

The Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue
kindly invites to the lecture of

Mahmood Sariolghalam

Professor of International Relations at Shahid Beheshti (National) University, Tehran

Democracy in the Middle East: Limitations and Prospects

Welcome:

Rudolf Scholten

Moderation:

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

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The lecture will be held in English

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Born in Tehran, Iran in 1959. He received his B.A. degree in Political Science/Management from California State University, Northridge in 1980 and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in International Relations from the University of Southern California in 1982 and 1987, respectively. In 1997 he was a visiting scholar of International Relations in the Ohio State University. Mahmood Sariolghalam is an associate professor of International Relations at Shahid Beheshti University since 1987. He is the Editor of "Discourse" (in English) and "Middle East Quarterly" (in Farsi). He does teaching and research on the "Third World Political Economy", "International Relations Theory/Methodology" and "International Politics of the Middle East". He is also author of several books in the above areas such as "The International Dimensions of the Western Saharan Conflict", "Development, The Third World and the International System", "The Evolution of Methods and Research in International Relations", and "Rationality and Development" and has published nine books and numerous articles in international journals.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

journalist and Managing Foreign Editor of *Profil*

Rudolf Scholten

Meine Damen und Herren, ich bin froh, dass es uns gelungen ist, diese heutige Veranstaltung zu machen. Wir haben, wie Sie wissen, schon eine zum Thema Iran geplant, die, um jetzt nicht auf nähere Details einzugehen, nicht gelungen ist. Das hat dann einige schwierige Phänomene nach sich gezogen. Aber für heute ist es gelungen. Sorry, I should talk in English. We already tried to do one event on Iran and it did turn out not to happen due to difficult circumstances. We are very happy to have the possibility tonight. I would like to welcome our guest of tonight, Mr. Mahmood Sariolghalam. He is not only an expert on Iran, obviously, he is an expert on the region, an expert on international politics. We met at an international conference where I was very much impressed about what he had to say. I am glad that somebody will lead us through this evening who is also an expert on the region, Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof. I just mentioned before that I met him in Tashkent once, at the hotel. I came there from a trip to Kasachstan and was travelling together with German and Italian business people. When we arrived in the hotel in Tashkent I said this is a horrible place, the only advantage here is you don't meet anybody you know. But then the two of us met. This was clearly an improvement of the situation. I leave the time and the place to you. Let me thank you again for being here. I hope that you will regret your decision to come and you will enjoy the evening with us.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

Mr. Sariolghalam will talk about the democracy in the Middle East. I have the impression that this question is a crucial question of the world politics today. It seems that it is not a very bright future for democracy in the region. The experiment of exporting democracy by tanks and bombs by the Americans obviously failed dramatically. Democratic elections in Palestine brought a result the world did not want. Hamas won. It was not recognized by the world. The democratic upheaval in Lebanon last year. At the moment it looks not very nice. After the war there seems to be a destabilization of the political process. Elsewhere, in Egypt you have the situation that the autocratic regime is restricting the very few liberties which were given to the people. And in Iran after the election of Mr. Ahmedinejad the forces of reform and opening the society are becoming weaker and weaker. A lot of questions arise on the future of democracy in that region. Why seems this region so immune against democratization? One has the impression that in that region democratization does not move forward whereas in most of the other parts of the world in the last decades it was a huge progress in that respect. Mr. Sariolghalam is best positioned to answer all these very crucial questions. He was born in Tehran, studied in the United States and teaching there on foreign affairs. At the end of the 1980's Mr. Sariolghalam went home to Tehran to teach at the Behesti University. He is the author of several books on the Middle East and also editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*. Please take the floor.

Mahmood Sariolghalam

Thank you very much. It is certainly a great pleasure to be here. I am very thankful to the Kreisky Forum and Dr. Scholten for inviting me to address this audience. As it has been announced, I will be speaking on the question of democracy in the Middle East, its limitations and prospects. I am going to be focusing more on why the Middle East has fundamental problems moving into a democratic tradition. In doing so I have a number of premises that I would like to outline in the beginning that will set the momentum for my later analysis of democratization processes in the Middle East.

First of all I do believe like perhaps most academics in the field that every nation state does have the potential to evolve as a liberal democracy. This is not a question of culture, this is not a question of geography, it is not a question of religion. Every society does have the potential to become democratic. I would like to underline three words in that initial premise. A nation state, a liberal democracy, and a process of becoming a liberal democracy.

We need to recognize that it is only with a nation state that democracy can be institutionalized and that democracy is not a project but it is a process. I have had many opportunities to speak with Japanese scholars. They tell me that even Japan today after a century of economic liberalism is still in the process of maturing political liberalism in that country, that Japan is far away from the European traditions in terms of becoming a truly liberal democracy whereas in economics, of course, they have been a success story. So a nation state and a process, they are very crucial to understand in the beginning. Many of us are used to using the word democracy without paying adequate attention to the whole word of liberal democracy. Without liberal we cannot think of being democratic. Those two words are very significant to look at. If we just focus on democracy as a numerical experience then it is going to be used in the end by rulers and elites in many countries. One American scholar has done a study on liberal democracy and numerical democracy. He believes that there are 85 liberal democracies around the world, but there are 118 numerical democracies where there are elections only. That is very crucial to underline that we are basically talking about liberal democracy and not democracy per se. I will elaborate on that term as we go along. But the fundamental distinction there is that liberal democracy is based on permanent institutions. In a liberal democracy institutions matter, not personalities. That is a concept that has been so matured especially in the European experience.

