

**THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY  
OF THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

**NATAN SHARANSKY  
ISRAELI DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
AND MINISTER OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION**

**INTRODUCTION BY MARTIN INDYK**

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**MR. MARTIN INDYK:** Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, please. Welcome to the Saban Center at Brookings. We are delighted today to have the honor of hosting Natan Sharansky, the deputy prime minister in the government of Israel and the minister for housing and construction.

Natan is somebody who I'm sure is well known to you all for his fame as a refusnik in the Soviet Union who spent years in prison for his beliefs and for his desire to immigrate to Israel. I remember well, as many of you probably do, out there at the demonstrations supporting Avital as she, Natan's wife, sought his release.

In 1986, finally, as a result of the efforts of many people, and particularly, I think, the U.S. government and the government of Israel, Natan was finally released, and he migrated to Israel. He then wrote a book, which had a profound influence on me, which I think is really an amazing expression of the triumph of the will to be free of the Gulag system of the Soviet Union. The book, of course, was called "Fear No Evil."

In Israel, he took up the cause of Soviet Jewry, promoting their efforts to be absorbed in Israel effectively. He set up the Zionist Forum as an advocacy group for Soviet immigrants, and then moved from there to establish the Yisrael Be'Aliya Party in 1995, which promptly won seven Knesset seats and put Natan Sharansky into government as the minister of industry and trade.

From that time, he served in each of the governments since then: as minister of interior in the Barak government until he resigned in July 2002 just before Camp David, as I recall; and –

**NATAN SHARANSKY:** Yes. A little bit before and because of ... (Laughter.)

**MR. INDYK:** And then in March of 2001, he joined the Sharon National Unity government as the minister of housing and construction. I suppose now you're a caretaker minister until the next elections.

Natan Sharansky, of course, has a giant reputation as a struggler for human rights, but also as a leading member of the Israeli government. And we're delighted to have him speak today about a subject which he feels very passionately about and I've heard him speak about many times while I was in government, but not since, and I'm delighted to have the opportunity to hear him today.

His passion in recent years has been about the need for democracy in the Middle East, and that's what we suggested he should address first of all today. No doubt you'll

have some questions about the upcoming Israeli elections, too, but we'll deal with that in Q & A.

I have to express my apologies to Natan and everybody else that I'm unfortunately going to have to leave a little early because I have a parents-teachers conference, and, as many of you will know, those are not moveable dates. (Chuckles.) But Steve Hess has kindly agreed to handle the Q & A session, and I apologize, Natan, for this.

I think it might be useful if we went around and asked everybody to introduce themselves to you. Steve?

**STEVE HESS:** Steve Hess.

(Introductions, off mike.)

And I should have already welcomed our ambassador from Israel to the United States, Danny Ayalon. Danny, I think this is the first time you've been to Brookings. A special welcome to you.

**DANIEL AYALON:** Thank you.

**MR. INDYK:** Natan.

**MR. SHARANSKY:** Thank you, Martin, Ambassador and friends, and ladies and gentlemen. You know it's true, Martin, that you heard me many times speaking about the importance of democracy in the Middle East, when you were in the government. , But there is one thing that has changed since then. Then each time I was speaking about it, it looked like some kind of dissident speech because -(laughter) – I had to say, well, in the program of our party since it was established in 1996, it is written that the depth of our concessions to the Palestinians should deal with the depth of democracy on the other side.

I think we still may be the only party of the world which connects concessions in the Middle East with the question of democracy. This was viewed by both left and right always as something nice, but ridiculous, which is not really connected to reality. If you are on the left, then you say, well, democracy amongst Palestinians will never happen, so it means that you don't want peace. If you are on the right, you'll say okay, if tomorrow they'll be democratic, so what? We have to give away our lands. Even when I have these conversations at Wye plantation, many other meetings which we had, it seemed -- looked like good, nice conversations, but a little bit out of the topic -- let's deal with this after we will solve our questions.

In the last month, and especially after the two speeches of President Bush, it became kosher in Israel, it became politically correct in Israel to make these connections. It doesn't mean that many people accept it or believe in it, but at least now you can't say

that it's something absolutely ridiculous. Though I have to say that some of the documents of the last time show me again that even the era after the speech of the president, again and again are ignoring it, and prefer simply to use these nice words about democracy instead of dealing with the real meaning of it.

So let me just spend, let's say, five minutes on the theory of the topic – why I believe, and believed, and for the last 30 years of my being involved in human rights in the Soviet and then in the Middle East, that security and democracy are something intrinsically connected.

