

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

H.H. SHEIKHA MOZAH BINT NASR AL-MISNAD

(TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.)

P R O C E E D I N G S

MARTIN INDYK: Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, please. It's a great pleasure to welcome you all here to our new dining room and the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution. This is not, as you know, our normal venue, but because so many people were interested in hearing Her Highness Sheikha Mozah, we decided that we would need to change the venue. So we're very grateful to you all for coming.

It's a great honor for us at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution to have an opportunity to host both His Highness the Emir of Qatar and Her Highness Sheikha Mozah. And, of course, always to welcome back to Washington our friend, Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim Al-Thani, the Foreign Minister of Qatar.

This is a tale of two highnesses, if you will allow me to say so. There is, first of all, the Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who is, I think, by now known to you all as the enlightened reformer who has brought such important economic and political change to Qatar and made it in some many ways a model, not just in the Arab world but in the Islamic world, for this process of reform and promotion of democracy in a very important part of the world, especially for the United States. And at the same time as he has done that, he has strengthen the relationship between Qatar and the United States now to the point where Qatar is hosting I believe the largest U.S. air base in the world, and that friendship is critically important for our ability to protect and promote our interests in the region.

They say, at least, Your Highness, in this part of the world, that behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law.

[Laughter.]

Now, I don't know Sheikha Mozah's mother, but I know that she is not surprised. And part of the reason that she is not surprised is because she and you are a

partnership in this endeavor. And although I have not had the honor of meeting Sheikha Mozah before, I know from her reputation that she is very much committed to the path that the Emir has embarked upon and is a critical partner in that process. She is the Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development, which she founded in 1995. In the fall of 2003, her foundation, the Qatar Foundation, officially inaugurated Education City, which is an extraordinary project, a prototype of the university of the future which brings campuses of international universities on-site in Qatar in a conglomeration of teaching universities and research centers. The Cornell Medical School has opened there. And I hope that she will have an opportunity today to tell us a little more about the amazing project that is underway there.

But I know that one of the things that she insisted upon was that a degree granted from one of these universities in Education City would be exactly of the same standard and equally acceptable to a degree granted, for example, from Cornell Medical School here in the United States.

That commitment to excellence and that dedication to education reform has been Sheikha Mozah's leitmotif and has done much to strengthen Qatar's position as a leading center for education and research in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf.

Her Highness is also President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, a governmental institution which promotes women's and children's rights, and also does research and analysis on social issues. In November 2002, Her Highness was appointed Vice Chairperson of the Supreme Education Council, which oversees Qatar's primary and secondary school system, and she is now undertaking or overseeing a full review of the curriculum of the primary and secondary school system in Qatar to ensure that Qatar's young people are educated for the challenges of the 21st century.

In 2003, in recognition of her work, she was appointed by UNESCO as a Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, and as this UN Special Envoy, she has

been actively promoting greater accessibility to education as well as the reforms which she has already pioneered in Qatar itself, using that experience to spread the knowledge through the rest of the world.

In June 2003, she established the International Fund for Higher Education in Iraq, which is dedicated to the reconstruction of institutions of higher learning in that country. And she has throughout been committed to developing a unique course of development that is based on the principle of utilizing the full capacity and potential of the people not only of Qatar but of the region which it inhabits.

I think you can see in the short introduction that we're very privileged today to have the opportunity to hear from Sheikha Mozah and to have a chance to ask her questions afterwards. So, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a very warm welcome to Sheikha Mozah.

[Applause.]

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Good morning. Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here today at the Brookings Institute to meet and exchange views with this outstanding group of intellectuals and experts. The Brookings Institute has always been an emboldened think tank which has made valuable contributions to various policy issues and produced quality publications on a range of topics, including the one I wish to address this morning.

In these troubled times, we place great faith in change and reform to better our societies and to nurture social justice. In fact, the very welfare of the global community depends on its member nations and citizens to meet each other with tolerance and understanding. To fulfill this objective will require the popular participation of all its citizens in a democratic sociopolitical environment, and education plays a key role in meeting these goals. Today, I wish to stress to you the urgency of this mission and how we in Qatar are implementing our action plan for development.