The second premise is that it is far easier to accept and institutionalize liberal economics than liberal politics. If we look at Malaysia today clearly Malaysia is a country with an outlook that is liberal in its economic success in only two decades. 55% of wealth in Malaysia now is owned by people outside of Malaysia. This is a country of 21 million people that has been able to produce an export range of 170 billion dollars, 45% of which is high technology. That is an amazing success story for a small country in the last two decades. Whereas Malaysia clearly is not a liberal democracy yet it is definitely a country that has been very successful in trying to globalize and link its national economy with the rest of the world.

My third premise is that we need to realize that democracy is a Western and particularly a European concept, that democracy evolved and matured in a particular socio-economic construct of Europe over a span of four centuries. What has happened in Europe needs to be understood properly if one is going to apply in a universal way the concept of democracy to other places around the world. Because the European experience is so unique, exceptional, and rich that if we want to understand the dynamics of a liberal democracy we also need to focus on how Europe became democratic over the last three, four centuries.

Having said those three premises I have four areas of both potential and limitation of liberal democracy in the Middle East. I am presenting these four ideas and four contentions as areas that I think are so crucial for a liberal democracy to emerge and at the same time I am speaking in terms that the Middle East is lacking in those four areas. Much of what I am going to substantiate upon can be applied to North Africa and the proper Middle East. As the United Nations documents will tell us it is the MENA region, Middle East, North Africa region from Morocco perhaps all the way to Pakistan. There are variations, of course, between these countries. But having studied the patterns of many of these Arab and non-Arab countries I think there are enough similarities for us to draw generalizations on the limitations and prospects of democracy in the MENA region.

The crucial point that we need to analyze as the number one contention is that, when we are speaking of a liberal democracy we are talking of a particular social organization. At the root of that social organization is privatization. Privatization is so central to liberal democracy. We also need to underline that before becoming an economic concept, privatization is a social concept. Meaning that the society does have a space independent of the state. That is probably the most significant, crucial underlying feature of liberal democracy. If we speak in mathematical terms. When the society is larger than the state then there is a prospect that privatization can evolve and liberalism can be institutionalized. If we look at the Western experience today and compare that with the Middle Eastern experience we can distinguish the differences in such a manner that in many of the European countries among the various groups, factions, parties, and organizations within each European country one probably can say that there are no philosophical differences, that there are no philosophical contradictions between various parties within the European societies. There are differences over policies, questions of distribution, questions of focus, and how to orient and customize policies and social issues. The left, and the right, and the center, and the intellectual, they all fall within a large philosophical consensus about the meaning and the significance of liberalism. And then they have their own fundamental differences within that broad conceptual framework. Here we can distinguish between a stratification and division. The European societies are stratified among various schools of thought whereas Middle Eastern societies are divided. In almost every single Middle Eastern country, from Morocco to Pakistan, there are groups within the society that have philosophical differences with one another. The world views are so distinct among various groups, from far left to far right, that encompass many schools of thought and philosophical orientations. A stratification is a healthy orientation. But division obviously is very unhealthy. So liberal democracy in the West benefits from a broad

consensus both on philosophy and methodology, on philosophy of life and methodology of settling conflicts, whereas in Middle Eastern societies we don't see the harmony and we don't see the broad consensus. For example if one studies Egypt as a Middle Eastern Muslim country, there are parts of the Egyptian society that would say Islam is the solution and on the other side there are those who believe in Islam as a religion, as a moral guide, but in a political sense. And then you move on to the nationalist and the secular sectors of society that have fundamental divisions among themselves. There is no harmony among various schools of thought and philosophical orientations within the Egyptian society. Now, Egypt being a very complex country. Probably we can say Iran, Egypt, and Turkey are the three ancient Middle Eastern Muslim societies that have similar paradoxes, that have similar problems and limitations when it comes to questions of liberal democracy.

Let me go through a list of paradoxes on this particular issue of privatization, liberal democracy, and the Middle Eastern context. In every single Middle Eastern society we have liberalism versus authoritarianism. There are liberal forces in the society that are basically on the margins. And then there are authoritarian forces within every single society. How do you bring the two into a national, harmonious framework so that you can have a nation state and say that there is a consensus on moving the country towards a liberal democracy. A second paradox is state control versus privatization. The tradition in the Middle East has always been a very strong state. Wherever you have a strong state the private sector, the private space of individuals suffer. So you have weak societies and strong states. That means that state control is so overwhelming that there is very little space left for the individual. The third paradox is democracy versus state centralism. Again here, how could political conflicts be settled in a society through democratic methodology of electoral process or it should be decided among very few individuals at the center of the state. Fourth, how do you settle the paradox between Islamic solidarity on the one hand and nationalism on the other? You would see this in Turkey nowadays. You would see this in Egypt. Should the country be oriented and directed by Islamic values or should it be based on national values? Where are the divisions between nationalism and Islam? Another paradox is between political Islam and moral Islam. That is a very central and crucial issue in much of the Muslim world. As someone who has done some studies and work on these issues I think Islam is a political religion, Islam is a politicized religion. And that is where the distinction is made between perhaps Islam and Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and other religions. Islam does have a political framework for running the affairs of a society. Political Islam is imbedded within the Islamic ideology. But, of course, there are those forces within the Muslim world that believe in secular Islam, even within religious clerics, among Shia and Sunni clerics there are secular orientation within the religion. And lastly a paradox is conformist versus individualist political culture. Because the state is so strong in the Middle East it coerces the individual to conform to the values of the state. There is very little space for individual choice. One of the offsprings of liberalism is individualism which we don't find in the Middle East. In the Middle East conformist culture is far more important than individualist culture.

