



# Annual Report

2023

**RDI** Renew  
Democracy  
Initiative®

## **VISION**

RDI envisions a world where the forces of freedom are united and authoritarianism is in retreat.

## **MISSION**

RDI is committed to unmasking and confronting the alliance of dictators threatening freedom around the world. By doing so, we inspire those in the US and other free countries to value and protect their own democracies.

## Letter from RDI CEO, Uriel Epshtein

This year, Americans will cast their votes for president in an election where neither candidate is popular and one openly expresses authoritarian sentiments.

In 2024, Ukrainians will enter a critical stage in the fight for their country's democratic future. Yet some of Kyiv's allies—including in the White House—still act without urgency.

In the months ahead, the Middle Eastern status quo, always fluid, will enter a period of increasing instability and uncertainty. Will the horror we witnessed on October 7th and the ensuing war ultimately give way to a more sustainable peace? Or will Iran and its proxies widen and perpetuate the conflict, plunging millions of people into further misery?

These challenges demand our commitment and RDI has not shirked its responsibility.



### Here are just a few of the ways we made a difference over the past twelve months:

**Our team launched Frontlines of Freedom TV**, a new web show that goes toe-to-toe with propagandists and agents of viral disinformation in ways the legacy media cannot.

**We held our inaugural Frontlines of Freedom Conference on combating transnational repression**, equipping scores of dissidents with valuable resources, which included an international network of pro-democracy activists and critical advice on issues like digital safety and immigration.

RDI published ***Making Putin Pay***, a report led by noted legal scholar Laurence Tribe, **establishing President Biden's authority to turn frozen Russian assets into a resource for Ukrainian victory.**

**RDI continued to provide significant material aid to frontline communities in Ukraine** directly affected by the Russian invasion.

**We brought former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss along with a delegation of British Tories to meet with Republicans in DC—including 25 members of Congress**—to explain the importance of supporting Ukraine.

**We expanded our reach to new audiences** with the addition of over 15,000 new subscribers, the launch of an innovative college course on democracy in partnership with Johns Hopkins University, and events at other campuses around the country.

There is a lot at stake for democracy in the year ahead, and we are just getting started. Keep an eye on our efforts as we expand these essential programs and launch new ones in the year ahead.

Thank you for your support and your trust. I look forward to working with you in 2024.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Epshtein". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Uriel Epshtein  
CEO, Renew Democracy Initiative

**From incisive newsletters to thought-provoking videos, RDI creates engaging content that unmask the alliance of dictators threatening freedom around the world.**



## NEWSLETTERS



The Democracy Brief™

Our flagship newsletter, The Democracy Brief, highlights important stories on democracy you haven't heard.



RDI also relaunched The Topline newsletter in 2024. The Topline helps readers stay informed on the latest developments and most innovative ideas in protecting and advancing American democracy.



### The US Isn't Ready for AI Fake News

90 percent of Americans consider themselves above average in identifying fake news. We're in for a shock.



### Protecting Dissidents Is Good Foreign Policy

Exiled dissidents are at the forefront of the global struggle between democratic protest movements and authoritarian regimes. The US can do more to help them.



## DARTMOUTH VOICES OF DISSENT

RDI's Garry Kasparov and Evan Mawarire brought the realities of dissent under dictatorship home to 300 American students and faculty at Dartmouth College. Voices of Dissent is emblematic of RDI's innovative approach to raising the alarm about democracy at home by sharing the stories of those who have put their lives on the line for freedom around the world.



