tensions in the name of promoting freedom of the press.

3. Manipulating and interfering in other countries’ elections

◆ In April 2022 and December 2023, Serbia held its presidential, National Assembly and local elections. NED interfered in the entire election process, and went all out to root for pro-US opposition candidates in the run-up to the elections. In May 2023, after two consecutive shooting incidents in Serbia, NED-sponsored human rights groups and pro-US opposition organizations staged mass demonstrations to demand the resignation of the Serbian government.

◆ NED has long been financing the Philippines' Rappler news website. According to a report on the NED website, between 2017 and 2021, Rappler received a total of US\$786,000 in funding from NED. During the 2022 general election, Rappler lobbied the Philippines' Commission on Elections for access to internal information including election trends and campaign spending of candidates, which raised questions from various quarters about the fairness and independence of the election. The authorized access was eventually revoked under intense public pressure.

◆ NED has long funded anti-Iran organizations such as the Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI) to sabotage elections. This has been admitted in an article by American social activist Kenneth R. Timmerman, the executive director of FDI.

◆ In January 2023, Damon Wilson, President of NED, publicly expressed concerns about democracy and fairness of the Nigerian general election during his interview with a Nigerian TV program.

IV. Inciting division and confrontation to undermine the stability of other countries

Kenneth Wollak, chairman of the NED board of directors, once told the US Congress NED's long-term efforts to empower the opponents of US enemies and their abilities to change foreign governments.^{IV}

1. Supporting "Taiwan independence" separatist forces. In 2022, NED and the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party authorities co-hosted a Global Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy and invited European parliamentarians and think tank representatives. They tried to mobilize "democratic forces" to open up the "frontline of democratic struggle in the East" and hype up the false narrative of "Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow." In July 2023, NED President Damon Wilson went to Taiwan for the 20th anniversary celebration of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, and presented a "Democracy Service Medal" to Tsai Ing-wen.

2. Colluding with anti-China destabilizing forces in Hong Kong. NED has long been colluding with those who attempt to destabilize Hong Kong by providing funds and public support. In 2020, NED set up several projects under its Hong Kong-related program with a total amount of over US\$310,000 to fund those attempting to destabilize Hong Kong. In 2023, NED colluded with organizations such as the Hong Kong Watch and Amnesty International, as well as anti-China lawmakers from the US, UK and Germany, and nominated Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, one of the elements bent on destabilizing Hong Kong, for the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize.

3. NED has long supported the anti-China organization "World Uyghur Congress (WUC)," with average annual funding ranging from US\$5 million to US\$6 million. In March 2024, NED invited a "WUC" leader to speak at its event, smearing China's ethnic policies and the development of regions with large ethnic minority populations.

NED provided financial support to Hidayet Oguzhan, leader of the “East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association,” and instructed Hidayet Oguzhan to ramp up anti-China rallies and sow discord between China and Türkiye. NED also funded Rushan Abbas, the head of an “East Turkistan” organization, so that she could frequently visit Türkiye and work with “East Turkistan” forces to stir up trouble.

4. In March 2023, NED President Damon Wilson led a NED delegation to Dharamsala, India, to meet with “Tibet independence” leaders and show support for “Tibet independence” activities. In November 2023, NED gave the Democracy Award for Individual Courage to Jigme Gyatso, a “Tibet independence” activist. In April 2024, NED invited the “Kalon Tripa” of the “Tibetan government-in-exile” Penpa Tsering to its headquarters.

5. NED funded the establishment of three local NGO groupings in Georgia at the beginning of the 21st century to organize demonstrations in capital Tbilisi. In May 2024, NED rallied support for and instigated protests in Georgia against the foreign agents bill.

V. Fabricating false information to mislead public opinion

1. NED President Damon Wilson, in an interview with *Asahi Shimbun*, falsely alleged that China used technical means and AI to surveil citizens. On November 30, 2023, NED Vice President Christopher Walker made up lies about CPC monopolizing ideas when testifying before the US House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party. ^V

2. NED-backed Serbian NGOs coordinated with CNN’s Serbia branch to fabricate China-related fake news, slandering projects undertaken by the Chinese side and hyping up so-called environmental protection, labor and corruption issues.

