

Conclusion

IN JANUARY 1997, eleven years after my release from prison, I made my first trip back to Russia. Only once during that time did I have any interest in returning. That was in 1989 when Andrei Sakharov died. Sakharov had been with my family during our most difficult days, and I wanted to support his family in their hour of need. But since I was officially still considered a spy by the Soviet government, my request for a visa was denied. In the 1990s, after I was “rehabilitated” and free to travel to Russia, I declined many invitations. When I was appointed Israel’s minister of trade and industry in 1996, however, I knew that I would soon be expected to go as part of my duties in the government, which included developing Israel’s economic relations with Russia.

Many people on official trips to Moscow visit the Bolshoi Theater, but I had been to the Bolshoi many times during my university days at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology. Besides, what I really wanted to see was my other alma mater, the KGB prison at Lefortovo, in which I had spent sixteen months undergoing interrogations before my trial and sentencing. After much hesitation and delay, my Russian hosts finally agreed to make Lefortovo part of my itinerary.

After a number of meetings with Russian ministers, I arrived at the prison. Inside, I thought I was at the theater. The dark and dreary place of my memory was now filled with light and immaculately clean. I stood in the prison cell I had lived in, walked through the winding corridors I had been led down, and visited the library whose books had once transported me to a different world. I presented the warden with five copies of my prison memoir, *Fear No Evil*, and told him that I would know glasnost was complete when current inmates were permitted to read my book. (In later years, I received word that the book was a favorite among prisoners, who particularly liked my stories about Lefortovo and my advice on how to handle interrogations.)

When the official tour ended, I asked to see the punishment cells. During my nine years in prison, I had spent 405 days in such cells, and I wanted to show my wife, Avital, who agreed to accompany me on the trip, what they were like. The warden took me to a normal cell, emptied of furniture, with a guard inside. "These are the punishment cells we have today," the warden told me. "What you remember, we no longer use."

I knew he was lying. “Look,” I said, “why don’t we go down to the basement and I’ll show you the punishment cells myself.” He motioned to a guard, spoke on a walkie-talkie, and twenty minutes later, we went downstairs. When I entered the cell, I was standing in the same cold, dark, small room that I remembered. I asked to be left alone for a few minutes with Avital. “Do you recognize the cell?” I asked her. “You were always in here with me.” “I know I was,” she replied.

As we left the grounds of the prison, I was besieged by a throng of reporters who had been waiting outside in the snow. One of the first questions was why I had returned to Lefortovo. “Isn’t it a very painful memory?” one journalist asked. “Are you some sort of masochist?”

“To the contrary,” I said, “it is inspiring to be here. Twenty years ago, in this very prison, the head interrogators of the KGB, the most powerful organization of the most powerful empire in the world, told me again and again that the movement for Soviet Jewry was dead, that the dissident movement was finished. Jewish activists and dissidents inside the country, they said, had been arrested. ‘Your supporters outside the country are scared and they will distance themselves from you because of the charges of espionage. You have nothing to hope for. You have nobody to rely on.’

“Twenty years later, the KGB has disappeared, the Soviet Union has disintegrated, global communism has collapsed, over one million Jews have left the big prison called the USSR, and hundreds of millions of people are free.” One would think that no more proof was needed of the power of freedom to change the world.

Unfortunately, this proof has not resolved the doubts of the skeptics. Many people remain convinced that freedom is not for everyone, that its expansion is not always desirable, and that there is little that the free world can do to promote it. Just as they were wrong a generation ago about Russia, and two generations ago about Japan and Germany, the skeptics are wrong today.

The formula that triggered a democratic revolution in the Soviet Union had three components: People inside who yearned to be free, leaders outside who believed they could be, and policies that linked the free world's relations with the USSR to the Soviet regime's treatment of its own people. Whether this same formula is applied to a great power like China or a weak despotism like Zimbabwe, a secular totalitarian regime like North Korea or a religious tyranny like Iran makes no difference. It will work anywhere around the globe, including in the Arab world.

