

Heritage Lectures

No. 960
Delivered June 15, 2006



Published by The Heritage Foundation

September 7, 2006

Is Freedom for Everyone?

Natan Sharansky

DR. KIM R. HOLMES: It is an honor and a privilege to introduce the Honorable Natan Sharansky, a member of the Israeli parliament, former Soviet dissident, and stalwart advocate of freedom. He will deliver our inaugural Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom Lecture: “Is Freedom for Everyone?”

We created this new lecture series because freedom is foundational to everything we do at The Heritage Foundation. Thanks to Lady Margaret Thatcher and a generous donation from her foundation, we now house the only center in the world that bears her name. Under the direction of Dr. Nile Gardiner, the Center will focus on promoting the legacy of freedom Lady Thatcher championed, and to strengthening that historic caravan of freedom, the U.S.-U.K. “special relationship.”

Through this new lecture series with distinguished advocates of freedom, we will explore all the questions surrounding freedom as a primary principle of foreign policy. In doing so, we hope to bring moral clarity to the debate that surrounds President Bush’s freedom agenda, which he laid out so well in his second Inaugural Address.

It is appropriate that Natan Sharansky deliver our first Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom Lecture. After all, President Bush said that if we want to understand that agenda, we should read Natan’s book, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, coauthored with Ron Dermer from the Israeli embassy, who is with us today as well.

Talking Points

- President Bush declared clearly and strongly in his second Inaugural Address that if you want to bring more stability to this world, you have to encourage more freedom in the world.
- Dictatorships are ugly, they are dangerous, they are frightening, but they are also very weak from the inside. The paradox is that the dictatorships need the free world as their enemy to keep their own people under control.
- The only thing that the free world has to do is to stop appeasing them, to stop supporting them, to make clear that the real allies of the free world are dissidents from inside.
- The test of the democratic state is not elections; there are elections in every dictatorship. The test of democratic states is the town square test, where you can go to this square to express your views and you will not be punished for it.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/worldwidefreedom/hl960.cfm
Produced by the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

The Thatcher Freedom Lecture Series

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

In their book, Natan and Ron make the compelling case that the longing to be free courses through every human heart. And it quickens in the hearts of the oppressed when leaders like Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush make freedom central to foreign policy.

Natan Sharansky lived in a society where freedom's power was greatly feared. For nine years, this mathematician who taught English to Andrei Sakharov was imprisoned because his words of freedom were a threat. For his efforts to champion freedom, both inside and outside of the Gulag,

- He was named one of the world's 100 Most Influential People by *Time* Magazine.
- He and his wife Avital received the Congressional Gold Medal of Freedom, joining an elite group that includes George Washington, Winston Churchill, Robert F. Kennedy, Elie Wiesel, Ronald Reagan, Martin Luther King, Pope John Paul II, Colin Powell, and Mother Teresa.
- He received the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in America, from President Reagan, who often used such awards to caution the free world to be vigilant. Natan Sharansky continues that clarion call.

A native of Ukraine, Natan Sharansky received a mathematics degree from the Institute of Physics in Moscow. He became an English interpreter for Andrei Sakharov, and soon became the leading dissident for the Soviet Jewry movement. When his advocacy became intolerable to the Soviet regime, he was arrested, convicted of treason and spying for the United States, and sentenced to 13 years in prison. His book, *Fear No Evil*, describes his years in prison, including solitary confinement and a torture cell in Moscow, as well as a Siberian Gulag prison camp.

Ronald Reagan personally raised his case with Mikhail Gorbachev, and in 1986 Natan Sharansky was released. He emigrated to Israel to reunite with his wife, whom he hadn't seen since the day after they were married. He served as president of the Zionist Forum and associate editor of the *Jerusalem Report*. He helped set up a new political party that was focused on immigrant assimilation. When it won seats in the Knesset, he was named Minister of Industry and

Trade. Since then, he also has served as Minister of the Interior, Minister of Housing and Construction, Deputy Prime Minister, and the minister responsible for Diaspora Affairs. Today, he serves in the Knesset and is a member of the Education, Culture, and Sports Committee. He is a substitute member to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

Natan, thank you for coming to Heritage today, which quite incidentally is the anniversary of two other great freedom events in the history of the world: The Magna Carta was signed on this day in 1215, and George Washington was appointed commander in chief of the American Army in 1775. Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Natan Sharansky.

