



'The Promotion of Democracy – what will the Middle East vote for?'

**Transcript of Sir Jeremy Greenstock's remarks
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I would very much like to subscribe to the injunction to treat this as a conversation and indeed, I would quite like to use this as a forum for thrashing out some thinking on a problem which has not been got right yet. Since I was also encouraged to talk about the Middle East, I am going to combine some thoughts on the business of promoting democracy internationally with one or two comments on the Middle East.

But I would like to treat this session as global and as a conversation about strategy and therefore as a forum and see what you think about some of the things I want to say.

It is a pilot project for me which I am going to take back into the Ditchley agenda and I particularly want to have a discussion with Americans – Ditchley is very much an Anglo-American foundation – about the whole business of promoting democracy and some of the implications that are necessary for the policy of those that promote democracy.

I am going to start with some fairly quick and probably for a large part some unexplained comments on what is going on in Iraq, in Iran and in Palestine, but I am very happy to range further on the Middle East if you would like to. But I choose those three, partly because they are in the headlines and partly because they illustrate some of the things that go right and go wrong in the promotion of democracy.

It may seem a little strange to think of Iraq as a pilot project in the promotion of democracy, since it is away from the West and in the Middle East in particular, but that is the way it has turned out. It has only achieved a certain distance in what was intended and I think it needs be judged against that background rather than against some others. The situation in Iraq at the moment clearly demonstrates that the mistake that was made at the beginning of the occupation period after the invasion was over was indeed irremediable, something that both John Sawers and I warned London about at the time, but it was not possible to correct.

The assumption by the United States was that things would go a lot better than they did and in effect, a vacuum was left in Iraq by a failure to put security first. I haven't yet been able to discover which American General – I think my answer to myself is 'none' – was given accountable responsibility for ensuring law and order in Iraq from April 2003 onwards. General Tommy Franks was psychologically on his way out after his victory. Ricardo Sanchez was not yet established and didn't have anything like the authority in the military system of the United States as General Franks. General Garner was never a serious player. He was a good, worthy, courageous man, but never given the resources, never given the respect by the fighting US army that he would have needed to run a country of 35 million people in chaos. When Ambassador Paul Bremer was appointed within less than a month and

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arrived just after a month, after 9th April, not only did he come out without any authority over the military sphere in Iraq, which meant that no single American presence in Iraq had authority for the whole government of Iraq, he also came out with a different policy than the one agreed with Lieutenant General Jay Garner. Garner was asked to hand over to the Iraqis, who would come through for the new Government, as quickly as possible, while assuring humanitarian supply and the beginnings of the new economic activity in the meantime and to leave as quickly as possible. And when Paul Bremer came out in the middle of May, the policy had changed and - I might add as an aside, without any consultation with the United Kingdom Government - to the establishment of order in Iraq over a period, the setting up of a number of constitutional principles and the beginnings of institutions which would make elections sensible and then for the American occupation to end. In some ways, it was a more sensible policy given the situation on the ground and certainly – I will come to this when I talk a bit more about the promotion of democracy – it is sensible not to think of introducing democracy only through the establishment of an electoral system, but Bremer was not given the resources or the environment within which to complete his assignment. There was no clear plan for security in Iraq as things turned out.

I say that, not just because it has to be remembered as a lesson from this exercise, that the first thing to get right in such a situation is to assure security, but also because it still underlies the task of Nouri al-Maliki's government now, even though last week the government was completed with the appointment of a Shia Minister of the Interior and Sunni Minister of Defence. They are, as far as I can see, good, probably uncorrupt men, willing to serve the central authority. But they are taking over a situation where there is very little respect left for central authority and very little chance to calm the country and bring it into a unified state capable of looking forward without a lot more time and lot more suffering.

Three things in particular are missing in the scene in Iraq.

One obviously is law and order and we can discuss why, if you wish, in the subsequent conversation. But the different pillars of the insurgency – the Iraqis, the non-Iraqis and amongst the Iraqis, the Ba'athists and the non Ba'athists, have too much momentum behind them, too many weapons to hand, too much motivation, too many men prepared to serve, for the security situation to improve much within the foreseeable future.

The second thing that is missing is a clear leadership for a unified Iraq. Political leadership has for some time become sectarian, something that should always have been expected out of a country of such schism and such trauma and I do not see even a coalition government representing the different communities and different sects being able to establish a sense of unity that will be impressive on the whole population.