I have no doubt that the Arabs want to be free. Many ask how I can be so sure when there is no Arab Sakharov and no Arab Gandhi. I am sure because I know that the extent of dissent in a society, like so many things in life, is largely a function of price. In the 1930s, there was no Russian Sakharov because Stalin executed all voices of dissent and few in the West paid any attention. Convinced that communism was just or that Stalin was an ally or that repression was Russia's fate, the potential forces of freedom in the West either didn't know what Stalin was doing, didn't want to know, or didn't care.

In the 1970s, when dissent was punishable "only" by

prison or exile, when a spotlight was shined on how the Soviet regime treated its people and when a handful of leaders argued for a policy of linkage, a few hundred dissidents had the courage to step forward. But we were only the tip of an iceberg. Beneath the surface were hundreds of millions who wanted their freedom.

The democratic forces in the free world today are largely silent about how Arab regimes treat their own people. Most security hawks fear that “weakening” these regimes will endanger stability and the free flow of oil. For their part, most human rights liberals have not embraced the cause of human rights within the Arab world anywhere near as vigorously as they once embraced the cause of human rights within the Soviet Union. Yet despite the lack of support for Arab dissent, the Arab voice for freedom is getting louder.

In the fall of 2001, I was sitting in my office at the Housing Ministry in Jerusalem when I received a call from a Palestinian businessman in Ramallah. At that time, Israel had placed that West Bank city under siege to prevent further terror attacks. The man introduced himself as Omar Karsou and told me he was calling from a pay phone in Ramallah so that his conversation with me would not be discovered.

“I was surprised to read an article you wrote about the need for democracy for Palestinians. Do you really believe what you wrote?” he asked. “Every word,” I said, “but why does it surprise you?” Karsou replied, “Because for us, you are a right-wing minister. You are supposed to be our enemy. Yet when I read your article, I agreed with every word. I too believe that the biggest problem for the Pales-

tinians is the lack of freedom in our society. We are all suffering from dictatorship and corruption.”

We wanted to meet immediately to discuss the problem, but it was almost impossible for Omar to leave a besieged Ramallah for a discreet meeting with an Israeli minister, so we agreed to meet in the future. We spoke a number of times by telephone, but met face to face only six months later in Washington. In moving his family out of Ramallah and organizing efforts to promote freedom and human rights for Palestinians, Omar became a dissident.

I am a Zionist. Omar is not. Though I am prepared to make compromises for the sake of peace, I believe in the historical right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Omar does not. Yet when it comes to our views on the way that Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace with one another, we see almost completely eye to eye. Both of us believe that Israel should not rule the Palestinians. Both of us believe that only by ending the Palestinians' fear society will it be possible to end Palestinian suffering. Both of us believe that the corrupt dictatorship of the Palestinian Authority is the prime source of Palestinian suffering. Both of us believe that Israel and the free world share responsibility for helping to build and maintain that corrupt dictatorship. And both of us believe that only if the Palestinians build a free society will there be peace.

Every time I listen to Omar, I am reminded of my own past. After years of hearing false arguments about how the struggle for the rights of Palestinians is the same as my struggle for rights in the Soviet Union, I have finally found someone about whom I can honestly say, “his struggle is my

struggle.” But there is also an important difference. When we in the Soviet Union were fighting for human rights, we knew we could be arrested and imprisoned. But we also believed that the free world would stand by our side, a belief that strengthened our resolve enormously. Omar Karsou, however, cannot rely on that solidarity. Had he stayed in Ramallah and fought for human rights, PA leaders could do to him what they wished without endangering their support in the free world. And now that he has escaped Palestinian tyranny, few are ready to help in his struggle for Palestinian freedom. Why? Because they do not want to weaken the Palestinian Authority, “the only hope for peace.” At this time, most doors in the democratic world remain closed to Omar.

When I returned to Israel, I tried to convince others to support Omar’s effort to strengthen democratic voices within Palestinian society. After looking into the matter, one of my colleagues told me that Omar might be a good man, but that he had absolutely no power. It reminded me of Stalin’s sarcastic remark about the pope, “How many divisions does he have?” My colleague was right. Omar has no divisions. Arafat and the PA have all the power. They have a 40,000-man armed police force and control over which Palestinians will receive permits to work in Israel, which families will get food distribution from international organizations, and who benefits from the hundreds of millions of dollars of international aid that are supposed to build a better life for Palestinians. But the PA has this power only because Israel and the free world gave it to them. We helped—and continue to help—undermine efforts of people like Omar Karsou to build democracy for the Palestinians.