3. NED funded the International Republican Institute (IRI) to launch the second phase of the Bolstering Europe Against the Subversive Tactics of the CPC project, which fabricates and disseminates the so-called threat of CPC to democratic values and transatlantic solidarity.

4. NED invested US\$17.41 million to carry out 92 projects on “DPRK defectors.” It funded ROK NGOs to run DPRK-themed radios, producing and broadcasting on a weekly basis stories about “DPRK defectors” from the perspective of “democracy and human rights.” It created DPRK-themed online publications to spread negative news about the DPRK, trained “defectors” to become reporters, and encouraged them to defame the DPRK by writing online posts and attending video interviews.

5. NED formed an information matrix against Iran together with Iran International, the Persian service of VOA and BBC, and other anti-Iran media. Negative information is provided to anti-Iran media by NED and its affiliated agencies to instigate intensive news coverage against Iran.

VI. Using “academic activities” as a cloak for interference and infiltration

1. NED funded the Governance Center for Public Policies (GCPP) in Iraq, which released the National Index for Democratic Transformation in Iraq report for six consecutive years, giving low

scores every time to Iraq's democracy, and categorizing Iraq as a "partial authoritarian transitional" country. People from across the society in Iraq disapprove the report as it did not truthfully reflect Iraq's progress in government administration, social governance, democracy and legal system. They believe the purpose of keeping the scores low is to provide excuses for continued US interference in Iraq's internal affairs and postponement of its military withdrawal.

2. In March 2024, NED's core grantee institution Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), together with the Philippines Makati Business Club and other associations, jointly published the first State of Sustainability Reporting in the Philippines, unfairly imposing upon the Philippines carbon emission standards and obligations of the US and other industrialized countries in the West to pressure the government of the Philippines to change the country's economic structure.
3. NED provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding to the European Values Center for Security Policy (EVC), Global Security Center (GSC) and other think tanks to organize various seminars and activities that incite the EU to follow suit with the US "small yard, high fence" policy.
4. Since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, the NED-funded Belgrade Center for Security Policy has supported protests by pro-Western demonstrations and criticized Serbia's foreign policy.
5. From January 2022 to January 2023, NED funded, through Atlas Network, the Turkish digital media platform daktilo1984.com, and supported activities on this platform that spread discontent and incite ethnic tension, social conflict and political differences.
6. NED has long funded NGOs in "Kosovo" to instigate tension between the Serbian government and the Pristina provisional self-governance institution. In December 2023, the NED-funded think tank Sbunker released a report saying that "Kosovo" is a relatively successful case of American support for nation building and promotion of democracy, an attempt to whitewash US' true intention to invade and split other countries.
7. NED used social media to wage information warfare against Iran. During the protests against hijab rules, a large number of social media bots with a big following emerged, disguising as personal accounts or independent media to spread anti-Iran information and mislead the public.
8. NED and USAID funded multiple Ukrainian organizations to serve as "fact-checkers" of Ukraine's social media. But such "fact-checking" is in fact an information filter created by the US on the Ukrainian Internet to deceive the Ukrainian people.

VII. NED exposed and criticized by the US and the international community

1. NED's true nature exposed by Americans

◆ Former federal congressman Ron Paul once posted that NED wasted a lot of American taxpayers' money to support foreign politicians and parties favored by the US, and such actions clearly violate the domestic law of the United States. NED provided "soft money" to fund foreign elections but portrayed such manipulation of election as "promoting democracy."

◆ Former federal congressman Barney Frank called for cutting the funding for NED in the 1980s. He argued that giving money to a French union for political purposes, rather than funding public transportation or research on cancer, is not reasonable.

◆ *The New York Times* published “Mixed US Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos” in January 29, 2006, which reveals how the US government subverted, through NED, Haiti’s democratically elected government.