Honorable audience, we are witnessing an unprecedented global interchange of people, ideas, and goods that is transforming our world. It is essential that this interchange becomes equitable and the voices of all the world citizens are represented. Human rights organizations urgently remind us that the democracy deficit is an international problem. It has become clear that without democratic channels of participation, citizens may turn to radical or even violent means of having their voices heard.

Deficits in education are evident internationally in both developed and developing countries. Even highly industrialized nations such as America are struggling with the problem of illiteracy. A study by UNICEF has revealed that nearly one billion people worldwide are illiterate. In the Arab world, we have been paying a dear price for deficits in democracy and education.

Currently, our scarce knowledge outputs are far behind our capabilities. The 2003 Arab Human Development Report highlights that the number of scientists working in research and development in Arab countries is not more than 371 per million citizens, and the number of books published in the Arab world does not exceed 1.1 percent of world production, though Arabs comprise 5 percent of the world population.

Ladies and gentlemen, how can we speak of fostering international relations and promoting just global communities when world education performance is in such condition? How can our citizens meet each other with tolerance and understanding and be cooperative partners in a knowledge-based global community when their basic education requirements are not being met?

I believe it is time that we are held accountable for our performance. Quality education is a basic right of every world citizen. Further, it is the very pillar of democracy.

Honorable audience, Qatar has placed great hope in the power of education. Bearing in mind that history does not belong to us, we belong to history, His Highness the Emir undertook a policy of education and political reform when he came to power in 1995. Events originated in the 1980s served as a wake-up call for Gulf countries. The Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the ongoing failure to reach peace in the Middle East, and the current conflict in Iraq resulted in a general feeling of insecurity in the Gulf.

In Qatar, we started realizing alliances are not static and that unless we are strong and independent, we can never gain security and stability in such a troubled world. We realized that the means to our security lies in enhancing our human resources, so we looked to our people to build a strong competitive society ready to participate in the global market.

Our objective is building prosperous minds, not destructive minds. A different and more effective kind of WMD, a “wealth of mind device.” To do this, we turn a critical eye to our education systems, recognizing the power of education in generating and sustaining democratic principles. We began a series of education reforms. The principles of collaboration, respect for others, and popular participation have been the impetus to changes in all levels of education structure from K-12 to the postsecondary system.

By forging alliances with established education institutions, we are bringing the best education opportunities to Qatar. In the K-12 system, we solicited intervention assistance to redesign the structure of our school network. Basics of creative thinking, problem solving, and civics are being offered in our schools. There is now competition between schools improving their standards, choices for our students, involvement of parents, and accountability to the community.

Similar changes are ongoing at the postsecondary level. With the assistance of international expertise, the state-sponsored university is adopting major reforms to become one of the leading national universities in the region. Also, in 1995, we established the Qatar Foundation as a private nonprofit organization with the mission of establishing education, scientific, and community development programs to develop the potential of the citizens of Qatar. It now operates a number of schools, research centers, and several specialized colleges through agreements and cooperation with high-quality universities. These institutions form a campus known as Education City. Other similar partnerships are being negotiated. In addition, construction will soon be underway on a national data center, a science and technology park, and specialty teaching hospital.

Ladies and gentlemen, these education reforms have been aimed at providing a strong base for a democratic society and have been matched with parallel political reforms. Freedom of speech, academic freedom, the right of citizens to establish civil and professional associations, and the right to assemble are protected under the Constitution. Freedom of the press is guaranteed, and this was demonstrated in the abolishment of the Ministry of Information and the establishment of al-Jazeera.

The freedom to practice religious rights has also been assured, and Qatar has granted designated lots of land to non-Muslims for building places of worship.

One of the most important rights guaranteed and protected in our Constitution is the right to education, and, again, I affirm that quality education is a right of every citizen.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is no secret many citizens of the world have been deprived of this right to education, and it is no secret that suppression of freedom and the rights of women have prevented many countries from reaching their potential.

In order to reach our potential, we have to face our mistakes and deal with our deficits. And, again, education is the key.

The education of both men and women is essential to provide equal opportunities for all citizens to participate in their society. In Qatar, over 60 percent of those enrolled in postsecondary institutions are women, and the illiteracy rate for both genders has declined steadily.