The third thing that is missing is morale within the population. Many of them have lost hope. Those who can get out are moving. Those who have tried to establish a business, have found that although business was flourishing for a while, they are now beginning to feel that no further progress is possible. The electricity is being supplied at less than the rate immediately after the war, well down from Saddam's rate of electricity supply in 2002/early 2003. Oil production is well down on the crude maximum under Saddam. There is no longer a feeling amongst the majority of the population that central government can turn this round and of course, with the passage of time, the distaste turned to disgust turned to hatred for foreign



troops on Iraqi soil has also had an effect on the relationship between the coalition and ordinary Iraqis on the ground, although the relationship between the coalition and the government still remains pretty good.

You should therefore expect a long haul in Iraq. We are talking about a generation before you see a stable Iraq if things go well, with several stages of sectarianism as we move through time; and possibly in the less good case scenario, a breakdown right back down to the local level, with local militias, almost street gangs, taking over in certain places where a larger authority is not able to exert itself. Only after that will we see a building back up, if my first point for the future takes effect, which is that Iraq can probably only reconstitute itself through the rise of an effective army. The police force is shot through with sectarianism, spies, weaknesses, some courage, some good people, but too many policemen who do not do much during the day are taking part in death squads during the night. It is the army in Iraq - still an institution in people's minds to be respected - that can form the backbone of a united Iraq. It is the army that will pull Iraq out of this mess if anything does and you can understand the connotations of that in politics. It may be an army ruled by a coalition civilian government, it may not. It is still perfectly possible that we can go full circle back to autocratic command of the army and the Iraqi people will accept that to some extent, because that is the only united Iraq they have known over many generations.

What therefore are Iraqis likely to vote for, to go back to my own title? In the last few elections, more in the recent ones than the January 2005 elections, but still noticeable then, and certainly I would expect it to be the case in the next election and the one after that, if elections continue, Iraqis will vote for their locality, for their identity, for people they identify with and for a desperate sort of local security. You will have to build this country back up from that local perception amongst the people, even if democracy is working and I will come back to what conclusions we may draw from that in a minute.

I will move rather faster through Iran, because it is in the middle of a play at the moment where diplomacy still has some chance. What is clear is that there is no proof sitting in front of, either the American government or the British government or the Israeli government, that Iran is moving towards nuclear weapons capability. There is no proof either than they want to do that, but all sensible observers and indeed all sensible policy makers are assuming at least, that Iran wants the option to do that, and therefore they want to retain uranium enrichment capacity, even if they have not yet mastered the engineering techniques that are needed to produce 80%-90% enrichment rather than 3.5% enrichment for civilian energy use.

The downsides to the use of force are also clear. The United States in particular has some decisions to make, but the United Kingdom also has decisions to make, as do the other Europeans, if it collapses back just to the two choices: do we acquiesce in Iranian nuclear capability or do we use weaponry to stop it? The downsides of force are huge. Nevertheless, it is my belief that they are not to be dismissed. The possibilities of the use of force are not to be dismissed and indeed, the possibility of the use of force should be left on the table to keep diplomacy more effective. If the Iranian government operates from the assumption that the United States will never use force against them, then that will make it much more likely that force will be used. Iran too has to be very careful in this situation. I look upon engagement in diplomacy as a strength, not a weakness. There has to be a middle road that is explored to a greater extent than has been done so far and I think that the decision by the American

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government to reconsider not many days, weeks, months, after many members of our government may have had a conversation with an American official at senior level who said: *'Do not expect this administration to talk to Iran'*, was a sensible one. They have moved away from that position and there is a now chance of some sensible diplomacy, with the Europeans playing a proper role.

It is my instinct to say that engagement with Iran just on the nuclear issue – I hesitate to call it the narrow nuclear issue – is not broad enough. If Iran is to be brought into a discussion of what happens in her region, as the country she is, with the history she has, and with the strengths and indeed the weaknesses that Iran has, then it is time for - and there is a need for – a discussion with Iran and with Iran's neighbours involved, on Iraq, on gulf security, on Iran's place in its geo-strategic position, looking to Turkey and to central Asia and the subcontinent. Iran is a player and if we are to have a strategy for that region, there must be discussions with the main players of that region as to how that strategy unfolds. I think that a solution to the nuclear problem can only be contained in a set of steps for the larger security of that particular region, if our government and the American government and other governments are capable of that longer-term view and a sense of strategy for the region, which is not all that visible at this moment.

