

Elliott Abrams on the name change of the Bureau to Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

I think it is a conscious decision to keep using the word “democracy.” When I was in the Human Rights Bureau at State it was known, the initials—every State Department bureau has initials—was H.A., which actually stood for Humanitarian Affairs. And I think the formal name was the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. Now it’s DRL; Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. And one of the things that means, I think, is the idea that ultimately the way to guarantee human rights in a country is to establish a democratic system so that people can protect their own human rights, so they don’t need the intervention of foreigners to do that. They are separate; you can envision a system that’s democratic and doesn’t protect human rights, a kind of majoritarian system where minorities are pretty well crushed. You can win a lot of elections that way and we have seen that in a number of countries. So you need both concepts, I think, and the Reaganite criticism of the Carter administration was it was human rights but not democracy.