

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

[Al Jazeera Helps Spread Democracy, Says Former Critic Perle](#) ^[1]

WASHINGTON, March 30 - One of Al Jazeera's fiercest critics in the U.S. now says the Arab satellite channel has become a vehicle to spread democracy in the Arab world.

Acknowledging this reversal of his longtime criticism of the channel, [Richard Perle](#) this morning said Al Jazeera's broadcasts of elections in Afghanistan and Iraq and anti-Syrian protests in Lebanon was advancing democracy in the region - just by the pictures it showed.

"Images conveyed by Al Jazeera have been very powerful," Perle said.

Just a few years ago, Perle was complaining that Al Jazeera's powerful images of civilian casualties in Iraq and its broadcasts of statements by Osama bin Laden were anti-American propaganda.

But speaking this morning at a [forum](#) at the American Enterprise Institute, Perle said democracy was advanced just by showing pictures of Iraqi voters' ink-stained fingers and of women voting in Afghanistan. These and other images carried in newscasts throughout the Arab world, he said, are having an impact.

"People see possibilities for self-government that may not have existed before," Perle said.

The role of Al Jazeera and other Arab satellite channels echoes the role of the arrival of the telegraph in that region a century ago, according to another speaker at the forum, [Michael Rubin](#).

Rubin, an historian who has studied Iran's political history, said it was clear from the daily news reporting from 1905 and 1906 that Iranians were using the then new telegraph technology to follow closely the pro-democracy protests in neighboring Russia - and then to make similar demands on their own government.

"What the telegraph did then," said Rubin, "the Internet does now."

That same pattern may now be playing out in Syria, according to Rubin, beyond the control of the Damascus government.

"Syria can try to crack down on the Internet," he said. "But they just dial out" to Lebanon, next door, to get unrestricted Internet access.

A third speaker, [Michael Novak](#), cited yet another influence: religion. On a recent trip to Jeddah, Novak said he saw pilgrims from around the Arab world who came and saw the relative affluence of Saudi Arabia.

Perle, a senior Pentagon official from 2001 to 2003, was especially critical of U.S. State Department relations with totalitarian states in the Middle East and elsewhere.

“The diplomatic profession is focused narrowly on state to state, government to government,” he said. This empowers dictators, said Perle, and discourages those who are fighting for democracy and freedom.

“The dominance of the diplomatic bureaucracy stands in the way of [democratic] revolution,” said Perle. “The Europeans are hopeless on this.”