But let me state frankly that our goal is not to focus only on the empowerment of women, but to empower all members of society. Issues related to women's development must be viewed in a holistic manner with the context of the family and the society at large.

Protection of basic freedoms and human rights is also essential for development. In Qatar, Islam is a deeply rooted part of our culture. While we share the ideals of democracy adopted by industrial countries, we also insist that democracy is part of the living tradition of Islam.

As we forge our path toward democracy and development, we hold the responsibility of carrying with us our traditions and our religious beliefs. In many ways, we are only beginning, and in order to succeed, I firmly believe it is necessary for us to reclaim the indigenous democratic ideals that have always been part of our Islamic heritage.

Honorable audience, I am here before you today in the hope that we may come together and take shared responsibility for our global citizens. It is the duty of every nation to foster social justice through education. In Qatar, we intend to continue our work to construct a modern state in the context of Muslim culture and traditions. Our goal is to do as ancestors did before us, who believed in the urgency of meeting other civilizations, but not melting into them.



And this is why we believe in the power of education to guide us toward this goal. We do hope that our enthusiasm is contagious.

Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to your questions and remarks.

[Applause.]

MARTIN INDYK : Thank you very much, Your Highness. That at least has, I think, the enthusiastic support of this audience.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you.

MARTIN INDYK : And it was really a pleasure to hear from you this kind of manifesto about education.

I wonder if you'll allow me to start by asking you to talk a little bit about the problems that you faced in this process of education reform, because you clearly have a track record of success, but it can't have been simple to deal with the conservatism of a traditional society, changing curriculum, educating women. So perhaps some examples you can give us of the kind of problems you faced and how you overcame them.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: As you all know, the sector of education has been stagnant for long, not just in Qatar, the whole region. So in a way, people start to lose hope, to lose confidence.

I think the biggest challenge that we faced, how can we bring back hope to people? How can we make them believe in themselves again and start to see things a reality? And I think that's why we started the Qatar Foundation, to initiate magnet projects, center of excellence for the others to see that we can achieve, we can accomplish. Once we have the will, the resources, nothing could stop us from achieving.

And I think having Qatar Foundation and starting our projects through the academic--we have the Qatar Academy and the other centers of excellence like

universities of--like Cornell and VCU and others. The whole society started to look at us and see if they could do it, why not us?

And I think since then the vibration of these changes permeates the whole society, and for us I think it was the starting point that people started to wake up, people started to understand they can do it. And since then--it took us around two years to get there, but since then things went very smoothly. And I believe that changing attitudes was the biggest challenge also, and once the people tried to--started to understand their capabilities and their potential, their attitudes will change automatically. And that's what happened.

MARTIN INDYK : Thank you.

Let's take some questions from the floor. Wait for the microphone, and please identify yourself, introduce yourself to Sheikha Mozah.

TAMARA WITTES : Hello. I'm Tamara Wittes with the Saban Center. Thank you so much for your remarks today.

The work that you've done in Education City has created a magnet for the entire region in the field of higher education, and I wonder if you can talk a little bit about the participation of students from outside Qatar in the schools that have opened and the opportunities that have been made available. And to what extent are they able to bring their experiences back to their home countries?

Thank you.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you. Well, as you know, Qatar Foundation and Education City is open for all kind of students and to different cultures, and that was a condition, that we are not catering only to Qatari students, we are catering for the region and even we can open for the whole world. And this is taking place now in Qatar. We are seeing students from the Gulf, students from the Middle East, we have from Lebanon, from Egypt, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh, from Iran, even from America,

from Europe in general. So we are seeing that, and this is something for--we didn't expect to see it so soon and to realize it in such a speedy way. But we are so happy that people start to understand that coming to Qatar is not just for a vacation; it is for enrichment in terms of culture, and people going--especially people who are living abroad, Arabs living in Europe in America, they like their children to go back home and have a quality education and quality research, at the same time introduced to their own heritage and their own culture. And I can see that this is getting very successful, and people think the interaction and the integration among students really is very rewarding for all of us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : I don't mean to be offensive, but I'm going to ask a very blunt question.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: The Foreign Minister is listening.