—Kim R. Holmes is Vice President of Foreign and Defense Policy and Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation

NATAN SHARANSKY: I want to thank The Heritage Foundation for giving me an opportunity to reconnect my struggle for freedom with such great people as President Ronald Reagan—who, as they were writing in the Soviet press in those days, was getting his reactionary ideas from The Heritage Foundation—and Margaret Thatcher, who was a strong ally in promoting freedom and democracy and in linking the question of security with the question of freedom and democracy.

I am really honored to give the inaugural Thatcher Center Freedom Lecture here in her name. So it is most appropriate to start with a personal story about Lady Thatcher.

My Connection to Lady Thatcher

When I was a political prisoner in the Soviet Union, there was a period of time—over a year—when I was not allowed to write letters to my family. So, I started a hunger strike. How this became known to the world and to my wife is a long story; if you want to know more, you can read my first book, *Fear No Evil*. When my friends and my wife found out that on Yom Kippur, a very important day in the Jewish tradition, I was beginning a hunger strike that I was not restricting with any time limits—as long as they would not permit me

to write letters, I would not stop at what, of course, could finish very tragically for me—my wife immediately decided to take action in America and Europe.

In Europe, the most important place to start is Britain. As the story goes, it is 2 o'clock at night when the personal secretary of Margaret Thatcher received a telephone call from my wife. Avital told him that, because of a very serious situation involving her husband, she would be coming to London tomorrow and wanted to see Margaret Thatcher.

Since it was 2 a.m., the secretary became quite upset. He started shouting: "Don't you understand where you're calling? Don't you understand what time you're calling? Do you think that we have nothing else to do than organize meetings between you and Margaret Thatcher, when all of the leaders of the world must coordinate with us for months and months—and you want to get this meeting tomorrow?"

Now in private life my wife is very shy. But here she was not shy at all! She told him, "Mr. Minister Advisor, pardon me, but you are not Margaret Thatcher. You cannot decide for her; you are only her secretary. Maybe the element that put you in this position did so for one reason only: to organize this very meeting, because the future of the world depends on this meeting."

The next day, my wife had 5 o'clock tea with Margaret Thatcher. For those of you who have not had the privilege of this experience, as I have had the honor a number of times, it is very exciting. It is very moving, and very interesting. But sometimes it's a little bit disappointing, because it is often very difficult to say anything. You are listening to Margaret Thatcher, and she is speaking and speaking—explaining to you how bad the Soviet Union is and how important it is to fight against it.

But my wife had come with a mission, and she wanted to speak about how to save her husband. So at the end of the meeting, she said, "So, Madame Prime Minister, what about my husband?"

Mrs. Thatcher said, "We have had our tea. We have talked. What else would you want?"

My wife left very upset and disappointed. But the next day, the Soviet ambassador was called to the

Foreign Office. Mrs. Thatcher's people expressed in the strongest terms their protest. They said that such treatment of prisoners of conscience is absolutely incompatible with the norms of relations between the Soviet Union and England. It was by far the strongest reaction of any foreign country at that time to the situation of one specific prisoner. And that says a lot about Margaret Thatcher—about her determination, about her commitment, about her global view, about her always seeing the big picture.

In fact, I first met Margaret Thatcher soon after I was released from prison. She came on her historic visit to Israel—the first visit of a Prime Minister of England to Israel in 40 years, I think. There was a long line of people who were greeting her and shaking hands, and when I met her we exchanged some words. I thanked her and she said she was pleased to see me.

