

Our bilateral and multilateral efforts to promote fundamental freedoms continue to bear fruit. Citing improvements in both political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House notes that “The Freedom in the World 2006 ratings for the Middle East represent the region’s best performance in the history of the survey” and that this positive trajectory has been on the rise since 9/11.

Afghanistan

- The United States and its partners in Operation Enduring Freedom and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force helped initiate democratic reform in Afghanistan, resulting in the successful Presidential elections in October and President Hamid Karzai’s inauguration in December 2004, and the National Assembly Elections in September and the Assembly’s inauguration in December 2005.
- U.S. assistance to Afghanistan totals more than \$12.5 billion since FY 2001.
- In addition to security, law enforcement, and counternarcotics support, the international community has built or refurbished 542 schools and distributed 49 million textbooks since FY 2002. United States assistance also concentrated on road construction, health clinics, and agricultural development.
- The United States is promoting educational reform and providing opportunities to girls and boys denied an education under the Taliban.

Iraq

- In January 2005, Iraq held its first free and fair elections in more than 50 years. Iraq continued its political reforms by drafting and holding elections to approve a permanent constitution and electing a permanent constitution-based Iraqi Government in December 2005.
- We are supporting the joint Iraq/UN effort to develop an International Compact to help Iraq transition to economic self-sufficiency through Iraqi commitments to benchmarked economic reforms and donor commitments to sustained assistance over the medium term.
- The United States is providing over \$20 billion in development and reconstruction assistance to lay a strong foundation for Iraq’s economic and democratic success.
- We have invested significantly in democracy-building activities, including the drafting of an Iraqi constitution, building civil society, strengthening independent media, advancing civic education and public dialogue, promoting rule of law and respect for human rights, and enabling the electoral process.
- The United States Government also is targeting assistance to particularly vulnerable populations such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, and youth.
- The United States remains firmly committed to supporting the Iraqi government, and our forces, with our Coalition allies, continue to train, assist, and fight alongside the Iraqi Security Forces.
- Iraq faces significant challenges in the coming months and years. Foreign terrorists and local radical extremists have waged a bloody campaign of terror in an effort to undermine Iraq’s democratic accomplishments and create a safe haven to train and launch new terrorist attacks. Their actions have made Iraq a central front in the War on Terror and our success there will deliver an important blow to the enemy in the most important battle of the 21st Century.