What happens in the Middle Eastern situation is that this rainbow politics, rainbow of ideologies among various groups in the society creates tensions and contradictions. For example, why in Egypt over time there has been limitations on allowing the Islamists to participate in the electoral process? Because there is no consensus between the Islamists in Egypt and the nationalists and the secular people on forming and shaping a national consensus on how to run Egypt. Those who study local politics would say, in the Middle East we have problems of identity. There are three sources of identity in the Middle East. There is the local source of identity, Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Pakistani, Iranian, Turkish as a nationalist source of identity. And then there is the Islamic source of identity. And then thirdly there is the global, the Western source of identity which is everywhere. If one studies the educational curriculum in the Muslim world it is either

French or Anglo-Saxon. There is no such a coherent system such as Middle Eastern educational system. It is basically Western. So West is everywhere in terms of the social formations and the local culture whereas Islam is also very much present and also the nationalist tendency.

Milton Friedman has a profound statement in his classic called *Capitalism and Freedom* which I think is important to understand the Middle East. Friedman says, for an individual to be free and enjoy a private capacity in a society, both economic and non-economic power needs to be separated from another. In other words, economic power needs to be separated and dissociated from political power. If the two are centralized, then the individual cannot have a private space. Of course, when he wrote and substantiated on that idea that was in the 1960's when there was a socialist and capitalist standoff in Western intellectual life.

Whenever we have a concentration of economic power and political power the individual suffers. And I think that is the case in much of the Middle East where economic power for OPEC countries is in the hands of the state, oil income goes right into the hand of the central government. And at the same time the state is very powerful. So there is very little room for the individual to remain outside of the state apparatus, both politically, economically, and therefore socially. If we look at the American economy some 90% and even more of those who work in the American economy work for the private sector. If one has problems with their company they move on to another company. You don't see the concentration of economic power in the hands of the central government. And that is basically the case with almost all Western societies. So societies become weak when economic power is in the hands of the state which is the case from Morocco all the way to Pakistan. It is even much worse for those countries that are members of OPEC and what economists would call the rentier state, the state that is not dependent on the taxes of the citizens. Taxation and representation are two concepts that belong to the sides of the same coin. So the societies in the Middle East are not required to pay taxes that are going to compose the income of the state. The state is so independent of the society in terms of its income so that it can basically rule in any way it can. For a liberal democracy to evolve the society has to overwhelm the state which is the case in much of the Western world. That is why that Malaysia among all Muslim countries has a better prospect of becoming a democratic state in the coming decades because gradually in Malaysia individuals are becoming wealthier independent of the state. The middle class is growing in Malaysia and people do not have to rely on the state for their subsistence. This is a unique country that has matured over the last two decades. Because of that economic privatization in Malaysia there are going to be pressures from the society, from the private groups for the state to act rationally in politics and foreign policy. When a state controls the income of its own then it can make any foreign policy decision that it wants to. Whereas the British government, the French government, and the American government cannot make any foreign policy decision that it wants to. It has to fall within the larger parameters of social interests. We need to look at the whole area here of social, private space. And that is initially produced by economic independence of society from the state which has taken such a long time over three centuries in the European experience.

If I may draw a parallel here between the Middle East and Europe and try to substantiate my ideas here, I can point out that to be a European, to be an Austrian, to be a liberal, and to be a Christian, all those four identities, European, Austrian, liberal, and Christian, do not contradict one another. They all belong to the same overall framework. One can interact within those four sources of identity freely and in harmony whereas in Egypt to be an Egyptian, to be a liberal, to be an Islamist does not fall within a harmonious category. I personally think that because Islam is a deductive construct and also a normative construct it cannot be liberal. In a liberal setting, everything is open for discussion, everything is decided on a majority. In Islam which is a deductive construct and there are norms you have to accept certain norms to be a Muslim, just like

any other religion. That is why I think the idea of Islamic liberalism or liberal Muslim is a concept that may not fit all together unless we think of Islam as moral Islam. If someone refers to Islam as a moral reference then it is possible to be a Muslim in a cultural setting and to be liberal at the same time. But if one believes in political Islam, I think political Islam and liberalism cannot be coalesced, they cannot be formulated within one construct. That is why in much of the experiments of the Middle East, for example in Turkey, in Egypt, and in Iran, it is very difficult to say that Islamic liberalism has evolved. That is a contradiction in terms. Because Islam involves in politics and there are certain features, characteristics and principles that you have to accept when you believe in political Islam.