Then I saw her husband standing nearby. He seemed a little bit bored, so I wanted to tell him something nice. I said, "Do you know what you and I have in common? Both of us came to Israel thanks to our wives."

And I have to say that, for me, this comparison between my wife and Margaret Thatcher, despite all their differences, is not accidental. My wife was always telling people all over the world—and there are many witnesses of this—that, "When my husband is released, the world of evil will fall apart." She especially believed this. And when Margaret Thatcher would be speaking about this dissident or that one, about human rights in Poland, or Czechoslovakia, or the Soviet Union, or any other part of the world, she was not doing it simply because she was passionate and sympathetic with it, but rather because she too saw the big picture. She understood, exactly as Ronald Reagan did—and with all their differences, on this they were like twins—that there was only one way to win this battle with communism, one way to win the Cold War: and that was by promoting democracy and building allies on the basis of their belief in human rights and freedom.

The Debate Over Linking Democracy and Security

That is why what Heritage is doing here in preserving the legacy of President Reagan and Margaret Thatcher is extremely important. The issue of

promoting democracy and the linkage between democracy and security—topics I have been speaking on for years—are difficult ones. Again and again, when I was fighting this cause, the debate would take me back to my prison years, for two reasons.

First, when you are sitting with other dissidents in a Soviet prison, it becomes so clear that if we have anything in common it is this cause of human rights and democracy. It is not about left or right; nor is it about this or that religion. Human rights and freedom is a cause for everybody.

Second, for many years I was in solitary confinement, where I could talk only to myself. When you speak about the linkage between democracy and security in the free world, very often you find you are speaking only to yourself. Nobody really wants to listen; nobody really wants to believe in it. The situation has changed over the last few years; I think in the Middle East it definitely has changed. There have been more discussions about opportunities for democratic regimes in the Middle East in this past year than perhaps for hundreds of years before this.

This new focus on freedom promotion has also happened because of two things: 9/11 and the President's leadership.

After 9/11, it became clear that all previous approaches had failed. Today, when we're so confused by the questions, it is very important to remember that all the previous approaches to bringing stability and peace by supporting friendly dictatorships failed. Let me give you two examples to illustrate this.

- Saudi Arabia: For years after the failure of the Soviet Union and the unique victory of the free world against communism, after it became so clear that linkage between international relations and human rights was a very powerful weapon for the free world, the question has again and again been raised in America, in Washington, with different administrations and different leading journalists as well as different people who believed in human rights and democracy: When will America start demanding it from Saudi Arabia? When would America start linking its policies with Saudi

Arabia to some minimal demands for human rights improvements, whether it be freedom of immigration, rights for women, or any other? Start with something. Again and again, the answer came back: "Saudi Arabia is not about democracy; it's about stability." Saudi Arabia is the best example of an Arab regime that since the time of Lawrence of Arabia has been our ally because it understands why it is good to be friendly with the West. So it is an example of the kind of stability we can get from friendly dictators in the Middle East. Yet, at the same time so many were trying to convince us to support Saudi Arabia, all the spiritual and ideological and financial support for the most awful international network of fundamentalist terror was coming from that country. It came from that country because its regime, at that time a tribal dictatorship, needed to support the most extreme forces of Wahhabism, with all its ideological and financial consequences, for its own survival, its own glue, to control its own society.

- The other example is also false: Israel—together with other countries around the world and with leaders of the United States of America—was wishing to find a quick way to bring peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, and it was concerned about the danger of fundamentalist groups like Hamas coming to power. It decided to support Yassir Arafat. Many believed, as our Prime Minister said in 1993, "It is good that he is not a democrat. As a dictator who is not restricted by the Supreme Court and human rights organizations and bleeding-heart liberals he will fight Hamas much better than we can do it." This marked the beginning of a failed approach. For years and years the free world gave all of its support and a lot of money to Arafat—money that belonged to the people of America, to the people of Canada, to the people of Israel and Japan, and to the Palestinians, public money which belonged to the Palestinians. It was transferred to the private accounts of Yassir Arafat. International agreements acknowledged that, yes, Yassir Arafat had the right to