Now there are two ways, in fact, in which the free world tries to guarantee stability and security of it because there is the free world, democratic world, and there is the world which is not free, or which is not yet free. It depends on your point of view, which is not democratic. And there are dictators who are ruling in different parts of this world, and dictators are always dangerous to our stability. So there are two ways of dealing with this. One is to bribe the dictators. You want to find a way to turn them from bad dictators to good dictators, to find a way to change their attitude towards us. They're going to say that's always the first choice of democracy; how to make sure that these dictators will treat us better. And the explanation of why we have to do it is always – almost always the same. We cannot decide for the other peoples what kind of regime they will have. As it was said by Tallyrand, every people have the government which they deserve. That's why, instead of interfering in their home affairs, you have to protect our security.

The other approach, of course, is to link all our relations with them, with the dictator and with this country, with the question of democracy and human rights, and build our national pose accordingly. I personally first met with this pose, of course, in the Soviet Union, in the times of, so-called, détente. This great era of détente, when the leaders of the United States in effect decided that they had to bribe Brezhnev, that they had to give him the status of most-favored nation in trade, to give them the credits which they need so much, to sign agreements about restricting the arms races in the aspects in which Soviet Union felt that they cannot compete with America, to close eyes on the fact that Russia, in fact, is controlling now all those countries which were occupied after the second world war and is not going to change, to give it away, but in exchange for a more loyal attitude towards the West.

And I remember the messengers who were coming. I was helping Andre Sakharov also, in addition to my Zionist activity, in meeting with the foreign press, organizing some, not press conferences because it was almost underground, but in meetings with these messengers or my friend, now my friend, Henry Kissinger, and some others, who were coming and explaining to us that we have to understand that Russia never was a democracy; for a thousand years that it exists it was always a dictatorship and will never be a democracy. And that's why it's senseless to try to impose here or encourage here or to pull them to become democratic. But we have to make them less dangerous, and we have to make them more loyal to us, and then we will be able to help you, to Sakharov, to Russian Jews, to many others.

And I remember how again and again, Sakharov was saying that you cannot trust the government. Don't think about us, think about yourselves. You cannot trust a government which don't trust their own people, so you cannot rely on the agreements which will be signed. And then came Senator Jackson, and he in fact said that, he was the first who made the clear linkage. At the moment when practically everything was ready for this agreement, which I called the "great bribery" which was prepared-how to bribe Brezhnev now that he will be good to us, to America and to the West. And he came. Jackson said as long as there is no free movement of people, there will be no free movement of trade. In fact, that's the essence of the Jackson amendment. And that changed the emphasis. All the time, you said it's in our interest of our security to link our relations, our free trade and other things with human rights.

Of course, the next major step was the Helsinki Agreement, which was less obligatory because it was not a law, but which was much more broad and deep, and where it's for the first time an international agreement, where the first, second and third basket are connected; meaning that economic, political results, political control over the world, economical cooperation and human rights. And though I was among those founders of the Helsinki group who were monitoring the fulfillment of this by Soviet, we went for this to prison. But the aim was reached. That was the linkage which the Soviet Union could never break between human rights, democracy and relations with the west.

And then the histories go on. President Reagan with his great speech of the evil empire, which maybe even some of those who are here didn't like at the time, but we prisoners, when we heard the speech, we were absolutely delighted. We knew that now, finally when the Western leader calls a spade a spade, makes this difference so clear, that is the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union could survive as long as he could play both roles. The tyrant against his own people, and a nice partner in the world. The moment they cannot do it, sooner or later they will fall.

And you also, of course, believed that Russia deserved democracy no less than America. In fact, my friend, Andrei Marik in 1969 wrote a book where he predicted that after 1984, the Soviet Union will be, Russia will be a democracy. It happened a little bit later. He paid his life for this book, but that's what happened.

The problem is that admittedly after this great victory of America was reached in the Cold War, these lessons were abandoned. I remember how I was meeting with George Bush's father in 1990 discussing the question about direct flight from Russia to Israel, and he was interested to discuss with me how to make sure that Soviet Union will stay in one piece, how to make sure that Gorbachev will be in control of the Baltic Republics and Ukraine, and how it is important for America that all this empire will stay as an empire because there is one guy that we can rely on, that in fact, you don't need to bribe him already because he is already ours, and it is important that Ukraine and the Baltic Republics will stay under their control. And I was trying to express my big surprise with the fact that America can even think in these terms, that America, which

understands the power of freedom more than anybody else has only to try to accompany this process and not try to stop this process.

And then after Gulf War when, not only myself, but I was raising the question here in Washington how it can be that America, the moment when Saudi Arabia was saved by America and Kuwait was saved by America, how it can be that America didn't even try to make any small connection between, didn't try to press even a little bit the Saudis to start some kind of process of openness where they will not become a democracy, but will permit some opposition leader to come and to live there, or some opposition newspaper to be opened. That must be in the American interest. And my friends were explaining to me that Saudi Arabia is not about democracy; it's about oil and stability. Saudi Arabia guarantees us, the West, stability.