Whenever we don't have the private sector we are not going to have social space. Because we are not going to have social space, then liberalism does not have a chance to evolve in a given society. If I were to look at the central idea about the limitations of democracy in the Middle East, I would say it is the economic structure that poses the main obstacle. As Farid Zakaria, an American scholar, has said, we need to understand that in Europe liberalism came before democracy, economic liberalism in Europe came before democracy. Democracy is basically a 20th century concept whereas liberalism began in the 18th century. In 19th century United Kingdom there were free universities, there was free press, free associations, and free individuals. Not until the late 1880's everyone could vote in the United States. Some of the European countries began in the first part of the 20th century. So democracy, meaning that every citizen has one vote, is a 20th century concept whereas liberal economics goes back to Adam Smith and even before him to the commercialization of agriculture and industries in the European context. What happened in Europe was that the impetus of the private sector was useful for everyone. The individual enjoyed freedom of choice, could count on his or her abilities for mobility. The firm and the company could rely on civilized and able citizens for the interests of productivity and efficiency. And the state regulated procedures and norms for upholding efficiency, mobility, diversity, and individuality. So economic privatization beginning in the 18th century and maturing in the 20th century provided quite a bit of a space for everyone, for the individual, for the firm, for the private sector, and also the state.

What is crucial here to underline is that in the social sciences in the topic of democracy we need to emphasize much more the economic aspect as a fundamental prerequisites of liberal democracy. If you study fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, it is fascinating to conclude and learn that all fundamentalists, all Islamic fundamentalists are either engineers or medical doctors. You will not find a single economist in the Muslim world who is a fundamentalist. You will not find a single sociologist who is an Islamic fundamentalist. And the reason is because political Islam is far more attractive to engineers and medical doctors than to the social sciences in general. Because no matter where you study social sciences, in Japan, or in Uganda, or in the United States, or in Brazil, or in Germany, social sciences around the world is basically a liberal orientation of thinking. Even within the Muslim world, within the university system of the Muslim world liberal thinking dominates the social sciences. Whereas if you move on to the engineering schools, you will find a lot of demonstrations, you will find protest. And you don't find that in a school of sociology or a school of political science. We need to realize that political Islam has much more attraction to those who have studied the hard sciences and are not familiar with liberal social sciences and had been able to draw on those lessons.

The Islam that you see in Malaysia is basically a moral Islam, an ethical Islam. If you study the history of Islam in Malaysia those who took Islam from the Arabian peninsula to Malaysia and Indonesia were merchants who moved from Yemen and the current Saudi Arabia all the way to East Asia to spread Islam. The idea of Islam in Asia was basically a moral Islam, an ethical Islam and less of a political Islam. And that is why despite the economic advancement of the country in

Malaysia religion has not suffered. I have to say that as I travelled within the Muslim world I find Malaysians much more tuned to Islamic code of ethical references than other places. There is an interesting correlation here between wealth accumulation in Malaysia and religiosity, meaning ethical religiosity, in Malaysia whereas you may not find the same degree of religiosity in some of the countries in proper Middle East or North Africa. This was the theoretical and conceptual setting of my presentation. I will move very quickly into the three other areas because they follow the concept of economic privatization.

The second concept is state. In the Middle East, the state is not the arbiter. In a liberal democracy, state is an arbiter. The state has an agenda as it is defined by the society in the Western world whereas in the Middle East the state has an agenda independent of the society. If you look at some of these Middle Eastern countries sometimes you see that the countries are spending billions and billions of Dollars on procuring arms. Where was the process of decision making within the society at large? Is that for the security of the society or the security of the state? And that is why in countries where the state is dominant you basically have the security of the rulers instead of having the security of the nation. That is very much prevalent in the region. When the state is strong conformity pervades and the state dominates all aspects of life within a society. The state decides what people should know. The state decides what kind of information the society should have. The state decides on what kind of newspapers the society needs to read. Whenever in a country the economic survival of the society is dependent on the state people have to conform. As I tried to outline in the economic privatization concept I think the state dominates because it dominates the economy. When it dominates the economy it dominates politics, it dominates the social sphere, it dominates the sphere of entertainment, of education, of social rules and regulations and norms. That becomes a problematic for liberal democracy to emerge.

My third area which basically follows the state, the second item, is that whenever you have a strong state you have a weak individual. The individual does not feel safe to flourish. The individual always has to conform to the norms of the state. Perhaps all of us know from the Soviet experience how that played itself out over a span of seventy years in the Soviet Union. When you have a weak individual, what happens? There is no inclination to organize. If you study Middle Eastern countries, you will see that social organization is extremely weak because when the state dominates, individuals cannot trust each other so that they can organize and challenge authority in a country. Liberal democracy leads to individualism. And individualism is lacking in much of the Middle Eastern cultures.