WATCH FULL VIDEO

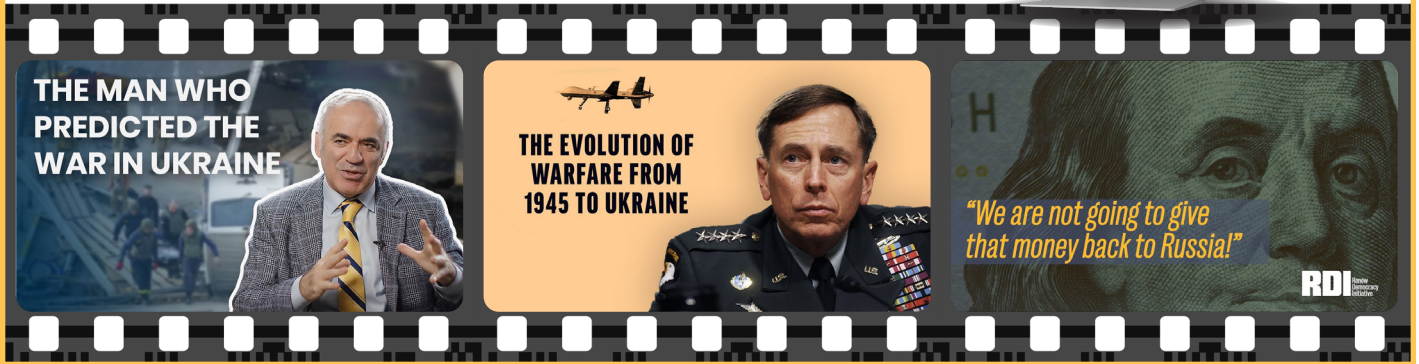




## VIDEOS

In 2023 RDI's videos received

# MILLIONS OF VIEWS



## FRONTLINES OF FREEDOM COURSE



**JOHNS HOPKINS**  
STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION  
SNF AGORA INSTITUTE

Each January, RDI hosts an intensive one-week course at Johns Hopkins University on its Frontlines of Freedom program, inviting a different dissident as a guest lecturer each day.

The course examines the rise of authoritarian regimes around the world and the pro-democracy protest movements organized to stop them.

### RDI's 2023 Dissident in Residence: Sunny Cheung

RDI established a Dissident-in-Residence program in partnership with Johns Hopkins University. Sunny Cheung of Hong Kong is the Dissident-in-Residence for the 2023-2024 academic year.



## GEORGETOWN

Evan Mawarire spoke at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service Commencement in May to offer the graduates words of hope and resilience as they enter a new phase in their lives.



**RDI is helping lead the national conversation on how the alliance of dictators is threatening democracy around the world and how we can protect it.**

The New York Times The Washington Post The Atlantic

THE BULWARK NBC POLITICO TIME

CNN NATIONAL REVIEW Forbes FOREIGN AFFAIRS SCRIPPS NEWS

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Newsweek KYIV POST

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**Biden Needs a New Foreign-Policy Team**

— Garry Kasparov —  
November 2, 2023

NATIONAL  
REVIEW

**Africa's Dictators are on a Killing Spree.  
Who is Giving them Cover?**

— Evan Marawire —  
February 12, 2023

Forbes

**Chess Legend and Putin Critic Garry Kasparov on  
Why Russia Will Lose in Ukraine**

— Garry Kasparov —  
May 2, 2023

“What happened in Poland is proof that when pro-democracy forces cease their bickering and come together as a unified front, they can overcome wannabe authoritarians, even when they’re faced with an uneven playing field.”

— Uriel Epshtein,  
The Washington Post “Poland offers  
hope for Reclaiming Democracy”  
October 2023

In May 2023, we led a delegation of American thought leaders and journalists to Ukraine to meet with top Ukrainian officials, military leaders, and recipients of RDI's aid. This trip spawned numerous articles highlighting the Ukrainian will to fight and imploring Washington DC and other Americans to maintain our support for Ukraine's fight for freedom.

## The Washington Post

**I was just in Kyiv under fire. I saw why Ukraine can win.**

May 22, 2023



But after spending last week in Kyiv with a delegation from the Renew Democracy Initiative (a pro-democracy group founded by former chess champion Garry Kasparov), I concluded that the Ukrainians' determination to prevail against heavy odds was not only laudable but also eminently sensible. Ukrainians have taken the worst that Russian dictator Vladimir Putin has dished out, and they have not only survived but also thrived."

—Max Boot

## The New York Times

**I Just Arrived in Kyiv. The Ukrainian Valor Is Breathtaking.**

May 18, 2023



Russia has been waging an unrestricted, gloves-off military campaign against Ukraine since the opening moments of the war, while the United States has continued to constrain Ukraine's response."

—David French

## The Atlantic

**Biden Is More Fearful Than the Ukrainians Are.**

May 29, 2023



I spoke to Ukrainians both in and outside of government during a recent trip to Kyiv with the Renew Democracy Initiative. Those I met were keenly aware that Ukraine relies on US weapons, US financial assistance, and US leadership to pull together international support, and they expressed gratitude for all that the United States is doing."

—Kori Schake

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Ukraine's Winnable War.**

June 13, 2023



Just as Russia has surprised everyone by its poor military performance, however, Ukraine has surprised everyone, as well, punching far above its weight throughout the conflict."

