

CHAPTER 2

A Free Society and a Fear Society

WE GENERALLY associate free societies with the preservation of basic liberties. Yet in no society are those liberties absolute. In America, for instance, freedom of speech and religion are considered sacrosanct. Nevertheless, one is not free to shout fire in a crowded theater, nor is bigamy permitted in the name of religious belief. While discussions on the appropriate boundaries of various freedoms may make for interesting policy debates within democratic societies, they fail to make a crucial distinction between societies that are based on freedom and those that are based on fear.

This distinction was identified by people who ought to know a thing or two about the subject: Soviet dissidents. In the Gulag, there were all kinds of political prisoners: Russ-

ian monarchists eager to restore the czarist rule that was wiped out during the Bolshevik revolution; Ukrainian nationalists struggling to win independence for their nation after 300 years of Russian dominance; Pentecostals who sought to practice their faith freely; Crimean Tatars who wanted to return from exile and reestablish autonomy from Moscow; Eurocommunists who wished to put a “human face” on Soviet communism; Jewish Refuseniks, like myself, who wished to emigrate to Israel; and many others.

Although an enormous diversity of opinion was behind bars in the Gulag, dissidents shared one belief in common: We all wanted to live in a free society. And despite our sometimes contradictory visions of the future, the dissident experience enabled all of us to agree on what freedom meant: *A society is free if people have a right to express their views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm.* Each dissident envisaged a future in which his concerns were paramount, but no matter how fervent our individual desires, all the dissidents understood that a society that does not protect the right of dissent, even if the society perfectly conforms to their own unique values and ideas, will inevitably turn into a fear society that endangers *everybody*. While we dissidents vehemently disagreed about what type of free society we wanted to live in, we recognized that as long as dissent is possible we would always be safe to fight for our ideas.

A simple way to determine whether the right to dissent in a particular society is being upheld is to apply the town square test: Can a person walk into the middle of the town

square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm? If he can, then that person is living in a free society. If not, it's a fear society.

Some people who live in free societies may consider this test too expansive since, in addition to the liberal democracies, it includes many countries not always considered free. According to the town square test, societies where women are not allowed to vote, where discrimination is rampant, or where the economy is rigidly controlled can still be free. This valid criticism demonstrates that every society that meets the definition of "free" is not necessarily *just*. Rather, this test shows only that every society that passes it has crossed the threshold of freedom. In contrast, fear societies *never* cross this threshold and are *always* unjust.

THE MECHANICS OF TYRANNY

The formula I have proposed divides the world into two categories, free and fear societies, with nothing in between. I believe there are only two kinds of societies because a society that does not protect dissent will *inevitably* be based on fear. Indeed, the mechanics of tyranny make this inescapable.

Imagine a monolithic society in which every person shares the same values, beliefs, and lifestyle. This hypothetical society is "free" because there are no laws that prevent people from expressing their views and there is no danger in doing so. Since everyone agrees with the prevailing ideology, however, there is also no dissent.

Human diversity suggests that change within any society

is inevitable. No two people, much less all the members of a community, have the exact same background, tastes, interests, priorities, curiosity, intelligence, and experiences. These natural differences will invariably lead people to respond to new situations in different ways. No matter how homogeneous a society may seem, eventually differences will emerge and grow. The speed with which this process occurs will depend on many factors, from how large and complex the society is to the degree of its exposure to outside influences, but differences in opinion are certain.

The question then becomes how the hypothetical society will respond to these inevitable differences in opinion. Will it allow them to be expressed publicly? Will it allow those who want to change the prevailing order to try to do so through democratic means? If the answer is yes, then the society will remain free, but it will also change.

The early kibbutzim, the farming settlements that were established in Israel and became a model of socialist living throughout the world, are a case in point. The kibbutzim were marked by an intense ideological commitment to collectivist values. In contrast to the collectivism of the Soviet Union, which the state imposed by force, the kibbutz way of life was voluntary. There were no laws preventing people from expressing their views and everything was decided by majority rule. The system appeared remarkably stable.

The test for the kibbutzim came when its ideological values, embraced so completely at the beginning, were challenged. Differences began to emerge. Successive generations did not always share their parents' ideological fervor. Though

the glue binding the kibbutz together continued to be those values and ideals that were once shared by everyone, factions pressing for change began to emerge. Wanting a different lifestyle for themselves, they abandoned the kibbutz or attempted to change it from within. Today, the kibbutzim are very different than they were two generations ago, looking more like private businesses than the models of collective living they once were.