My fourth point is mode of social interaction, how people view association and how they view teamwork and how that affects social organization and the maturation of liberal democracy. One of the interesting contrasts that I always see in the Middle East when I travel to Arab and non Arab countries is the prevailing problem of a lack of stable belief systems. Belief systems fluctuate all the time. To a large degree that is not only because of lack of individualism, but also partly fear, fear of the state. When the state is so strong, individuals cannot organize and individuals have to be extremely ambiguous. That is another feature of the Middle Eastern societies where ambiguity is a virtue. If you want to survive, you have to be ambiguous. And that is why I think to some degree, and I am not really being sarcastic here, one of the reasons why poetry has developed in the Middle East is because of lack of transparency. Over centuries, people have wanted to protest, express their dissent against the state. And you find poetry and literature as avenues where you can use ambiguous language to express yourself. Trust in the Middle East is a scarce commodity, especially when it comes to politics. And again we are talking about a very strong state. It is interesting that in a liberal democracy a person's authority derives from his or her role, education, functions, talent, ideosyncracies whereas in the Middle East authority is a derivative of power, not so much what a person knows, or is able of doing, or is able of functioning. But power relations,

power contacts, tribes, relatives, political contacts dominate the structure of authority within the society. The fluidity of beliefs by itself inhibits social organization in the Middle East. Loyalties do not form. In much of the Middle East, from Morocco to Pakistan, the most important social loyalty is to the family. Outside of the family it is very fluid, ambiguous, and unreliable, and people can change from day to day. The prevalence of subloyalties delays the rise of the nation state. It does not allow the formation between the state and the nation into a very comprehensive construct.

Let me conclude here. First liberal democracy is a process. It cannot be imposed from the outside. That is very clear. Domestic restructuring of the economy is the crucial, initial step for any country to turn into democracy. Liberal institutions, liberal thinking, and liberal societies are the determinants of liberal democracy. Where there is privatization of economic production there is going to be privatization of the individual and individual space. If we were to look at the Muslim world and categorize countries I would say Malaysia is perhaps the closest country with a prospect of democracy within the next couple of decades. Again, I am basing my argument on the private production of wealth in Malaysia which is going to require the rationalization of politics and competitive politics in that country. If we move to the Middle Eastern Persian Gulf region paradoxically and ironically the United Arab Emirates is a very interesting example. In the Persian Gulf region United Arab Emirates has been able to accumulate quite a bit of private wealth. It has turned into the regional banker. It has turned into the regional distributor of goods and commodities and services. It has become a country where it can create a melange of tradition and modernity. And the state facilitates the private accumulation of wealth in that country. So although politics in that part of the Persian Gulf is very traditional and to some degree tribal we can be hopeful of organized politics in the coming decades because of huge amounts of wealth that is being accumulated in that part of the Muslim world. And then some prospects of promoting democracy can be found in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Those three countries are moving gradually into privatization of wealth. Perhaps it will take many decades for them to be able to rationalize their political process.

One distinction is very significant here. The Middle East is liberalizing as a whole but it is not democratizing. In our literature, we do make a distinction between liberalization and democratization. Through the forces of globalization, through the forces of the internet, through empowerment of women in much of the MENA region, North Africa and the Middle East, societies are becoming open. People are learning to accept differences. Diversity is becoming commonplace. Interaction with the rest of the world is becoming very important for the average citizen. The mindset is opening up. But social organization is far away from democratization because democratization relies on institutions whereas liberalization relies on the change of the individual which may be an important prerequisite for a democratization in the future.

That sums up the conceptual part of my presentation. There may be issues and examples that I may draw upon in my responses to your questions. But as a whole we should be realistic about the concept of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is not a prescription for every society. We need to understand the local nuances of every society so that we can apply very complex processes of liberal democracy. Thank you.

Georg Hoffman-Ostenhof

In a certain way most of your discourse brought me to some pessimism. You said, the state is very strong, society is very weak, individualism is not developed. Except Malaysia there is no way of changing in the next years. Have we to wait for threehundred years like Europe in order to develop the institutions, in order to have then the possibility of marching towards democracy? There is a tradition of merchant societies in the Middle East. Not everything is state owned. In Lebanon, in

Palestine, in Iran you have the tradition of owners of production and certainly of merchant classes. There you have a kind of middle class which exists. If political Islam is not compatible with liberalism, a hundred years ago you would have said the same with regard to Christianity. Christianity is also not really open to different opinions. It is also a rather strict religion. And what about the AKP in Turkey which is developing somehow from an Islamist party with Islamist background towards a kind of Islamic Christian democratic party. What would you say to that?

Mahmood Sariolghalam

You asked, do we have to wait for three hundred years for democracy to emerge in the Middle East? First of all, we need to realize within every single Middle Eastern society there is no consensus for democracy to emerge. There are sectors of the society who believe in democracy. But the societies are very divided. We have to believe in variations from one country to another. For example, in Tunisia probably the majority within the society do believe in democracy. But if you move to Saudi Arabia, there is no consensus whether democracy is the solution for social organization or for statecraft. We need to understand the local politics and the local culture. It varies from country to country.

Your last question can be linked to this one. In Turkey, there is this box that Turkish nationalism is important, privatization is important, trying to move towards the European Union is important for all parties. From the leftiest late Ecevit to Ciller on the right to the Islamists of Erbakan type and Erdogan type there is this box of Turkish nationalism that everybody has to operate within. I know that it is not fully institutionalized and it is fragile. But the thing is even with the Turkish Islamists, they do not believe in political Islam. They believe in Islam as a religion that can guide their social life, that can guide the family life. But even the Islamists in Turkey, like the Prime Minister himself, he is in the private sector of Turkey. They all believe in capitalism as the mode of productive capacity. I don't see Turkey as an example of political Islam. Yes, Islam is important in Turkey from a cultural, from a social, from a moral perspective and less so from a political perspective. Maybe those who believe in ethical Islam are politically mobilized. But that is not toward a political motive of the state. That is more so to be able to maintain the Islamic culture within the Turkish society.