[Laughter.]

AUDIENCE MEMBER : There's a lot of criticism in the West, especially in the United States, especially after 9/11, on how Islam is being taught. I wonder whether you care to discuss this question and assure the audience how Islam is being taught most Arab schools.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Well, thank you very much. It's not just Islam. It is not just Islam as a topic... It is the whole methodology of our curriculum and our education. We teach children to memorize things. We teach children to know things by heart. We don't teach them to think and to analyze the facts. We don't create debate in classrooms. We don't create this sort of stimulation to the brain and the heart of people. And this is against Islam. You know, Islam encourages us to wonder and to look and to see and to study, not just take things for granted. And in the end, the education system concluded very passive and responsible citizens.

Do we want to see this in this new era of interaction, of globalization, of competitiveness? We don't want this. That's why in Qatar we start to change this fast, to create critical thinking, to encourage critical thinking, to encourage fact analysis in the classrooms. We want to abandon the blind obedience. This is something that doesn't match our time now, and we shouldn't blame Islam for that, or we shouldn't really say that this is Islamic studies. This is our education system in general.

[Applause.]

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Thank you very much. In the United States, we say that people who succeed, who have a drive, who are determined, who have a cause, as you do, for development and education of all people, what was it in your childhood experience, what was it that drove you to become such a spokesperson for development and education in an area where there are so few voices and so little evidence of a real commitment to develop the societies and to reach the full potential of Arabs everywhere?

SHEIKHA MOZAH: My childhood has--

[Laughter.]

SHEIKHA MOZAH: It's a long story. It's okay?

[Laughter.]

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Well, it happened to be that I am a member of a family that very highly appreciated education. My father is really a person who taught himself when he was in his 40s--yes, his 40s, and due to some of the political reasons that we had, the circumstances of the '60s in Qatar, we had to travel. And my husband--my father--

EMIR AL-THANI : [inaudible]

[Laughter.]

SHEIKHA MOZAH: He came later on. We had to leave the country, and my father in his search for a place for us to live, he set the priority where to look and

where to search, and the first priority was a place with good education. And at that time, the '60s, Egypt was the place--or Cairo was the best place for education. So we lived there until the '70s. We came back, and I was blessed again to marry a person who really valued education and also, again, appreciated education.

So it came through my childhood, then also through my marriage. So this is the obsession and the sickness that I am carrying.

[Laughter.]

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Good obsession. I'm all in favor of such obsessions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Thank you very much, Your Highness. Thank you very much for gracing us with your presence, and thank you also for your clear-sighted vision.

When I hear you speak and obviously when we look at everything that Qatar is doing, obviously there's a great deal of hope in what you say. And obviously you also know that here in the United States there's a great debate as to what the United States should be doing in the Middle East, where we should be putting our efforts. Should we be pushing? Should we be prodding? Should we be holding back?

When I listen to you speak, the only thing that comes to my mind is what can we do to help, and in particular, given the problems that the United States has created for ourselves and our friends in the region, and the problems inherent in the societies where the United States is concerned, how can the United States help exactly this kind of initiative that you're proposing and help the cause rather than hurting it?

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you. I think you can help a lot, but the problem in the United States is that they always like to be--in any initiative they like to be dominant, like to be obvious. And you have to study also the psychology of the Arab world. They don't like this. They have to lead. For any changes that would take place

there, the leaders should be Arab leaders, not Americans. They can use them as experts, as references, but not as leaders because that will not be--that will not take us anywhere knowing the very complicated situation there.

[Applause.]

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Your Highness, when we look at the Arab region and when we look at advanced countries--take, for example, America, Germany, England, and Japan--those societies that advance, advance because of one simple thing. They invested in human capital.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Correct.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : And when you invest in human capital, you're basically nourishing the life of the mind. And once you nourish the life of--

SHEIKHA MOZAH: WMD.

[Laughter.]

AUDIENCE MEMBER : People begin to question, people begin to be creative. And as you look at the Arab world today and as you look ahead, do you think there are people who will be threatened by this new approach to education? And where do you see the Arab world as far as education 20 years from now?