But what if the majority in a society does not want any changes now, and wants to prevent change in the future? Laws banning dissent will have to be enacted by the majority or imposed by the regime. Whether these laws will be an effective deterrent will depend, among other things, on how committed the dissenters are to their ideas and on the severity of the punishment. But one thing is clear: This will no longer be a free society.

DOUBLETHINK

In any place where dissent is banned, society fractures into three groups. One group is composed of those who remain committed to the prevailing order because they agree with it—the true believers. Another group is made up of those who are willing to defy the prevailing order despite the risk of punishment—the dissidents. For members of these two groups, there will be little or no gap between their private thoughts and public statements. Unlike true believers and dissidents, members of the third group do not say what they think. This group is comprised of people who no longer

believe in the prevailing ideology, but who are *afraid* to accept the risks associated with dissent. They are the “doublethinkers.”

I was five years old when Stalin died. On the day of his funeral, as solemn music blared from the loudspeakers of our town and enormous portraits of Comrade Stalin lined the streets, my father called my seven-year-old brother and me over to him, making sure we were out of the earshot of the two families with whom we shared an apartment. “Today is a great day that you should always remember,” he told us. He explained that the man everyone referred to as “Our Leader and Teacher” had massacred millions of people and was planning a new wave of persecutions against Jews. We were fortunate, he told us, that this “butcher” was dead. He followed these shocking revelations with stern warnings never to repeat what he said to anyone and to behave exactly like all the other children. So, at the tender age of five, singing paeans to Stalin and shedding crocodile tears with my kindergarten classmates over the death of a butcher, I had been initiated into the world of Soviet doublethink.

In *Out of Iran: One Woman’s Escape from the Ayatollahs*, Sousan Azadi tells a similar story about the world of doublethink in her former country:

I always warned my son not to tell the teachers anything about what was going on in our home and that if they asked if I had a certain something or other in the house, he was always to say no. One day he came home from school and reported proudly, “Mom, I did something

good today. The teacher showed me a Koran and asked me if we had one at home and I said NO.” He was just beaming, and it broke my heart to take my little child and show him where my marriage Koran was kept and to admonish him sternly never to say that we did not have the holy book in the house. “You have to tell people that we pray every day even if we don’t,” I told him, hating myself for teaching him at such an early age to lie for survival.¹

In a letter smuggled out of North Korea in the 1970s, one North Korean explained how he had learned the art of doublethink. “I learned that if you speak out loud what’s on your mind, you die! I learned that if you have something to say, it is much easier to say it with your eyes. I learned to see with my lips and speak with my eyes.”²

Doublethinkers live in constant tension from the gap between their thoughts and words. They always avoid saying what is not permitted but also try to avoid saying what they do not believe. But fear societies generally do not leave their doublethinkers such a luxury. They demand from their “cogs” constant expressions of loyalty. In kindergartens, schools, universities, workplaces, religious institutions, public meetings, and elsewhere, doublethinkers must parrot the ideology of the regime and hide their true beliefs. This constant self-censorship can be such an inseparable part of a doublethinker’s existence that it becomes so habitual that the tension between thoughts and words is almost no longer felt. Indeed, only when doublethinkers are free are they fully

aware of the extent of their previous self-imposed intellectual servitude.

Political anecdotes and jokes, which can expose the hypocrisy of a fear society, are used to decrease the tension of the life of doublethink. The way in which these anecdotes and jokes can be conveyed—whether expressed for example, in small circles or in larger ones, orally or in written form—depends on the level of fear in a society. Moreover, the extent to which these anecdotes and jokes permeate a society is a measure of the extent of doublethink in that society.

In books, poetry, plays, art, and music, the cultural elite is constantly testing the borders between doublethink and dissent, competing to be the first to react to changes in the policies of the regime and to discover the new borders of acceptable expression.

Though certain “specialists” can interpret these subtle signals and understand the internal processes taking place within a fear society, to an outside observer, a fear society’s doublethinkers are indistinguishable from its true believers: Both groups will *appear* to assent to the prevailing order, though only one actually does. Therefore, to an outsider, a fear society will consist of only two groups, true believers and dissidents. And if the punishment for dissent is high enough, the fear society will have no dissidents either.