—Gideon Rose



**In 2023, Ukraine continued its heroic battle against authoritarian Russian aggression.** The Renew Democracy Initiative supported humanitarian campaigns that prioritize frontline communities and liberated territories, ensuring Ukraine's viability the day after the war. Through advocacy and educational campaigns as well as an RDI-led delegation to Kyiv, we sought to combat Russian disinformation and maintain Western unity in defense of Ukraine.

**In 2023 RDI donated over \$5 million to a range of humanitarian aid and political information campaigns supporting the defense of Ukraine.**

Our giving philosophy focuses on enabling Ukrainians to survive on their own land and repopulate areas liberated from Russia. We think of our giving as “humanitarian HIMARS” —relatively small grants that can have a disproportionate impact on the situation on the ground. To develop internal Ukrainian capacity, we ensure that as much of our aid as possible is produced in-country. Our value-investing approach is targeted for maximum impact in frontline communities, enabling more people to either return to their homes or never leave in the first place.

Our deep connections in Ukraine have enabled us to cut out middlemen and work directly with affected communities at scale.



**143,135**

MREs (meals ready to eat)



**37,070**

sleeping bags



**\$1,030,445**

to medical supplies and  
misc. humanitarian aid



**8**

water filtration units



**\$485,379**

to information campaigns



Western aid doesn't only keep people safe in big cities; it is often the difference between someone becoming a refugee and being able to remain in their home.

**RDI has provided more than \$11 million in humanitarian aid since the full-scale invasion in February of 2022, largely focused on keeping Ukraine habitable for everyday Ukrainians.** Some of our especially innovative investments include eight water filtration units, each capable of providing enough clean drinking water for 30,000 people each day.”

— Uriel Epshtein, RDI CEO

## RDI Water Filtration Units in Ukraine

RDI partnered with Rebuild Our Ukraine to build eight mobile water filtration units with the capacity to produce 90,000 liters of drinkable water per day, supporting up to 30,000 people.

At a time when Ukraine's civil infrastructure is under threat, these units enable Ukrainian communities to stay where they are, preventing thousands of Ukrainians from being displaced. Shortly after Russia destroyed the Kakhovka Dam, we moved two of our units to the south to provide safe drinking water to residents affected by Russia's eco-terrorism.





**Frontlines of Freedom (FOF) is a groundbreaking network of over 120 international freedom and democracy dissidents, united under RDI's banner to champion the cause of democracy around the globe. Our mission is to activate urgency, restore agency, and instill courage among citizens in free countries, empowering them to stand up against the tide of autocracy. By amplifying the lessons and lived experiences of dissidents who have faced the challenges of authoritarianism firsthand, FOF seeks to illuminate the path to a freer, more just world.**

### Frontlines of Freedom Conference on Transnational Repression

RDI launched our inaugural Frontlines of Freedom Conference in November 2023. **We united over 100 pro-democracy dissidents, NGO leaders, political decision-makers, business leaders, and journalists** to address transnational repression: the cross-border targeting of activists in exile by the governments they fled.

RDI called on Congress to pass the Transnational Repression Policy Act, which will hold foreign governments accountable for the abuses they commit and elevate transnational repression as a foreign policy priority for the United States. [Read our open letter here.](#)



Our dissidents and speakers came from all across the globe to challenge the threat of transnational repression.



## Frontlines of Freedom TV

Frontlines of Freedom TV is a new and unique online media platform seeking to bring attention to the global fight between freedom and tyranny. RDI's Evan Mawarire highlights the threats posed by dictators and their apologists—whether their talking points come from Moscow or Mar-A-Lago, Tucker or Tehran—in ways legacy media outlets can't.

FOFTV is taking the information war right to the dictators' doorsteps. We've targeted some of the worst purveyors of viral disinformation in the West, while also calling out the actions of dictators like Putin and Xi Jinping directly.