receive hundreds of millions of dollars of public money in his personal account, all to strengthen a dictator who would fight Hamas. That in a very primitive way is the idea behind the Oslo process, and the practice continued for years and years. In the meantime a new generation of Palestinians was brought up in the spirit of the most extreme hatred of Israel. And as I wrote in 1993, we may do our best to strengthen Arafat as a dictator, and he as a dictator will use every dollar and every rifle and every square meter, whatever he will get, to strengthen hatred towards us, because that's the way he can survive.

In both of these cases, attempts to build a stable world by supporting friendly dictators failed. That is the first reason why the question of linkage between democracy and security came on the agenda for the first time after the years of Reagan and Thatcher.

The second reason, of course, was President Bush himself—his strong belief and determination to promote democracy. In fact, almost immediately after 9/11, we could see the first signs of this new approach. Then there were the March speeches and his great speech in June 2002. And of course, as just now mentioned, the highest point came in his second Inaugural Address, when all this philosophy was expressed very clearly and strongly: that if you want to bring more stability to this world, you have to encourage more freedom in the world. Liberty in our country depends on the liberty of other people; and our real partners, our real allies, are not the dictators, friends among friends, but the dissidents—people inside those countries who want more freedom for their own people. They are our allies; they are those who will bring more security to us. And that, no doubt, is a great and almost revolutionary change in the approach to international relations.

Answering the Skeptics

Immediately, of course, there were voices of skepticism. The skeptics raised the same questions which are raised always whenever a democratic agenda appears: “Who said that freedom is for everybody?” and “Who said that even if it is good for other people, it is good for us that they will be free? Maybe it is dangerous for us. Even if it is good

for us and for them, who says that the free world has anything to do with this?”

Well, I wrote about it in depth in *The Case for Democracy*, so I'm not going to repeat my discussion. But I can briefly mention the answers.

- “Who said that freedom is for everybody?” Look at every nation in the past, whether it is Japan, whether it is Germany, whether it is Latin American countries, whether it is Confucian cultures, whether it is Hispanic or other Catholic cultures, and you can find very strong arguments why democracy would never arise there. Yet, again and again they are wrong. Why? Because in a fear society, there are three categories of people: 1) true believers who believe in the ideology; 2) dissidents who don't believe in the ideology and speak openly against it; and 3) the overwhelming majority of people who are double thinkers. Over time, the tougher the dictatorship and the longer it exists, the number of double thinkers—people who don't accept or believe in this ideology, but who feel that they are not strong enough to speak against it because they are afraid of punishment—grows all the time.

If you look at the experience of people in different cultures, in different religions, in different parts of the world, the experience of double thinkers is the same. And the fear of the double thinker, that they will be punished perhaps if their child in school will say something different or you will not demonstrate the evidence of the ideology, and the discomfort of the life of double thinkers is the same. And that's why each time when they have an opportunity to start living life without double-think, they choose it.

- Why are democracies not fighting with one another, and why are dictatorships—even the most friendly—still dangerous? Because dictatorships, in order to keep under control all these double thinkers, need external enemies. And if external enemies do not exist, they have to be invented. Otherwise dictatorships will never be able to keep for a long time under their control the brains of hundreds of thousands or

millions or hundreds of millions of double thinkers. And then again, you can find many examples in history of how inventive dictators are in finding or in creating these enemies, and in keeping the atmosphere of hot war or cold war in order to control their own people.

- *So, what can the free world do with all this? Does that mean the free world has to fight, to send their troops?* Dictatorships are ugly, they are dangerous, they are frightening, but they are also very weak from the inside. The biggest part of my last book is about this weakness of dictatorships from inside because they spend all their energy to control their own people. That is why they need external sources of energy to continue to maintain that control. The paradox is that the dictatorships need the free world as their enemy to keep their own people under control, and they need the free world as a source of energy—and that's why they need all the time to encourage this policy of appeasement. Very often they succeed. The only thing that the free world has to do is to stop appeasing them, to stop supporting them, to make clear that the real allies of the free world are dissidents from inside, to create an atmosphere in which the millions of double thinkers will not be afraid to cross this line between double think and dissent and then the dictatorships begin falling apart.