In the 1930s, there were no dissidents in the Soviet Union, at least none that were known to the West. Were the more than 150 million people who lived under Stalin’s boot in the 1940s all true believers? Or, more plausibly, was the lack of dissent due to the fact that in Stalin’s time, dissidents

would be summarily executed? Is it not logical that the number of dissidents in a fear society would largely be a measure of the risk of dissent? The USSR of the 1970s, for example, was a relatively less oppressive society than it had been in the 1930s and so a few hundred dissidents appeared. Had Mahatma Gandhi been facing the regime of a Stalin or a Hitler, his struggle against foreign rule would have ended before it began. Fortunately for him, he confronted a British society that, while imperialist, was also liberal and democratic.

If a fear society is repressive enough, it will appear to an outside observer to consist of *only* true believers when in reality it may have thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, tens of millions, or even hundreds of millions of doublethinkers living in terror. Moreover, while it is impossible to know how many doublethinkers there are in a fear society, one thing is certain: With every passing day, the number of double thinkers in a fear society almost always increases. It happens because the restrictions of a fear society provide many reasons for true believers to become alienated from the regime. Once alienated, these new doublethinkers are highly unlikely to become loyal supporters of the regime again (although, as we will see later, the regime constantly tries to recruit them).³

DECEIVING OURSELVES

In Saudi Arabia, one can definitely be arrested or imprisoned for expressing one's views. While many people who

grew up in liberal democratic societies would regard life in Saudi Arabia as oppressive, can it be said that the people of Saudi Arabia, who appear to agree with the prevailing ideology, live in fear? Aren't the Saudi Arabians simply living according to their age-old traditions? Though no one could claim that Saudi Arabia is a free society, does that necessarily make it a fear society?

This question assumes that the people of Saudi Arabia agree with the policies of their regime. But how do we know that? Because of what the Saudis say publicly? Can we assume that what people living in a fear society are willing to say publicly is a true expression of their beliefs? The books of dissidents describing how Saudis flying to Europe hurry to change into their Western clothes while still on the airplane and adopt different modes of behavior when they are abroad are enough to convince me that Saudi Arabia is steeped in doublethink. Even if these stories only refer to the Saudi elite, the process of internal decay, when more and more people are conforming to a world they no longer believe in, is clearly under way. We must always keep in mind that the public statements of those who live in fear societies are motivated by fear. If we fail to recognize this, we will only be deceiving ourselves.

In the 1930s, when Stalin was killing millions of his subjects and starving millions more, Western intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Romain Rolland, and Leon Feuchtwanger waxed poetic about the contented Soviet masses. Feuchtwanger, a famous German writer of the era who specialized in historical fiction, visited the Soviet Union

in 1937. In a book describing that trip, Feuchtwanger contrasted the “unhappiness in capitalist countries” with the “satisfaction of people in the Soviet Union.”⁴ At the height of Stalin’s repressions, when nearly the entire Soviet population was living in utter terror, Feuchtwanger offered readers in the West his impression of the public mood:

Though from time to time they criticize a minor shortcoming, all the people whom I met, even those whom I met by chance, who could not have been prepared for a discussion with me, all agreed with the existing [Stalinist] system. All the vast city of Moscow was brimming with satisfaction and consent, and even more than this, happiness.⁵

Stalin admired the propaganda value of Feuchtwanger’s work so much he granted the writer the rare privilege of attending a public trial. These trials provided Stalin with the means to consolidate his power and liquidate his opponents. They would generally feature prominent Communist Party officials whom he wanted to oust for one reason or another. The officials would be arrested and tortured into confessing their “crimes against the people,” and if torture would not suffice, they would be warned that their families would be killed if they refused to comply. By the time they entered the courtroom, the accused were well prepared to deliver carefully scripted public statements that served Stalin’s propaganda needs.

In his account of one trial, Feuchtwanger hailed the pro-

ceedings as a remarkable display of justice and mutual respect. Feuchtwanger observed that despite the serious charges facing the accused (of the seventeen people on trial, twelve received the death penalty and five long prison sentences—sentences which in Stalin’s time usually meant death as well), they were all united in their “love for the machine” of communism. Describing a mutual affection that “encourages the judges and the accused to cooperate so closely with each other,” Feuchtwanger compared it to a “feeling similar to the one that connects the government and the opposition in England so closely that the government pays the leader of the opposition 2,000 pounds a year”⁶ and noted the solemn approval with which the people greeted the verdicts.