## FOFTV Guests Include:

### Malcolm Nance

*Former US Navy Intelligence Officer and Ukrainian Foreign Legionnaire*

### Masih Alinejad

*Iranian Women's Rights Activist*

### Bill Kristol

*Former Chief of Staff to Vice President Dan Quayle*

### Garry Kasparov

*RDI Chairman, Russian Dissident, and World Chess Champion*

### Michal Cotler-Wunsh

*Israeli Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism*

### Chemi Lhamo

*Tibetan Dissident*

### Max Boot

*Washington Post Columnist*

### Olga Lautman

*Senior Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis*



**WATCH ALL EPISODES**

 @RenewDemocracyInitiative

**RDI aims to shift opinion and behavior among critical groups of thought leaders, decision-makers, and other key constituencies on issues essential to our mission.**

In Washington, RDI led the way with important policy initiatives aimed at strengthening support for Ukraine. We launched the Making Putin Pay report, authored by noted legal scholar Laurence Tribe and a team of legal experts. Our independent study laid out the case for turning frozen Russian assets into an asset for Ukrainian victory and is making waves on Capitol Hill and beyond. RDI also organized a delegation of British Conservatives led by former Prime Minister Liz Truss to come to DC and shore up critical GOP support for Ukraine, framing Kyiv's struggle in terms Republican policymakers can relate to.

### British Delegation

RDI organized a delegation of senior UK Conservative politicians led by former Prime Minister Liz Truss to push Republican legislators for critical aid to Ukraine. The British mission represented a unique opportunity to frame Ukraine's cause in terms Republicans can relate to.

### Berlin Roundtables

We coordinated a series of roundtables in Berlin aimed at realizing Germany's potential as a foundational member of the democratic, transatlantic alliance. Representatives of the Bundestag (parliament) and government agencies joined journalists as well as leading Ukrainian and American voices to mobilize German support for Kyiv's cause.

### Informational Campaign

RDI launched a campaign to increase public support for Ukraine among key groups in the mid-Atlantic region. The campaign amplified messages from our Ukrainian partners and ensured that they broke through the noise among an audience that prioritizes foreign policy. Ultimately, we communicated that Ukraine represents the frontline of freedom and if they lose, that frontline moves closer to home. The campaign resulted in over 20 million impressions online and in-person.





## Making Putin Pay

Working with noted constitutional scholar Laurence Tribe and his colleagues at the law firm Kaplan, Hecker & Fink, RDI issued a comprehensive report laying out the legal framework for confiscating billions of dollars in Russian state assets. RDI hosted a [panel event](#) at the Voices of Communism Museum to present the findings of the report with author **Raymond Tolentino**, RDI CEO **Uriel Epshtein**, former Vice Presidential Chief of Staff **Bill Kristol**, and former US Representative **Tom Malinowski**. The report has had widespread impact, influencing decision-making at the highest levels of government and being sent to President Biden's desk with signatures from eight Members of Congress.



**If Ukraine is to defend itself and rebuild successfully, every dollar of legally available Russian assets must be brought to bear.”**