I agree with you that there are merchant classes in the Middle East from one country to another. There is a private sector. But again, the merchant classes and the private groups in the Middle Eastern countries are not organized enough to set a security and a political agenda for the state. Still the state overwhelms this private sector. With the exception of Malaysia and Turkey, I cannot think of another country in the Muslim world and in the Middle Eastern region where the private sector has the largest employment versus the state. In other words, the private sector employs most of the society. The state in every single Middle Eastern country provides the largest number of employees in the society. Those are the dilemmas. Again, I go back to my premise. As long as we have weak private economies there is not going to be an impetus for the state to comply with the needs of the society.

Question

You were talking about weaknesses and immaturities in Middle Eastern societies and you were talking about liberalization. Of course, democracy as we all know cannot be imposed. But I wonder what the motives of the United States, of the American administration, of the President were talking about introduction, not talking about imposition, of democracy in the Middle East? Anyone would agree to that. But isn't it inconceivable that these very educated men and women in the American administration just don't know that? How can you really talk about introduction of democracy in the Middle East? I am a bit flabbergasted by that. Could you follow up the role of religion? Talking about weaknesses, but relying on religion, on the Koran, I think it is probably

not true that only the Islamists and the extremists are always citing the Koran to justify their actions. But isn't the Koran and religion itself very much embedded into the societies themselves. You did not touch very much on the role of religion. Could you follow that up?

Question

You did not mention Syria in any of your examples. Syria had a non-political Islam and yet is far from being democratic.

Question

Does the switch of power towards women influence the countries towards democracy? The relation of the individual ego versus the communal ego or versus the society, the individual is strong in North America and in Europe. And the moment we go to the East these relations turn. It means that the communal ego, the society gets stronger and the individual ego gets weaker which is true also in parts of Asia. How do we explain this when you look at India? India is a democracy. But the individual ego in India is not strong.

Mahmood Sariolghalam

From what I know of the American intellectual circles I would guess that the overwhelming parts of the educational system, academic community in the United States would subscribe to the view that democracy cannot be exported to any other country, that democracy is a homegrown movement, that means the local institutions. Of course, in politics any idea can become a project for a political design. This is more politics than a full blown intellectual framework that one can refer to.. If you look at previous administrations, even within the Republican Party this idea is exceptional. For example, study even the Reagan administration or Richard Nixon in the 1970's and the 1980s. They also believed for the most part in promoting the private sector as a means for promoting democracy. As much as I know it does not have much support within the American academic community.

Religion is very important in the daily life of the average citizen in the Middle East. Egypt is a secular country. It has a nationalist secular government. Yet religion is very significant in Egypt. Turkey, for example, is another country where the masses are very religious, especially in the countryside. So religion is very important. And that is why, I think, we need to vary from one country to another about prospects of democracy. But, generally speaking, in much of the Mena region religion is part of the culture rather than politics. One reason why political Islam became fashionable in Iraq, among the Palestinians in Saudi Arabia is because of failures in other areas that radicalized the Muslim sectors of the society. We need to look at the failure of nationalism, the failure of socialism in the Arab world that led to the rise of Islamist groups in those countries. Just because a country does not believe in political Islam does not mean that it is going to automatically turn to liberal democracy. Syria has an authoritarian past. It has a very strong state. Yet, political Islam is not part of the ideology of the state. That is true for much of the Arab world. Not a single Arab government, of course, believes in political Islam. And yet, state centralism does dominate all those countries.

To give you some statistics on the role of women in the region. In 2018 61%, and some even forecast 64%, of the Iranian population will be women. That is huge numbers where females are going to be dominant. That is also true in some of the smaller Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, also true in Egypt. And they are becoming more educated, professional, functional, urban oriented. For example, one of the interesting movements in Iran among professional women, which are in large numbers, is that they are all seeking financial independence which will give them quite a bit of space in social life and also in family life. On my campus, for example, 68% of the students are female. And the top students on my campus are all female students which gets them scholarships

not only within Iran but also outside of Iran. I hear the same thing is true in Egypt. I hear that in Saudi Arabia things are changing very rapidly for women. That is also very true in Jordan, in Tunisia, in some of those countries. That is going to be a very important dimension of change. That is definitely noteworthy.

You are right about India and the concept of individualism. I would argue that liberalism has degrees. There is a variation of liberalism. If you perhaps know Western society is as individualist as the American society and you compare that to France and Italy, Spain and Portugal, these are all industrialized countries. So we have a variation. And then you move to Japan which is a more or less collective society and individualism does not play a major role. I would emphasize liberal economics as a common denominator of all Western societies. But when it comes to political liberalism we need to look at a variation. Individualism can take its own pace and its own orientation in different countries.

Question

What are your thoughts on the relationship between media and government in the United States?