◆ In September 2021, Stephen Kinzer, a former reporter of *The New York Times*, published articles in the New York Review of Books website unveiling that NED collaborates with CIA and USAID to support insurgent forces in other countries in a bid to overthrow regimes that the US dislikes. According to the articles, early members of the NED board of directors were mostly warmongers, and among the current board members are former federal senators enthusiastic about regime change in Cuba and Nicaragua. The mission of NED is to overthrow unfriendly foreign governments and install regimes more in line with American interests.

2. NED’s misdeeds exposed and criticized by the international community

◆ On July 29, 2015, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement officially listing NED as an “undesirable organization” and banned its activities within Russian territory. The statement said the US Department of State had made a clearly hypocritical statement about being “deeply troubled” over the fate of Russian civic society. Most of NED’s projects aimed to destabilize the domestic situation in countries trying to pursue an independent policy in line with its own national interests rather than following Washington’s lead.

◆ In May 2022, the Russian news agency TASS reported that when interviewed by the magazine *National Defense*, Russia’s Assistant Secretary of the Security Council Nail Mukhitov commented that NED mainly affects young people, attempting to erode their patriotism and downplay the role of Russia in the modern world order. Using “liberating the people” as an excuse, the West attempts to install negative views about Russia in its citizens.

◆ French journalist Frédéric Charprier published the book *CIA in France: 60 Years of Interference in French Affairs* in 2008, revealing NED activities in France, and stated that NED relies on disbursement from three agencies—US State Department, USIA, and USAID, and serves the US diplomatic and military policies.

◆ In 2010, the French website Voltaire Network published an article by its founder, Thierry Meyssan, titled “NED, the Legal Window of the CIA,” exposing NED’s direct involvement in French NGOs, its interference in French elections, among other misdeeds.

◆ In 2018, the Hungarian media *Figyelo* blacklisted the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a civil human rights organization funded by NED, as “Soros mercenaries,” accusing it of colluding with foreign forces and undermining the stability of Hungary.

◆ In April 2023, NED opened funding applications to recruit non-partisan, independent media seeking to defend human rights and the rule of law, and support freedom of speech. Stephen Kinzer,

former reporter of *The New York Times*, cautioned world governments that NED's sole purpose is training people to destabilize governments that Washington disapproves.

◆ The Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of Russia pointed out in its article "the National Endowment for Democracy at 40: Back to Basics?" that NED allows the US government to pursue a simultaneous two-level foreign policy with current dictatorial governments, in which the US government maintains relations, while NED works at the sub-state level over the long term to cultivate required political forces capable of replacing these governments in the future. NED can play a role in sensitive areas where government programs are inconvenient.

◆ In June 2023, *Agencia Brasil* quoted Camila Feix Vidal, professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, as saying that NED is strong evidence of democracy being used as a pretext for seeking gains and a moral excuse for meddling in other countries.

◆ In 2016, the Indian government put NED under watch list due to its donation to NGOs in contravention of the provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

Conclusion

Under the guise of democracy, freedom, and human rights, the United States has used NED for infiltration, interference and subversion against other countries. This has grossly violated other countries' sovereignty, security and development interests, blatantly breached international law and basic norms of international relations, and severely jeopardized world peace and stability. Such unpopular and despicable acts are firmly opposed by the international community.

The world is moving toward multipolarity, and there need to be greater democracy in international relations. Every country has the right to pursue a development path suited to its national realities and the needs of its people. No country is in a position to lecture others on democracy and human rights, still less using democracy and human rights as excuses to infringe upon the sovereignty of other countries, interfere in their internal affairs and incite ideological confrontation. Following humanity's common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, members of the international community should engage in exchanges and dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and equality, and work together to contribute to the progress of humanity.

Note

I. William Henry Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, Zed book, 2006

II. Thomas Carothers, Benjamin Feldman, *Examining U.S. Relations with Authoritarian Countries*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dec. 2023

III. RT, 'American 'Regime change' specialists NED claim credit for Belarus protests & boast of funding Russian opposition during prank call, 17th May, 2021

IV. Edward Hunt, *NED Pursues Regime Change by Playing the Long Game*, Counterpunch, 6th July, 2018

V. U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository: docs.house.gov