— *Making Putin Pay Report*

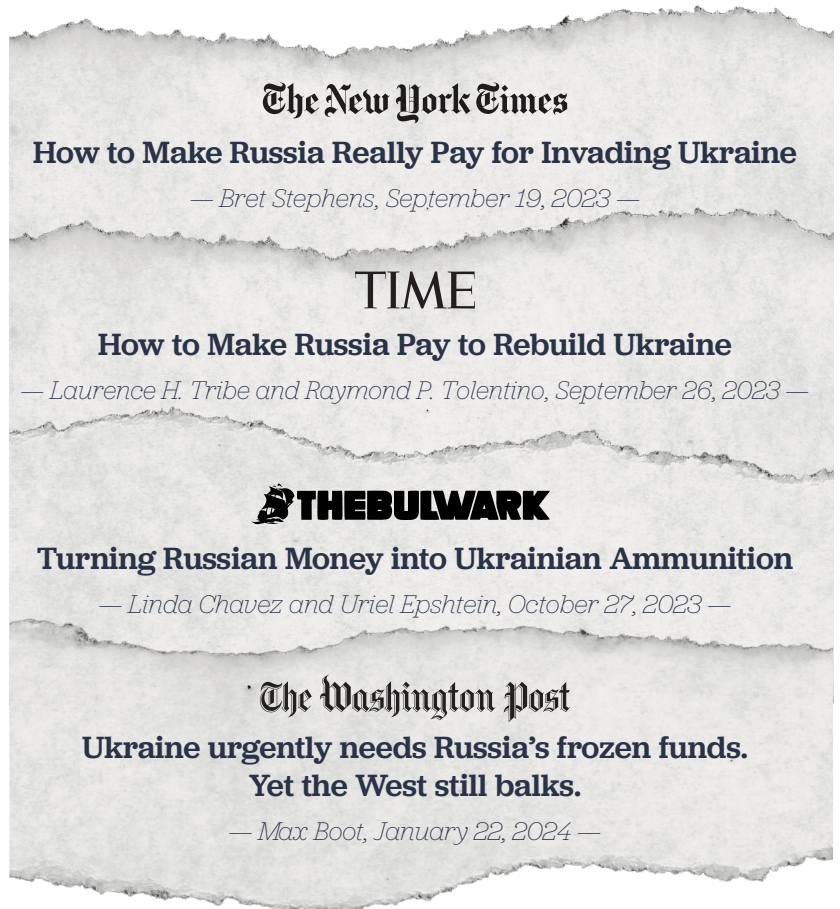


### THE LEGAL, PRACTICAL, AND MORAL CASE FOR TRANSFERRING RUSSIAN SOVEREIGN ASSETS TO UKRAINE

By: Laurence H. Tribe, Raymond P. Tolentino, Kate M. Harris, Jackson Erpenbach, and Jeremy Lewin

September 17, 2023

**READ FULL REPORT**



### The New York Times

**How to Make Russia Really Pay for Invading Ukraine**

— *Bret Stephens, September 19, 2023* —

### TIME

**How to Make Russia Pay to Rebuild Ukraine**

— *Laurence H. Tribe and Raymond P. Tolentino, September 26, 2023* —

### THEBULWARK

**Turning Russian Money into Ukrainian Ammunition**

— *Linda Chavez and Uriel Epshtein, October 27, 2023* —

### The Washington Post

**Ukraine urgently needs Russia's frozen funds. Yet the West still balks.**

— *Max Boot, January 22, 2024* —

**RDI is building communities** of thought leaders, dissidents, students, and dedicated individuals around the country who believe in the power of freedom and democracy. We do this through intimate salon discussions, innovative event series and courses, inspiring speaking engagements, and more.

### Heroes of Democracy Gala

We hosted our inaugural Heroes of Democracy Gala in April 2023 to celebrate remarkable individuals who have fought for freedom around the globe at great personal risk.

We were proud to present our very first Heroes of Democracy Awards to **Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba**, bravely fighting for his nation's survival; **Carine Kanimba, daughter of Hotel Rwanda hero Paul Rusesbagina**, who courageously fought for her father's freedom; **US Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough and her colleagues**, unsung heroes who protected America's democratic processes during the attempted insurrection on January 6th; and **Philanthropist Howard Buffett**, a firm believer in Kyiv's victory and an investor in Ukraine's recovery.



In 2024, we honored Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas, Representative Adam Kinzinger, Senator John Fetterman, and two courageous poll workers from Georgia, Ruby Freeman and Shaye Moss.







## Whistleblowers & Dissidents

We brought our New York community together for a discussion on threats to truth-tellers at home and abroad at our *Whistleblowers & Dissidents* event this summer. The panel included *Rings of Power* actress and Iranian activist **Nazanin Boniadi**, former White House official **Olivia Troye**, former “*New York Times Anonymous*” whistleblower **Miles Taylor**, and award-winning Zimbabwean human rights activist **Pastor Evan Mawarire**. We also shared an exclusive preview of iHeartPodcasts’ new series *The Whistleblowers* with Miles Taylor.

## National Constitution Center

We co-hosted a panel with the National Constitution Center where RDI’s Garry Kasparov and Evan Mawarire joined PEN America’s CEO Suzanne Nossel for a discussion on The State of Free Expression in the US Abroad.

**WATCH  
HERE**



“ Democracy is the most valuable hand-me-down future generations will ever receive. It must be handed down, worn, and used because only then can it be trusted to endure as a system that ensures our hard-won freedoms are never snuffed out.”

—Evan Mawarire



George W Bush Presidential Center: Evan Mawarire gave a moving testimonial at the Center’s PEPFAR at 20 Event



American Democracy Summit: Evan Mawarire spoke at the American Democracy Summit in LA

## Our Team

**RDI expanded rapidly in 2023**, nearly doubling our team in order to meet the challenges to democracy worldwide. Our growing team has an outsized impact. Thank you to our incredible hardworking staff for making 2023 a success!