Those who report today on the “Arab street” or on the contented masses in Beijing, Havana, or elsewhere around the world should be wary of falling into the same trap as Feuchtwanger. Almost daily during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, democratic audiences watching the news were reminded that though the Taliban and Saddam may not be their cup of tea, they did nonetheless represent the will of large portions of the Afghan and Iraqi people. And how did these reporters know this? Because “the people” told them so.

In one memorable CNN broadcast devoted to finding out what the people of Afghanistan thought, a journalist noted that the Taliban “were controlling where you can go, but not necessarily what you can say while you are there.”⁷ The journalist did not seem to realize that in a fear society, finding out what people truly believe is not a function of whether the press is given the freedom to ask questions, but rather whether the people feel free to answer them.

In the same broadcast, the journalist whom a member of the Taliban was escorting on a “tour” around Afghanistan, informed his viewers that the Afghans he had spoken with “appear quite passionately, at this stage, behind the Taliban.” When the CNN studio host asked whether statements made in the presence of Taliban chaperones were part of a “good propaganda show,” the reporter replied,

No, again, that’s a question we have asked, I’ve asked several Taliban that question. They say, “no.” They say that [what people] read of the Taliban and the Afghan mindset is completely erroneous and wrong. That is one of the reasons, also, they want to bring us into these areas. It’s not just to show us the civilian casualties, but also to show us the mindset.⁸

Similarly, in an article entitled “Waiting to Kill Americans,” a *Time* magazine journalist used the words of a forty-year-old Iraqi war widow to convince readers that the Iraqi “people” were firmly behind Saddam.

The Americans should be warned that Iraqi women know how to fight and die as well as our men. . . . We will give up our lives for our beloved country, our beloved Baghdad and our beloved Saddam.⁹

Admitting that the woman’s words “borrow heavily from official pamphlets and presidential speeches,” the journalist nevertheless assured his readers that “the emotion they convey is her own.”

These journalists apparently never questioned the authenticity of public statements that were made defending a regime that put its opponents through plastic shredders and tortured children in front of their parents. Perhaps he would have served his readers better by quoting the words of one North Korean defector who explained that “it is the understanding of every average person in [North] Korea that if you say something against the party line, you will be taken to a controlled area.”¹⁰

After the war, journalists heard a very different tune from the Iraqi people from the one they heard only a few weeks earlier. One journalist, noting how many people had told him that their terrible fear of Saddam had prevented them from speaking out, was honest enough to set the record straight.

The painter Rassim described to me how the mere act of talking with foreigners at an art exhibition could result in being hauled away for hours of questioning by the dread Mukhabarat secret police. . . . Mushtak recalled how his teenage son had once blurted, “I hate Sadaam Hussein!” to a group of close friends, only to find himself arrested a few hours later. The police demanded a million Iraqi dinars to free him and then 200,000 more. “My wife and I never discussed politics in front of our children,” he told me. “We never knew when one might accidentally reveal something to an informer.”¹¹

The public statements of those who live in fear are never a reliable indication of people’s true opinions. Had a poll

been conducted in the Soviet Union in 1985 asking whether respondents supported the policies of the communist regime, 99 percent would have answered yes—incidentally, the same percentage who would have answered yes in 1935, 1945, 1955, 1965, 1975, and every year in between. The opinion of “the people” apparently underwent a dramatic change a few years later when communism collapsed in the face of a popular uprising. Had the people suddenly changed their minds? Had their long love affair with totalitarian communism come to an end overnight? Of course not. The only thing that changed was that the masses of doublethinkers were no longer afraid to express their true beliefs.

In 2001, in one of the first meetings of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s national unity government, I argued, as I had for many years, that Yasser Arafat was a corrupt dictator whom Israel should stop supporting. A senior minister in the government who was very supportive of continuing negotiations with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority told me that regardless of what Israel thought about Arafat, he was “beloved by his people,” as we could see from the “massive public support” he enjoyed. I assured my colleague that Arafat was beloved by his people in the same way Stalin had been beloved by his. Just as there were times in the Soviet Union when one couldn’t survive without expressing loyalty to the regime, so too the Palestinians must often express their loyalty to the regime that rules them.

WILLING DUPES?

Doublethinkers, who must play a role their entire lives in order to survive, will have little problem hiding their true beliefs and still convincing an outsider of their sincerity. Their role playing is made easier by the fact that many outside observers have an ideological bias that allows them to willingly suspend their disbelief and not see the effects of tyranny.