So, the democratic agenda came back in the world when the leader of the free world started speaking very forcefully and powerfully about it, and the situation started to change very quickly. A year and half ago, many of us, myself definitely, were full of optimism. The President started making first but very clear and strong steps and you see what happened in Ukraine, in Georgia, in Lebanon, and in Egypt. Where were all these voices who were saying that people in the Middle East will never say anything against their leaders? They were silenced.

One million Lebanese went to the demonstrations against the Syrian occupation only because they felt that for the first time for many years the free world was absolutely on their side. And 2,000 judges in Egypt dared to send a letter to Mubarak demanding to change the system of elections only

because it was clear for them that the situation changed, that the free world was on their side. The leader of the free world secured the release of Egypt's number one dissident, Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim, when he directly linked U.S.-Egypt relations and U.S. financial support with the fate of a dissident. You can see how immediately this influenced the millions of double thinkers who are trying to find out whether it's time to stop being double thinkers.

But if you look at the situation today, it looks like skeptics again have the upper hand. Now we hear that the developments in the Middle East prove that all this was wrong. Hamas came to power as result of democratic elections; in Egypt, dissidents are in prison. What's happening in Iraq and practically every other country in the Middle East raises a lot of questions. Does it mean that the democratic agenda has failed, that it was a mistake?

I believe not. I think not. And it is very important to understand what really happened. Why on the one hand do we have such strong speeches in support of democracy and at the same time such poor results?

Why Elections Do Not Democracy Make

Let me take one area that I have followed more closely than any other, and that is what has happened with the Palestinian Authority. It is an example that proves my point that the developments taking place have nothing to do with pursuing a democratic agenda. Rather, they prove we are failing to defend the agenda which we ourselves are proclaiming.

Hamas came to power, and some say it was a big surprise for those who promote a democratic agenda. I recommend that you read, that you listen to what those of us who believe in promoting the democratic agenda were saying a year ago, three years ago, fifteen years ago. We were predicting and warning that the course the free world had chosen would inevitably bring Hamas to victory.

The first stage was, of course, the decision to bring a corrupt dictator to the Middle East and to make him as strong as possible and as corrupt as possible because it was believed that his strength

and his corruption were the best guarantees that he would be loyal to us and would fight Hamas. As a result, this created a unique system where this corrupt regime is running the lives of some million people; where practically every Palestinian has to pay protection money because it's running it like a mafia; where all the beginnings of civil society and free economy are destroyed. And the free world is paying for this; the free world is supporting all of this. So, of course, this regime was hated by us because it was inciting a lot of hatred towards us and thousands of prisoners. But it was also hated by Palestinians, who suffered from this.

As a former Minister of Industry and Trade, I remember how it was impossible to help the Palestinians to create any independent jobs because the moment Arafat understood that it meant his people would be more independent from him, he was not interested. So, there was a regime which Palestinians hated.

Second, the free world made some very strong statements and the leader of the free world, President Bush, made very strong statements about the need of democratic reforms. Then, under the road-map, reform number one is what? It is elections. In America, I came here to this city, to this White House to discuss with the Vice President and with everybody who wanted to listen that you cannot start democratic reforms with elections. You can have elections, but they will have nothing to do with the democracy. Democracy is not elections; democracy is free elections and free society. The test of the democratic state is not elections; there are elections in every dictatorship. The test of democratic states is the town square test, where you can go to this square to express your views and you will not be punished for it. Palestinians of these elections had to choose between a hated corrupt dictatorship, a mafia which was taking from them protection money for everything on one hand, and a few honest terrorists who wanted to kill a lot of Jews but who were taking care of the weak and poor on the other hand.