Question

What do you think about the role of the private sector in the three revolutions that Iran has had in the past century?

Mahmood Sariolghalam

It is true that there is a mainstream in the Western media. But again, if a citizen in a Western country wishes to seek new data that is also possible. There one has to admire the foundations of liberal democracy. Yes, there is a national harmony between the media and the main parties in a given Muslim country. That is true. But again, that does not inhibit the average citizen from thinking differently or seeking different organizations and trying to associate with other individuals and groups in a society. Of course, that also differs from one society to another. I think in the American system the harmony between the media and the state is very strong whereas if you, for example, move to France it may not be that harmonious. I agree. But again, one has to appreciate the fact that the citizen does have the freedom to move outside of the mainstream if he or she wishes to. That is something to underline.

The foreign policy of the Bush administration is also a reflection of the wing that this particular group belongs to in the Republican Party. That cannot be underestimated. Their view of the American economy and their view of the American defence establishment and what changes they can bring about in the foreign policy towards particularly the Middle Eastern region. We cannot perhaps ignore the party line independent of the orientation that the Bush administration has taken in the last six years. And perhaps it is going to change in the next two years because of the electoral process.

About the three revolutions in Iran, if we can use that term loosely, of course. Revolution in the social sciences has a particular meaning. I am not sure that 1953 would account for a revolution, but perhaps we can call it a political movement. The constitutionalist movement, again, is more or less political reform within the monarchy rather than a revolution. But truly in 1979 there was a revolution in Iran. It is true that we have had private sectors. I am not again going back to the Turkish example. But I am not really sure that the private sector in Iran has been powerful enough to set a state agenda and to shape the policies of the state. Even the private sector under the Shah had very close court relationships in order to maintain its share of the economic benefits. The theory is that, when a private sector can set its own agenda independent of the state, then we can hope for a liberal democracy or a liberal political change in the system. But I think in much of the

last century in Iran the private sector has not been vibrant enough. The main industries in the country have always remained state industries. They have not had accountable shares of national wealth so that they can shift the policies of the state. That is why I think what has happened is clearly at the social level. The revolution of 1979 was a reaction from the social sector, not so much from the private economic sector. And, of course, 1953 it was politics within the elites. And the constitutionalist movement of 1906 was also a reformist movement within the nationalists, to some degree Islamists at the time. I don't see a role for the private sector in the last century of Iranian history.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

I am also an admirer of Farid Zakaria who has this theory about first institutions, then middle class, then democracy. Is history really going in this orderly way? What do we say to an opposition group in Egypt saying we want to have a multi-party system, elections and so on? Would we say, wait a little bit, we have to privatize before, then you build the institutions, and then perhaps you are mature enough to vote? Isn't history more chaotic and more complex than this development?

Mahmood Sariolghalam

Of course, there is no guarantee that everybody is going to be democratic. It depends on historical forces. I tend to be more or less a pessimist on the prospects of democracy in the region. Can we envision other avenues of reaching a democratic stage? A very informed public and organized societies are the two pillars of quick change. One reason why Turkey is, comparatively speaking with other Muslim countries, ahead of others is because there is more or less an open circulation of information in Turkey. People do have access to diverse sources of information. Turkey is gradually improving in terms of political organization. It has a long way to go. But again, it is improving. Those are probably important parameters alongside economic privatization. When the vast majority of a population is poor and they depend on their daily subsistence, obviously politics is going to take a turbulent move rather than an organized change. I think yes, because of globalization, the internet, maybe societies are going to organize faster because they are going to be far more informed of the necessities of change. If we look at the role of Al Jazeera in the Arab world, and now there is an English Al Jazeera. Those are maybe non-economic media factors that are changing the minds of individuals. But again, the crucial fact here is that will people not fear the state in order to organize? The way not to fear the state is to be independent financially of the state. That is why I look at Malaysia and to a lesser degree at the United Arab Emirates as having better prospects for democracy.

Will the oil industry in Iran shift into private hands? I don't see that happening in the medium term. We are talking about huge stakes here. The society is not organized enough in order to do that. Iran is a very ancient country with a traditionally strong state. The oil income has reinforced the power of the state. So I don't think it is going to happen any time soon. But what we can hope for is that the oil income will be used for redistribution purposes, for building an infrastructure, and for setting a national agenda for economic growth, and also for turning Iran into an economically regional power which has all the prerequisites. And it has the geopolitics to become a regional power. If we have the agenda that Malaysia has in Iran to become an economic power because of a huge young population, access to international waters. Iran has gas at the current levels of production for the next 330 years. It has 16% of gas deposits in the world. There is all that potential. So I think it comes down to political choices so that the oil money can be used for national purposes.

Question

In biology there is the concept of equilibrium with the evolution going for a long period and all of a sudden the change is very quickly. I remember being in Berlin in June 1989 saying, will you ever get rid of this wall here. And people said no, never. There will be decades more to come. By the end of that year the wall was gone. So I think something like clerical clashes in Iran for twentyseven years now ... But then it might happen just over night, before you know it. So in my opinion Iran was a much more suitable character for joining Europe than Germany is or was. Is this happening, becoming a democracy in the foreseeable future and actually joining Europe?