The intellectuals fooled by Stalin in the 1930s shared a sincere belief that communism's egalitarian ideals promised a more just order than the one offered by their own capitalist countries. Convinced that the Soviet attempt to build a "new world" and a "new man" was a noble one, they refused to believe that those championing such ostensibly lofty goals could employ such reprehensible means to obtain them, and they filtered their observations accordingly.

This ideological predilection is so strong in some people that even after the truth is revealed, they cannot acknowledge it. At the end of the 1980s, small unofficial delegations of Soviet cultural and public figures started coming to Israel. It was part of re-establishing relations between the Soviet Union and the "Zionist Enemy," which the Soviets had broken off after the Six Day War in 1967. After decades in which the superpower had served as the main supplier of arms to Israel's enemies and had spearheaded attempts to isolate the Jewish state in international forums, these first contacts were understandably a cause for much excitement in Israel. I had been released from prison some years before,

and as a sign of the “thawing” of tensions between the two countries, I was sometimes invited to attend these meetings. I remember that at one of the meetings, Shimon Peres, the leader of Israel’s Labor Party made some opening remarks. Searching for common ground with his guests and obviously trying to say something pleasant, Peres reminded the delegation of the two nations’ common roots: “We have the *kibbutzim*, and you have the *kolkhoz*.”

Our Soviet guests were shocked. The *kolkhoz* were the collective farms established by Stalin in 1929 that robbed peasants of their land and stripped them of their rights. Peres did not realize that he was comparing Israel’s *kibbutzim* to what had become a symbol of Soviet slavery, in which millions were killed, millions exiled, and millions starved. Even sixty years later, the *kolkhoz* were an embarrassing reminder of the Communist regime’s horrible past. Like Feuchtwanger, Peres was simply unable to take off his ideological blinders. To Peres, the ideal of communal living remained a glorious vision that people in both countries could admire. Peres couldn’t appreciate that a collective enterprise in a fear society is utterly different from a collective enterprise in a free society, notwithstanding that they share the same label.

A close friend of mine encountered the same phenomenon in a discussion group that had been formed between Israeli and Palestinian women. When one of the Palestinians mentioned the horrible honor killings that plague her society, an Israeli participant, with a clear anti-religious bias, told her that Israel had a similar problem. In the ultra-orthodox com-

munity, she explained, women who cheated on their husbands were also the victims of a shame-and-honor mentality. My friend, not believing what she was hearing, vehemently protested the comparison. The ultra-orthodox, she explained, may ostracize a member of the community, but they would never kill her. Second, the penalty of being ostracized was not limited to sexual indiscretions, but applied to many other facets of ultra-orthodox life, from failing to obey the Sabbath laws to violating dietary restrictions. Therefore, being ostracized has nothing to do with gender issues. Third, in the ultra-orthodox world, unlike the situation in many Muslim countries, this penalty is applied to both men and women. There is no moral equivalence between honor killings in a fear society and ostracization in a free society. But this Israeli woman, because of her anti-religious bias, compared two completely different phenomena.

TRUE BELIEVERS

The power of a fear society is never based solely on an army and a secret police. As important is a regime's ability to control what is read, said, heard, and above all, thought. This is how a regime based on fear attempts to maintain a constant pool of true believers.

The Soviets went to great lengths to shape the minds of their citizens, subjecting the nation's old to a mixture of overt and subtle reprogramming and forcing its youth to imbibe the official wisdom of the Soviet government. The voluminous State Encyclopedia in my father's house was a

constant reminder of the malleability of Soviet history. Every few years, after a high-profile death or trial, our family received official pages of revision. We were advised by the authorities to put those pages in the appropriate place and burn the ones earmarked for removal.

For those living in a free society, the idea that a state would try to thoroughly brainwash its subjects is particularly difficult to grasp. On my first trip to America I met with the publisher of Random House, a vociferous critic of the Soviet's human rights record. He asked me whether people in the Soviet Union could freely enter bookstores and buy books. At first, I couldn't believe he was serious. Then I understood that he simply had no idea how a fear society worked. I explained to him that *we* were free to go in, but that the *books* were not.