Omar Karsou is one of many dissidents in the Arab world fighting for more democracy in their countries. Armed with nothing more than a computer and the Internet, one can find the names of many of them:

Salaheddine Sidhoum of Algeria

Abd al-Raud al-Shayeb of Bahrain

Saad Eddin Ibrahim of Egypt

Dr. Muhamed Mugarby and Samari Trad of Lebanon

Fathi El-Jahami, Fawzi Orafiya, Ashur Shamis, Abd Al-Qader, Al Hudheiri of Libya

Abdelaziz Mouride and Ali Lmrabert of Morocco

Bassem Eid and Issam Abu Issa of the Palestinian Authority

Abdullah Al-Hamad, Mohammed Said Al-Taib, Towfiq Al Qaseer, Najeeb Al-Khanizee, Abdul-Rahman Alahim, Ali Al-Deminy, and Shaikh Sulaiman Al-Rashoud of Saudi Arabia

Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam and Saleh Mahmud Osman of Sudan

Aktham Naisse, Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan, Khaled Ahmad Ali, Muhammed Ghanem, and Mahleb Muhammed Ghanem of Syria

Zoheir Yahiaoui, and Mokhtar Yahyaoui of Tunisia

Hashem Aghajari, Ahmad Batebi and Siamak Pourzand of Iran

There are many, many more.

Imagine what would happen if the enormous support the free world gives to nondemocratic regimes in the region were

given to the people, like these dissidents, whom those regimes repress. From the army of doublethinkers in the Middle East, hundreds and then thousands of dissidents would emerge and the end of these fear societies would draw nearer.

I am also confident that the leaders of the free world can serve as an enormous force for democratic change. In the last few years, President Bush has seemingly used every forum, every stage, and every address to assert his unequivocal belief that the region can be free. He has argued forcefully that there is an inextricable link between freedom and peace, between democracy and security. And he has made the case for helping build democracy both in terms of respecting the rights of those who are denied freedom and protecting the security interests of his own nation. On the other side of the Atlantic, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has made similar arguments, and democratic leaders elsewhere have supported efforts to build free societies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

To create a critical mass for these ideas, however, the unique partnership that once brought together the “human rights camp” and the “security hawks” must be reconstituted. In the Cold War, political leaders, religious leaders, human rights organizations, writers, and journalists transcended partisan and ideological divisions to work together to confront tyranny and support those inside the Soviet Union who were fighting for freedom. To win the battle against today’s tyrants, we must once again turn political opponents into allies and unite the world’s democracies in a common purpose. We must recapture moral clarity by rec-

ognizing that the great divide between the world of fear and the world of freedom is far more important than the divisions within the free world. At a time when freedom and fear are at war, we must move beyond Left and Right and begin to think again about right and wrong.

I am also confident that a policy of linkage can be pursued successfully. True, linkage without leverage is impossible, but Middle Eastern regimes are even more dependent today on the West than the USSR was in 1975. This may seem hard to believe to those who are convinced that the free world is dependent on Middle East oil. But consider that in 1978, among the top oil suppliers to the United States were Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Iran, and Nigeria. In short order, three of those states became avowed enemies of the "Great Satan." But the sky did not fall. Prices did not even rise dramatically. In fact, even with the recent spike in prices, oil today is still cheaper in real terms than it was a quarter century ago. If a country like Saudi Arabia responds to pressures to reform by choking off oil supplies, the free world will survive the blow. Saudi Arabia won't.

The Soviets used nuclear blackmail to instill fear in the West. Middle Eastern regimes use oil blackmail to instill that same fear. But to paraphrase U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in standing against this tyranny, the only thing the democracies have to fear is fear itself. If the free world uses its enormous leverage, the Arab regimes will no longer be able to violate human rights with impunity. And the more freedom the people of the Arab world enjoy, the more secure all of us will be.

Just as Helsinki helped liberate hundreds of millions of people and defeat an evil empire that threatened the democratic world, the same approach today can transform the Middle East from a region awash in terror and tyranny into a place that provides freedom and opportunity to its own people as well as peace and security for the rest of the world.