Mahmood Sariolghalam

Actually, I have talked about that in a roundtable in Iran. Just basing Iranian behavior on history, if we look at historical patterns, Iran has really never been a Middle Eastern country. Iran has fundamental conflicts with all of its neighbors. It has always had problems of association with its neighbors, to the north, the south, the east and the west. Where do you form coalitions in Iran's regional politics? Are the Arab countries interested in Iran's national growth? Do Russians care for Iran's development? Can Iran build a coalition with Afghanistan and Pakistan? Where can Iran find partners for its national development at the regional level? History tells us that Iran has always looked beyond the region for partners, not at the regional level. If that is any useful evidence, the current preoccupation with regional issues is a source of buying short-term security. But if economic growth becomes a national priority, then Iran will shift. That is when the change will come. Iran is a country of seventy million people. The forecast is that by 2020 Iran will be a country of a hundred million people, 70% of which will be below the age of thirty. By that time we will have another generation of people ruling Iran. One can be hopeful for the next couple of decades. And then, Iran has had its revolution unlike Egypt, unlike Saudi Arabia. The intellectual discourse in Iran is very different than when you compare it to Egypt. It is a question of generational shift in Iran which is coming in the next decade. In about a decade from now we are going to have new groups in power. The forces of globalization and also domestic forces are going to push Iran towards a priority in national economic growth rather than other items on the agenda. In that case Iran has to change its foreign policy. Under those circumstance there is quite a bit of prospect for Iran. Within the Iranian larger security domains in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf, some 80% of global gas and oil is located. The geopolitics of Iran will always make it important, no matter what. It is a question of making the economic choice and the technological choice rather than the political choice so that the country can shift.

Question

I have never been aware of the importance of economics in the context of democracy. These were very new aspects. You mentioned the nation state and its prerequisites. ... In the course of history a stable community, sometimes large, sometimes smaller, ... I just want to see how this ... could be provided in this diverse country. I am glad about the question of the bazar. We always thought of the power of bazar and the private sector not in the terms of Western industrialized countries but in our traditional terms of a strong capitalist society. They stood up to the political events for the ... more than the religion which is blamed for everything in the West ... You mentioned the post-communist/Soviet spirit of the society in terms of like a frozen society, static. Is that what you were observing now in the last four or five years in the Iranian youth culture. Because before there was student movements. The hope was that this new committed Muslim society is producing a political prospect. There is not much of it happening now. There is political disinterest. There is a move into silence. ...

Question

What is the role of the bazaar in Iran today?

Mahmood Sariolghalam

I think it is very clear that those initiatives were in response to some pressures from the US Congress at the time, that the US should seek political change and not emphasize so much political stability. It is interesting that now it is changing. If you read recent pieces by Henry Kissinger he is emphasizing stability over democracy. So we are back to traditional American Middle Eastern politics of emphasizing the status quo rather than fundamental political changes which are not really possible. It depends on the interests of the day. Access to the energy of the Middle East is far more important than political change. That is a clear indication of American foreign policy in the region.

I should probably point out that as of now there is no longer such a thing as a bazaar kind of class in Iran. That group has been demolished in post-revolutionary Iran. You may recall that the bazaar class in Iran belonged to the nobility and many extended families that remained outside of the state. As you correctly pointed out, with their religious connections they were able to wage protest movements in Iran in the 1950's, 1960's, and later on even before the Iranian revolution. But today there is no such thing as a bazaar class. People have left the traditional bazaar. Commerce in Iran is fundamentally state commerce. That class has basically been abandoned. What can bring stability to Iran? From historical perspective this is a country that extended from China to the Mediterranean. That is why even in the Iranian psyche many do have imperial outlooks on issues and things. It is strong, it is there. Part of the psychological explanation for the current policies on the nuclear issue and perhaps Iranian preponderance of power over its neighbors has a lot to do with the imperial mindset that Iranians have. They say that the beauty of Iranian geopolitics, and its vast territory, and its connections to the north and the south make it a strong country, a regional power. Stability, if we take any lessons from processes of globalization, will ultimately fall on the economic growth issues. The huge income now coming from the oil and gas sectors are jeopardizing the whole idea of national economic growth. With that huge income Iran can move into a country that focuses on very elaborate infrastructure and great productive capacity. But it is basically that oil income is not used for national economic growth, but it is more for self-preservation and regional outreach in foreign policy.

The terminology that I used was unstable belief systems rather than unstable value systems. True, when it comes to values we do have very stable values over time. When it comes to the mixture of Islamic and Iranian cultural traditions, for example the whole idea that the Iranian New Year is a Zoroastrian tradition and has remained so over centuries. Despite the Iranian revolution of 1979, Noruz does remain the most important holiday of the year. But Iran cannot be blamed for religious intolerance. Religious tolerance is part of the Iranian culture. Even Iranian policy on Israel has a lot to do with political issues rather than religious issues. Anti-Semitism does not have any roots in the Iranian society and culture. Your very interesting last question, do we find the current conditions in Iran as static? At the social level, no. As is the case with Iranian culture, Iranians have a great capacity to adapt to difficult circumstances and find their own ways to make sure that change will come about.

Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof

Although it starts to be even more interesting than at the beginning we have close. Thank you very much for that very instructive lecture and your answers to the questions.