All fear societies are based on a certain degree of brainwashing. State-controlled television, radio, and newspapers glorify the actions of the regime's leaders and incite their populations against those it deems to be enemies. Recently, an officer in the North Korean army who had defected described how he oversaw experiments at a prison camp in which parents were placed in gas chambers together with their children. Asked how he could take part in such barbarism, the officer replied:

At the time I felt that they thoroughly deserved such a death. Because all of us were led to believe that all the bad things that were happening to North Korea were their fault; that we were poor, divided and not making

progress as a country. . . . It would be a total lie for me to say I felt sympathetic about the children dying such a painful death. Under the society and the regime I was in at the time, I only felt that they were the enemies. So I felt no sympathy or pity for them at all.¹²

North Korea's regime has an easier time brainwashing its subjects than do regimes that preside over less insular societies. The Palestinian Authority, however, has shown that it is possible to poison minds in much more open societies as well.

For twenty-five years, the Palestinians lived under Israeli military control. Palestinian laborers worked in Israel and Palestinian society was thoroughly exposed to Israel's democratic way of life. But after Israel transferred control over Palestinian-populated cities to Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA) under the Oslo accords, the PA used every tool at its disposal to incite Palestinians to hate Israel and hate Jews. Textbooks that did not include Israel on a map of "Palestine" taught Palestinians that the Jewish state had no right to exist; summer camps trained kindergarten children to become suicide bombers; PA-controlled media hailed terrorists who had murdered Israeli civilians as martyrs whose heroic actions were a source of pride to their people.

By the time the campaign of Palestinian terrorism began in September 2000, the level of indoctrination among the Palestinians had reached fever pitch. On PA-run television, five-year-olds donning suicide belts beckoned viewers to join them in the struggle to liberate all of Palestine, and schools were let out so that children could participate in the fighting.

In one chilling interview broadcast on PA television, an eleven-year-old Palestinian girl said becoming a *shahid* (martyr) was more important than achieving a “just peace.”¹³ From morning to night, martyrdom was portrayed as the highest calling of all Palestinians. To be sure, many of those who took part in this festival of hate were doublethinkers, simply conforming with the prevailing ideology in order to survive. After all, Arafat and the PA controlled the distribution system of food aid, a monopoly over many basic goods, the hundreds of millions of dollars of international aid that were supposed to go to improving conditions for Palestinians, tens of thousands of permits that allowed Palestinians to work in Israel, and much more. Many Palestinians had to express loyalty to Arafat and the PA if they hoped to feed their families. Still, systematic brainwashing is bound to have ill effects, particularly on the young. Not everyone will be lucky enough to have a father who will inform them that their “Great Leader and Teacher” is a butcher.

But the lasting effect of such indoctrination should also not be exaggerated. The day-to-day life of a fear society cannot be made palatable forever. Eventually, bitter experience belies the propaganda so that not even some of the people can be fooled all of the time.

The 1979 revolution against the shah of Iran had broad support in the population. It would quickly become clear, however, that the revolution had imposed a totalitarian religious order that was no less corrupt and even more repressive. In less than a generation, popular support has turned completely against the regime. Though elections in Iran are

strictly controlled, with candidates vetted by the ayatollahs and with the media fully controlled by the state, Iranians have increasingly shown their opposition to the mullahs by electing those candidates that are seen as the most hostile to the ideology of the regime. After twenty-five years of failure, oppression, and economic stagnation, few Iranians can be brainwashed into supporting the ayatollahs. The true believers have become doublethinkers, and the doublethinkers, sensing that the regime is weakened, are turning more and more toward open dissent.

Another example of the limits of indoctrination can be found in the common observation that the most anti-American regimes in the Middle East have the most pro-American populations. This is not *despite* those regimes' anti-American propaganda but because of it: The attitude of those living in fear societies toward America is a reflection of their attitudes toward their own regime. If America is seen as supporting that regime, as in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the people hate America. If America is seen as opposing the regime, as in Iran, the people admire it. A few months ago, a leader of a former Soviet Republic told me about his recent visit to Iran: "It reminded me of the Soviet Union. All the officials criticize and condemn America and all the people love America."

Even those who genuinely do hate America do not necessarily hate free societies. Rather, part of their hatred is due to the perception that by supporting the nondemocratic regimes that are oppressing them, America is betraying the democratic values it claims to uphold.