SHEIKHA MOZAH: I don't know if they are--I think we are talking about doing--we believe in what we are doing, and what we are doing, we are doing it for our people and for those who want to benefit from what we are doing. The feeling of other people is not our concern now because we wasted lots of time thinking of others and thinking of how will people receive what we are doing. And this is what brought us to this situation.

I think these times are past, and now it is time to think of ourselves and for the progress of our--and prosperity of our people and our society. And we are open for anybody wants to benefit or wants to look to what we are doing and try to follow. This is

something that is up to them. But we shouldn't--we will not succumb to that. We are going to continue.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Thank you. Your Highness, you raised many of the points in your speech that are raised in the UNDP report on the empowerment of women and so on.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Correct.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Now, these problems can be overcome in Qatar over time simply because of the resources. But when you go to a large Arab countries, what might you propose. What are you doing in terms of working with women's groups in the West Bank and Gaza and the education situation in refugee camps. Tell us about your efforts in that regard. How do you work with others, especially at times of conflict?

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you. You know, as my position as Special Envoy for UNESCO, I'm trying to help as much as I can. We established funds to help Iraq in higher education, and so far this fund is very successful. And also we formulated a committee where students and faculty from Iraq would go and have their training in some highly reputed universities all over the world. Actually, we have Iraqi students in Qatar studying in our Education City.

So this is an example of our potential and our capabilities, and we are open. We are trying to forge alliances with women's groups and education groups to try to give them--or to offer them some of our experience in that regard. So we are trying to do our best, but if there is any suggestion that you would like to suggest, we are open.

MARTIN INDYK : Thank you, Your Highness. You've been very generous. I just have one last question. I noticed you said that, I think, in your higher education, 60 percent of--

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Seventy.

AUDIENCE MEMBER : Seventy percent of the students are women.

And I know that that's also the case in other universities in the Gulf, like in Abu Dhabi, I believe. What happens to these women once they graduate? And are you thinking about that in terms of employment? Is that going to be the next frontier that you're going to have to break down? Will there be meaningful jobs for these highly trained women?

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you. The labor force is open for men and women, and because of this situation, the new situation that we have now, we have more women, highly qualified, highly educated, than men. You can see positions like the Minister of Education, she's a woman. We have the Dean of Islamic Studies, she's a woman. And this is the first time in the Middle East and Islamic world, actually. We have women all over the ministries and the sectors, governmental sectors. So the labor force is open.

The only obstacle that you might face--and it's fading out but slowly, not as fast as we want--the social culture. So, yes, we can give the women their rights, their constitutional rights, but we need to educate them to use these rights, and we need to educate the society also to accept them.

We're doing that but--we are very ambitious people. We want to accelerate this process by setting examples, showing these successful women in the media and the public eye. So this is something that we are trying to foster.

But, yes, there is a problem, but the problem is not actually with our women. The problem is with our men because, yes, I mean, everybody here talks about women empowerment. But what we need to talk about is men empowerment because men are going to face problems in the next ten years or so.

We are trying now to set programs to rectify this problem, true, because we don't want--I mean, we want to be evenhanded when it comes to opportunities and



jobs. And so far I can see our women are more--I mean, they are more enthusiastic toward work and education, and we don't see that actually in our men.

So, I mean, that is a problem, and especially now with the reforms taking place. Jobs are based upon merits, not gender. So if we end up by having more qualified women than men, it is a problem for our men.

[Applause.]

MARTIN INDYK : As probably any woman in this audience could tell you, it's a problem for our men, too.

[Laughter.]

MARTIN INDYK : And it's been a problem for them. So in the process, I suspect that we will end having more in common. But let me just say on behalf of all of us how very much we appreciate what you said today, how grateful we are to have had the opportunity to hear you live with your ideas, and how I think I can speak for all of us in saying more power to you. We hope you will not only be successful in your own right, but your example will inspire many other women in Islamic societies around the world so that you will succeed with your wonderful obsession.

SHEIKHA MOZAH: Thank you.

MARTIN INDYK : Good luck. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MARTIN INDYK : His Highness and Her Highness are going to join us for lunch, so, please, enjoy yourselves.

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