When I hear some of the stories from Arab villages—from Christian Arab villages—that voted for Hamas, their explanations remind me of a film

which I saw as a child, one of the unique cases when the Soviet Union showed an “ugly American” film. It was a film called *The Magnificent Seven*. It was the only American film which I saw, and it was about how noble cowboys came to the village and saved them from the mafia. That's exactly how these people saw Hamas, who came to save them from these awful men. And then after all this, when we decided that there is nobody to talk to, we decided simply to leave Gaza. As I wrote in my letter of resignation, there is no way that our one-sided concessions will strengthen moderates. They can strengthen only extremists, only those who are responsible for these terrorist acts.

Just a few days ago in the Knesset, the head of our intelligence service said that the only organization which benefited from our leaving Gaza was Hamas. They immediately went with the slogan: “You see we killed 1,000 Jews and they leave Gaza. We'll kill 2,000 and they will leave the West Bank; 3,000, they will leave Jerusalem, immediately.”

And then we are told that these elections prove that the democratic agenda doesn't work. Elections are a good thing—it is always better when they hold elections rather than kill one another. But if it is not a free society, it's a technical thing, and not more than this. It has nothing to do with a democracy.

To the contrary, Hamas came to power because for all these years we abandoned the policy of promoting democracy. The plan which I proposed in 2002 to Ariel Sharon was that we would leave all those lands on which all the refugee camps will be dismantled, the free economy will prevail, the education for hatred will stop and, of course, terrorist organizations will be disbanded. Only then, when there is a trial period of some years, when you have implemented all of these reforms, then you can have truly democratic elections.

Let me go to another example. Egypt also is very unfortunate. On one hand we see very strong speeches of the American administration and some very strong steps that created important dynamics. On the other hand, the most important thing here is to continue strengthening the authority of dissidents in those countries. I say it from my experience in the Soviet Union. When

Mubarak is arresting the leaders of the democratic opposition and putting them in prison, when he is sentencing them to five years in prison in mock trials, exactly like the mock trials in the Soviet Union, and yet he or his members of family and his representatives are receiving a royal reception in Washington, that's the worst possible message to the double thinkers. Don't be in a hurry. Your time hasn't yet come. It's not the time to cross this line to become dissidents.

The Importance of Supporting Dissidents of Tyranny

And then we come to maybe the most difficult question of this moment: Iran. Iran is a unique example of where on one hand you have this awful regime which now is threatening to blackmail all the world with nuclear bombs, and on the other hand, a country where in one generation, a country of true believers of overwhelming support to this regime turned into a country of double thinkers, of people who don't accept this situation. And they started expressing it. The opposition movement in Iran is not a dissident here, a dissident there. It's a powerful movement of different trade unions, of student organizations, and of women's organizations who started two years ago to speak loudly and openly and appeal to the free world to support them, saying, "We are your allies, not the ayatollahs."

The closest analogy to the former communist world is what happened in Poland with the Solidarity Movement. When the Solidarity Movement raised their voices in Poland, they became the biggest heroes in the free world. Everybody wanted to welcome them, everybody wanted to support them, they were receiving Nobel prizes. The Pope was organizing special services in the church every day for the health and survival of Solidarity. Poland found itself under strong pressure from all the free world.

There is a comparable movement in Iran, which is receiving almost no support. Not only is it receiving almost no support, but the America which took such a strong position on Iran at the last moment declared that they have new proposals for the ayatollahs and, in fact, by starting this new page,

undermined immediately the inner strength of their position. I am saying this with pain, because I have great admiration for the President. When I met him I saw how deeply he believes in these ideas of promoting independent democracy. But when I look at the policies of the United States of America at this moment toward Iran, I don't see any difference with the policy of the previous administration toward North Korea. And that administration had a very different philosophy. But suddenly, take their approach to North Korea and this approach to Iran and it proves the same.