**Uriel Epshtein**

*Chief Executive Officer*

**James Black II**

*General Counsel*

**Evan Mawarire**

*Director of Frontlines of Freedom*

**Caitlin Forrest**

*Director of Stewardship*

**Tori James**

*Director of Operations*

**James Lewis**

*Director of Programs*

**Evan Gottesman**

*Chief of Staff*

**Sohan Mewada**

*Program Associate*

**Noel Hijazi**

*Development & Operations Associate*

**Gabriel Strobel**

*Graphic & Web Design*



“ Fighting for democracy and freedom is part of what you commit your life to achieving, not because you are guaranteed success, but because precisely you are not. It is not a job, it is a calling”

—Evan Mawarire





**Thank you to our Board and Advisory Board for their continuous guidance, encouragement, and support.**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**GARRY KASPAROV**  
*Chairman*

**ALEXANDER VINDMAN**  
*Board Member*

**MICHAEL STEELE**  
*Board Member*

**LINDA CHAVEZ**  
*Vice-Chair*

**IGOR KIRMAN**  
*Board Member*

**CONGRESSMAN MICKEY EDWARDS**  
*Board Member*

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**KARL-THEODOR ZU GUTTENBERG**  
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**DANIEL HURWITZ**  
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**BRET STEPHENS**  
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**MAX BOOT**  
*Advisor*

**BILL KRISTOL**  
*Advisor*

**RACHEL VINDMAN**  
*Advisor*

**LUCY CALDWELL**  
*Advisor*

**MARK LASSWELL**  
*Advisor*

**ERIC WOLF**  
*Advisor*

**KATHERINE CHAPIN**  
*Advisor*

**RDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to confronting the alliance of dictators threatening freedom around the world. Courageous individuals like yourself are at the core of our work, and a contribution to RDI is just one way to fight the Putins and Xi Jinpings of the world.**

## Join RDI's Giving Circles

RDI is building a community of individuals dedicated to renewing democracy in the US and around the globe. Members of our giving circles lay the foundation of our work by investing in RDI's mission on an annual basis. Each circle enjoys exclusive access and unique benefits:

### RDI Visionaries: \$100,000+

- Garry Kasparov or another RDI Board Member will speak at one of your events
- VIP access to all RDI events
- Possibility for naming rights for RDI events
- All preceding benefits

### Democracy Defenders: \$10,000-\$19,999

- Semi-annual conversations with senior Frontlines of Freedom dissidents
- Chess board signed by Garry Kasparov
- All preceding benefits

### Chairman's Circle: \$50,000-\$99,999

- Annual private meeting with Garry Kasparov in NYC or mutually agreed upon city
- All preceding benefits

### Freedom Fighters: \$5,000-\$9,999

- Early access to events
- Bi-annual update call with CEO
- Recognition in our Annual Report

### RDI Ambassadors: \$20,000-\$49,999

- Private community event for your network planned by RDI
- Private semi-annual conversations with a senior Frontlines of Freedom dissident in your area of interest
- All preceding benefits

Please email [giving@rdi.org](mailto:giving@rdi.org) for more information on giving levels and how to join.

# Letter from RDI Chairman, Garry Kasparov

As a lifelong chess player, planning the next move is second nature to me. But when it comes to democracy, the year ahead is littered with unknowns.

Will the United States provide Ukraine with the means to prevail against authoritarian aggression—or will Washington waiver? Will Iran’s theocratic regime plunge the Middle East into a wider war after backing Hamas’s murderous rampage on October 7th? Can freedom persevere in America in the face of Donald Trump’s increasingly threatening autocratic rhetoric?

There are no easy answers, but the Renew Democracy Initiative is prepared to navigate these uncertainties. You’ve just seen how RDI has taken the fight straight to the dictators: on Capitol Hill, with material aid to Ukraine, and in the all-important information space.

We are celebrating our wins. But at this critical juncture, we cannot risk complacency. I invite you to continue your support for the Renew Democracy Initiative as the fight for freedom ramps up in the year ahead.



A handwritten signature of Garry Kasparov in blue ink. The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Warmly,  
Garry Kasparov

## How to Give

RDI is a qualified 501(c)(3) and contributions to RDI are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. RDI’s full legal name is The Renew Democracy Initiative Inc., and our tax ID number is 82-2547275. You can donate online at [www.rdi.org/donate](http://www.rdi.org/donate) or send a check to Renew Democracy Initiative, 1230 6th Avenue, Floor 16, New York, NY 10020.

Please contact RDI’s Director of Stewardship, Caitlin Forrest at [giving@rdi.org](mailto:giving@rdi.org) for more information on ways to give, including via wire transfers or stocks.





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