Even the “truest” of true believers will not indefinitely support a fear society. For decades, Stalin terrorized not only the Soviet people but also the entire Communist Party leadership: A member of the ruling Politburo might be a rising star in the party one day; the next, he could find himself on a train bound to Siberia or facing the death penalty. After Stalin died in 1953, no one in the Communist leadership was willing to grant the same level of absolute authority to his successor. The next leader’s power was restricted not because the Communist leadership wanted to bring an end to totalitarian rule but rather because *they themselves* no longer wanted to live in fear.

THE EXHILARATION OF FREEDOM

There is no way of knowing for sure what the precise distribution of doublethinkers and true believers is within a fear society at any point in time. But the experience of living in such a society and my understanding of how individuals cope with such societies has convinced me that the number of true believers is always far smaller, and the number of doublethinkers much larger, than outsiders assume. Moreover, if a majority of those who live in a fear society do not already prefer freedom to fear, they will soon after their fear society collapses.

The deeper the level of control that a society tries to exercise over its subjects, the faster the change will occur. In 1989, a North Korean student who defected a short time after he began his medical studies in Czechoslovakia noted

that “most North Koreans, raised almost from birth to regard the two Kims as all-providing deities, accept the propaganda, as I did until I saw the relative freedom of Czechoslovakia.”¹⁴ Once the systematic brainwashing stops, once the truth begins to come to light, once the doublethinkers are no longer afraid, in every society a majority who will not be willing to live in fear again quickly emerges.

More than any other reason, this is why Germans, Japanese, Italians, Spaniards, Russians, and so many others made the transition from fear to freedom during the twentieth century. They have very different cultures, beliefs, religions, ideals, values, and lifestyles, but in one respect they are all the same: None of those peoples wanted to live in fear again.

The determination of men and women who are free never to return to a life of fear should never be underestimated. Indeed, the sense of freedom that comes from leaving the world of brainwashing and doublethink is a liberation that is not soon forgotten. My own liberation from the world of fear began when I was still a student at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, a school that liked to compare itself to MIT. Figuring that in this school of “wunderkind,” the conventional methods of brainwashing would have little impact, the authorities used other methods. The more sophisticated propaganda we were subjected to appealed to the importance of the work we were doing. All talk of rights, freedom, and justice, we were told, was just that, only talk. What do mere words mean compared with the immutable laws of Newton,

Galileo, and Einstein? Political values will come and go, while science offers universal, eternal truths.

Ironically, I was inspired to leave a life of doublethink by a man perched at the very apex of the world of “eternal truths.” In 1968, in an essay directed at the Soviet leadership, Andrei Sakharov, the most prominent scientist in the Soviet Union, wrote that scientific progress could not be disconnected from human freedom. The stifling intellectual environment inside the USSR was retarding its people’s capacity for invention and crippling the nation’s ability to be a world leader, Sakharov wrote. The ideals of socialism would never be reached, he explained, if the Soviet Union did not embrace intellectual freedom. In one courageous statement, Sakharov had dealt a severe blow to Soviet power. The chief scientist of a superpower that prided itself on its scientific achievement was arguing that the nature of Soviet society was making it impossible for the USSR to keep pace with the free world.

For a young scientist contemplating his future, the message was loud and clear. A man we all revered was warning that the world of falsehood led not to a better future for all mankind, but to intellectual paralysis and scientific regression. Sakharov, who would later risk everything by challenging the regime to respect human rights, became an inspiration for me, and I quickly gravitated to his side. When I later worked as his liaison to foreign journalists, diplomats, and politicians, I saw that there was never a gap between this remarkably humble man’s inner thoughts and public statements. In my case, the convergence of my thoughts and

words—which happened when I first became a Jewish activist—would bring an end to my own inner discomfort. As self-censorship and doublethink gave way, I was overcome by a powerful sense of liberation. It was as if an enormous weight I had borne for years and whose burden I had become habituated to had finally been lifted. All of a sudden, I was free to think what I liked and say what I thought. Even when I was on a prolonged hunger strike in my punishment cell, the sense of freedom never left me.

For most of those who have lived their entire lives in fear, this feeling will be experienced only when their society is free, when they feel it is safe to go to the town square and express their views without fear. But it will be no less exhilarating. I am certain that this feeling of exhilaration transcends race, religion, creed, and culture, and that the drug of freedom is universally potent. I am equally certain that once a people live in freedom, the vast majority of them will never want to live in fear again. To suggest, as the skeptics do, that the majority of a people would freely choose to live in a fear society is to suggest that most of those who have tasted freedom would freely choose to return to slavery.