The irony is that I happened to have a lot of meetings with Russian leaders including Vladimir Putin about the leakage of Russian technologies to Iran, because we in Israel for 10 years have been warning the free world. And of course Russia was doing a very bad job with this. But President Putin told me a number times that all this pressure of the West is because the West wants to keep us away from the markets; that Europe is sending their technologies, which are even more advanced, to the terrorists; and America, exactly as it built nuclear reactors in North Korea, is dreaming only of how to build nuclear reactors in Iran.

Of course, I dismissed his words immediately, but what I can say now? His cynicism is suddenly becoming a reality.

So these are the real dangers. It's not that the democratic agenda doesn't work. The democratic agenda is in danger and I believe of all the reasons, first of all it is in danger because President Bush is very lonely in his struggle. You know, the fact that he has so few allies overseas is bad; but the fact that he has so few allies in Washington is much worse.

Of course, dissidents are always lonely. But now, in this confrontation between the world of freedom and the world of terror, it is crucial that the President of the United States will not be alone on this. But second, to stay the course is very difficult, it's very important. Before we start saying the democratic agenda failed, let's first sincerely try this agenda. And then we'll see whether it will fail or not.

I believe it will win. Thank you.

—Natan Sharansky is a Member of the Israeli Knesset, a former Soviet dissident, and author of *The Case*

for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror.

Selected Questions and Answers

QUESTION: In pursuing this agenda of democracy, what sort of time limit, or what sort of time frame do you see for positive democratic developments in, for example, the Middle East? Everybody's saying, well, we've got problems, it isn't working now. But what sort of time frame would you say it would take to judge the success of this policy?

Natan Sharansky: First of all, these concepts refer to the Middle East in general. In every specific country, in every specific society it depends on the nature of the society, and the strengths of the dictatorship. Usually, I would say, the longer the period of appeasement of those regimes, the more difficult it will be to dismantle it or to change the psychology of people. On the other hand, when people really have the option to choose and they're not threatened, changes happen very quickly, as we could see in what happened after the Cold War or as we could see, for example, in the sudden change of mood in Lebanon. It was sudden, but people were absolutely ready for this. They were all double thinkers. So, now the building of institutions takes time. I can tell you that, for example, in the proposal I gave to Prime Minister Sharon in 2002, I believed the minimal time has to be three years. In fact, three years is very modest for building democratic institutions. In Japan, it took from five to seven years to build full-fledged democracy and there, there was no resistance from the neighbors.

Unfortunately, in real politics, three years seems like a huge period of time. The Prime Minister said, "What are you talking about three years? These time lines are written into the agreement, and you are insisting on serious changes practically every

month. Ehud Barak was telling us we have to implement all his plans while Clinton is in the office." I think it's ridiculous that timelines are dictated by political needs and not by the realities on the ground. Then there is the other extreme, that, "It will take another generation." With a well-developed, full-fledged, double-think country, and that's the majority of dictatorships, it takes two or three years for huge change.

QUESTION: Here in Washington, those who are opposed to pushing the freedom agenda say things like, "If we pushed the freedom agenda in Egypt, the only result would be that the Muslim brotherhood would come to power." How do you answer that?

Natan Sharansky: Well, if you push elections in places where there is no developed civil society, yes, extremists will come into power. We just now saw it in the Palestinian Authority. But it has nothing to do with a democratic agenda. A democratic agenda does not mean that you demand immediate elections, but that you start demanding more rights for your own citizens. As a matter of fact, that is what America, and then all the free world, did with the Soviet Union. They started with freedom of emigration, then step-by-step other things, and said, if you want to get our money, you start giving more freedom to your people.

Egypt receives \$2 billion a year from America. So start with small things: Tell Egypt to stop arresting editors of opposition newspapers. Start permitting more freedom: economic freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of opposition, ending mock trials. Step-by-step, people in Egypt would be able to choose between living in the society of fear or the state of freedom. If you look at history, it will be very difficult to find examples when in a free society people having free choice choose slavery.