Well, today when Saudi Arabia is the main source of Wahabism and the main source of the money for your terror, I think it's clear. But maybe the biggest, I believe, mistake or the biggest illusion which we've been ignoring is the connection between freedom, security and democracy. Peace or the Oslo process was in fact a big dream about a new Middle East for some people. For others it was an understanding that time is playing against us. We cannot wait anymore; we have to do something very drastic.

But then what came of it? If you want solutions quickly, we are taking Arafat from Tunis. We are bringing him to Palestine. We make sure that he will be a strong dictator, and we believe that if we only give him enough lands, and enough territories, and enough control over the people, and enough economic tools, he will become the guardian of our security. He will be interested in our security. And the fact that he is dictator, it's not a problem. Maybe some people saw it as a problem, but for some of the major architects of the Oslo process, that was an important condition. As our late prime minister said once, not thinking deeply about it and it immediately became something which goes without saying. A week after the agreement was signed he said, "It's good for us that Arafat doesn't have a supreme court, human rights organizations or free press." Well, in Hebrew it's even much funnier. He said, "Because he doesn't have these restrictions, he will be much more successful in fighting terrorists from Hamas."

That was the theory. And not only was it the theory, in fact, if you look then through all the peace process and all the stages, this concern that Arafat will not fulfill one or another obligation was much less than the concern that Arafat could be weakened. It was an absolute axiom that it's very important, because they're in such competition. Because there are extremists, because there is Hamas, we need a strong Arafat. And he knew how to play on this. He played on this very well. He could have fought not to fulfill any of his obligations. And each time when we were coming saying, wait a minute, we already went so far in this agreement and he still didn't fulfill what he had to do three years ago, two years ago, and you demand from us, and you ask why we didn't do what we had to do one week ago?

But also, Arafat was – if you demand – if you insist, I'll do it. I'll become weaker and then Hamas will come to power. And our friends, American friends, were

immediately in a hurry to come to us and to say, god forbid, don't you understand? Do you really want that instead of Arafat there will be Hamas? And they're going to say, in the Wye Plantation, our main opponent was not Arafat, because Arafat, Abu Mazin, we knew all of them, we knew. But our friends, beginning from Martin and finishing with the American president, these were our real problems because even at some moments, I will not go into details. But at some moment when finally-

(Laughter.)

**MR. SHARANSKY:** we convinced Arafat to agree to something He did agree. Sandy Berger rushed to Arafat to say, are you crazy? Do you understand what you are doing? And of course Arafat was more than happy to give up to the pressure of our American friends.

**MR. INDYK:** I don't remember it that way. (Laughter.) But how come you believed him when he said he agreed?

**MR. SHARANSKY:** (Chuckles.) Well, at the moment he said he agreed. We have to check the record If you remember, in Wye Implementation I wrote an article saying again and again that, no, I don't care about confiscation of the weapons. I don't care about the size of the police. I care what he is teaching at schools. I care what he is saying in Arabic. And on these issues, not only didn't he do anything; he goes in absolutely the opposite direction. And let's make direct linkage between all our concessions, which we already did and which we are supposed to do, to this question. And unfortunately, it was very difficult because the fear was that you cannot pressure Arafat because he will become weaker. We need a strong Arafat in order for him to fight Hamas. With this approach, something very fundamental was ignored all the time, and is ignored today in many other parts of the world, and it's the principle difference between democracies and dictatorships.

And where is, from my point of view, this principle difference? First of all, what is in common? The leaders of both, dictators and democratic leaders, want to stay in power as long as possible. That's the rule of nature. Once, in the Soviet Union I thought that that's typical only for dictatorships, for Politburo. Today, when I look at my country and some others, I see that's nature, the way of life. As long as leaders can stay in power, they want to stay in power. But in democracies, leaders depend on their people. So in order to stay in power, he has to deliver. He has to make sure that people, if are not happy, at least feel that the leaders are doing something good for them. The majority of people don't want to be suicide bombers, but want to live in peace, want a good education for their people, and so on. That's why for democracies always, in the end, war is always the last option. They will make all possible sacrifices, sometimes very dangerous sacrifices to avoid war because they have to deliver what people want.

In dictatorships, leaders don't depend on the people. To the contrary, people depend on their leaders. But when people depend on their leaders, it's a very unstable situation. For the leader, in order to stay in power he has to keep his people under

control. In order to keep his people under control, there is only one way, which was always used by all dictators. You need an enemy. You need to constantly mobilize your people for the sake of struggle against the enemy. In the Soviet Union, they were geniuses about this. They always looked at an internal enemy as an external enemy, and all our life was this struggle against these enemies. Of course every dictator always needs his enemy.