Linkage worked after Helsinki because dissidents inside the Soviet Union and leaders outside the Soviet Union turned a nonbinding agreement into an internationally accepted measure of Soviet intentions. This must now be done in the Arab world.

The first step may already have been taken. Early in 2004, a document produced at a conference in Alexandria, Egypt, pointed to the urgent need for political, economic, and social reform in the Arab world. What makes this document potentially so significant is that the conference was attended by representatives of civil-society institutions within Arab states and that the document was written by Arabs themselves. The fact that nondemocratic Arab regimes have tried to block further action on the issues that were raised at Alexandria only proves how important this document can become.

The critical next step can be taken if the reforms called for in Alexandria are turned into a yardstick by which to chart the progress of Arab regimes, and if democratic states are prepared to link their policies toward those states to this progress. The United States, for example, might insist that if the Saudi regime wants American protection, it will have to

change its draconian emigration policies and improve its record on women's rights. European states, for their part, might demand that if the Palestinian Authority wants to keep receiving financial support, it will have to prove that this money is being used to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and not to fund terrorism and corruption.

I was encouraged by a recent visit to Washington where I testified before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a commission that was set up, like the Helsinki Group, to monitor the Helsinki accords. When I told them the names of the Arab dissidents who had been arrested in only the last few weeks, members of the commission promised that the fate of Arab dissidents would be placed on the agenda just as the fate of Soviet dissidents had been placed on the agenda a generation ago.

The lesson of Helsinki is that when demands to uphold human rights are backed by effective action, the cause of freedom and peace can be advanced. In the atmosphere created after Helsinki, the Soviets were forced to choose: Respect human rights, or give up all the benefits of cooperation with the free world. That is how the acceptance of human rights commitments, which was once seen as a hollow promise, turned out to be one of the most fateful decisions of the Cold War.

The danger today is that the commitments to spread human rights and democracy in the Middle East will remain an empty promise. In order to ensure that the free world's commitments become more than lip service, nondemocratic regimes in the region must understand that they, too, face a

clear choice: If they continue to repress their people and stifle dissent, they will lose all the benefits the free world has to offer, from legitimacy and security guarantees to direct aid and trade privileges.

The free world should not wait for dictatorial regimes to consent to reform. If there are courageous leaders in the Arab world who are genuinely willing to democratize and liberalize their countries, then they should be applauded and supported. But if we condition reform on the agreement of nondemocratic leaders, it will never come. We must be prepared to move forward over their objections.

We must also not wait for the support of international organizations. Many of the countries that wield influence in these organizations are nondemocratic regimes. Surely, we cannot rely on those who deny freedom to their own people to support efforts to expand freedom around the world.

I do not believe in an end of history. The diversity of the world ensures that there will always be argument and conflict. But I do believe that there can be an end to lasting tyranny—that we can live in a world where no regime that attempts to crush dissent will be tolerated. Just as the institution of slavery has been all but wiped off the face of the earth, so too can government tyranny become a thing of the past.

To protect and promote democracy around the world, I believe that a new international institution, one in which only those governments who give their people the right to be heard and counted will themselves have a right to be heard and counted can be an enormously important force for democratic change. Such a coalition of free nations

could turn a government's preservation of the right to dissent—the town square test—into the standard of international legitimacy. Countries that fail to meet this standard would not be accepted into the community of nations. They would be shunned and sanctioned, and the people they repress would be embraced and supported.

If a coalition of free nations acts in this way, then the decay of today's fear societies will be accelerated and the dangers of one man, one vote, one time, will soon disappear. Perhaps in less than a couple of generations, the world could become a community of free nations in which each country would build a democracy that suits its unique culture, history, religion, and traditions, but where no nation would be able to undermine the right to dissent that truly is God's gift to humanity.

This community of free nations will not emerge on its own. It will require both the clarity of the democratic world to see the profound moral difference between the world of freedom and the world of fear, and the courage to confront fear societies everywhere. I am convinced that a successful effort to expand freedom around the world must be inspired and led by the United States. In the twentieth century, America proved time and again that it possessed both the clarity and courage that is necessary to defeat evil. Following that example, the democracies of the world can defeat the tyranny that threatens our world today and the tyrannies that would threaten it tomorrow. To do so, we must believe not only that all *people* are created equal but also that all *peoples* are created equal.