And that's why when our leaders said that it's good for us that Arafat is without a supreme court, human rights organizations and free press because he will fight against the terror of the Hamas, that's when I wrote my first article against Oslo. I said, not against Oslo but against this approach, that Arafat will need us as the enemy. We will stand for him as a dictator. He, in order to survive, in order to be the leader of the Palestinians, he will need to have us as the enemy, and he will do everything to strengthen the hatred of his people towards us. And unfortunately, that's what's happened. At the same time, he was playing two roles: the only hope for peace, because if he will become weaker then will come Hamas, and that's why he could continue mobilizing pressure on us that we will continue delivering, at the same time not doing anything on his side. And at the same time he was successful at building and building this autonomy of hatred towards Israel. It's not an accident that the new generation of Palestinians that was brought up in Arafat's schools hates us much more than those who were brought up under our occupation, because all the system of education, everything is different. So I believe that was the main illusion, which had to explode at some moment. That's what happened.

Now to come to the current situation. What happened in America on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September showed, or reminded us that, after all, our war in the Middle East, some kind of tribal war between Arabs and Jews, is in fact a world confrontation between the old free world and the world of terror. And I definitely greeted enthusiastically the speeches of President Bush of March, and then in June, where he made the right connection. In fact he says that, he feels that the Palestinian people deserve to live in democracy no less than any other people. I believe that's a very important statement, a very important axiom which we are ignoring again and again.

I mentioned Russia and I can tell you, I can show you quotes of American specialists who said to Roosevelt that Japan is not for democracy because the Japanese people have a different mentality, a different civilization. It's all built on hierarchy. That's why you cannot impose democracy there. It was when America occupied Japan. We know how wrong it is. In the '80s there were specialists who were explaining that Confucian countries are not for democracy, meaning Singapore and so on. Then the Latin American countries are not for democracy. And many of these countries that were mentioned as those who are not for democracy because of their mentality, today are, you know this Freedom House has these ratings; they are at the top of these ratings. So the same I think is true about Palestinians. But President Bush, in fact, in his speech, said that the regime has to be changed. Deep reforms have to change this regime, and then Palestinians will get, through negotiations of course, their state.



I was among those who was once asked about it, and I believe that is the real roadmap to peace. At the same time, now we see the documents, which are not yet official documents, but for me they look more like a roadmap not to peace, but a roadmap back to Oslo. Because in fact what they're trying to do, they're trying now to, instead of encouraging reforms from the bottom, they're trying to make some cosmetic changes at the top, to move Arafat aside a bit, to put Abu Mazin or some other guy in. Frankly, also in Israel, almost every politician has his favorite cousin who can be better than Arafat, to let them make some reforms, and then to give them a state, and that's how we will be building peace. And to declare that in two or three months, let's have elections, and so on.

I believe that's the way to spoil or to compromise such a great and powerful idea. Elections are not the symbol of democracy. You don't start the process of democracy with elections. Elections have to be held at the end of the process. Elections are coming when people are not afraid to express their opinions. They know that whatever they will say doesn't, if the government doesn't agree, mean they will go to prison. That's the station of democracy. It means there are enough institutions of society which protect the citizens, and citizens are not afraid. They know that they will not go to prison because they say something wrong. And in this station, when people express and go and vote in elections, they are really electing the leaders who depend on them, who depend on their needs, on their dreams, on their desires and so on.

And that's why the plan which I proposed about a year ago, they gave it to my prime minister and he gave it to some leaders in Washington, I was speaking about a transitional period of about three years. I tried then to encourage the American administration to lead the special international body. It was the American administration together with the Germans and Egypt, for example to establish a transitional government of professionals, not Palestinians. During this transitional period of time other must be a huge economic effort, together with Israel, but also with the Gulf states to establish a new Marshall Plan for the Palestinians, dismantle refugee camps, but at the same time, increased freedom of political activity and freedom of press, but with full prohibition of hatred, of propaganda of war or propaganda of anti-Semitism. Like there was de-Nazification of Germany, like there was demilitarization of Japan, there has to be a period of demilitarization or de-Arafatization, I would say, of Palestinians.

Then, at the end of this period, there will be elections. And with those leaders, I'm sure it will be very easy, of course, to make big concessions, but as I've said, the depth of the democracy on the other side is like the depth of your concession. Then it is easier to make concessions. Then it's not dangerous. Then you can rely, both sides can rely on the agreement with the other side. But of course everything that I am saying, I am representing my point of view and not necessarily the point of view of my government, especially the period before elections there.

Well, I think that's more than enough for the theory. (Laughter.) Thank you very much.