Iran of course, is to some extent, a democracy, a democracy with elements of autocracy on top of it, and elements of brutality and repression. That is absolutely clear to anybody who observes Iran. But Iranians vote and the story of the Shah has made it clear - or even the Soviet Union has made it clear - that if you do not bring the people with you, you cannot survive as a regime in the long-term. Iranians, if asked to vote in the near future as they were asked to vote last year, will vote for Iran the nation. They will vote as patriots, because even this leadership, which they partly despise, has convinced them that they are under attack from overseas, potentially militarily but also in a cultural and political sense. And that has brought more support for an extraordinary government in Iran than might otherwise have been the case. If asked, for the moment, with their perception of the 'outside' as it is at the moment, Iranians will vote for 'inside' against the 'outside'. That still needs to be changed if we want to change the character of the region, but it will not be changed by putting tens of millions of dollars into a programme from outside to persuade the Iranian people to change their thinking.

Palestine has already voted, in an extraordinary way, to bring Hamas in. I regard it as a fair reflection of what the majority wanted in the Palestinian election a few months ago. Hamas was elected with the Palestinian people conscious of its programme. They wanted a change from Fatah and they were able, through the democratic system, to throw out a government they had lost confidence in and regarded as corrupt and inefficient. This does not mean to say that they will vote another time for Hamas, if Hamas doesn't produce a better life for them or some kind of progress in their own perception. Hamas must be made to feel the pressure of its programme, of its failure so far to accept that Israel must exist in security, but I think time is going to be needed for that.

We are observing this week an escalation in the internal struggle between Fatah and Hamas with violence beginning to be involved, another possible phenomenon when democracy is introduced into a territory that is not fully ready for it. I would recommend not cutting off money to the Palestinians; they are bitter and wounded enough. But obviously care has to be taken that if European money, for instance, is to continue going to the Palestinians, it goes



through channels that makes it difficult for the Hamas government to misplace it. If the Palestinians were asked to vote again in the near future, they would vote by a majority in my view for salvaging their national pride. They are humiliated, wounded, bitter, denied justice in their own perception and the perception of many others. But they will not necessarily vote for a long-term immoderate strategy if they are still deeply distressed and unable to carry out their daily lives.

I wanted to say a couple of things about any programme to promote democracy overseas. Although it is difficult to do, since democracy is a word of strong token significance, I prefer to think of government with the consent of the people, as being the first stage that needs to be reached within territories that are decidedly undemocratic. Democracy has too many ideological connotations, and is associated too much with the West. It has to be made very clear, if we are to enter into the whole business of promoting democracy where it does not exist at the moment, that we are not trying to promote our own versions of democracy, or our own ideology or our own culture.

With globalisation working as it does in the economic and commercial spheres and in communications and in travel and in places other than government, you have to remember that politics is not globalising. Politics is stagnating at the national level in terms of international exchange. With that come very strong feelings of culture and identity and locality. And if we look as though we are attempting to introduce democracy into a territory where the ideology of the place from where that democracy programme has come from is not there and is not acceptable, then democracy will not flower. And yet governments that work without the consent of their people will not last longer than a certain stretch of time. They too have got to think further into the future, about where they have to give way and where they have to allow consent in their populations to the government of that territory.

The second point I want to make is perhaps, in some ways, even more controversial. It is that the promoters of democracy have in the end to practise what they preach. There is no real sense of democracy at the UN, or in international exchange, in the international structures, in international agencies, if those with the greatest power or the most money are those who sit at the top table or who run the board or who will not accept that a General Assembly of all the nations should have any power. And I think we are beginning to see an era where the old powers, the powers of 1945, who are still powerful, have got to start adapting. It is always difficult for those who are on top to make a decision about whether to cling on or whether to adapt. The choice perhaps is greater cohesion at a greater cost now, or preserving dominance for longer at the risk of an even bigger cost and a steeper drop later.

I do not think that any democracy promotion programme can really take effect in the world we are having to deal with at the moment unless there is greater democracy at the international level and there are problems there, because we cannot move too quickly, too precipitously to such a state of affairs internationally. There are too many vested interests. It has to be progressive, but a start has to be made. We should also remember that democracies themselves, established democracies, are not good at strategy. They are too short-term. I think we have seen in recent years the failure of important countries, such as the United States or the European Union as a group, to establish a long-term strategy for the projects they are engaged in, a strategy that takes account of the realities that they cannot control. China is much better-placed to take decisions that allow time for the kind of progress they want, that



allow consistency, that look ahead twenty years, that calculate what is going to happen in the next generation, because, of course, they are not a democracy. The European Union made the mistake, in my view, of thinking that its programme was going to work, because Europe's elite had established it with tremendous care and effort, but they had not taken account of the fact that the peoples of Europe had not signed up to it. We are going to have to go back to the constitutional area with that thought in mind.

So finally, what is the right mix of policies for the promotion of democracy?

Well, first of all, think persuasion, not compulsion or bribery or even leading from the front without looking back. Think persuasion because unless a programme of democracy carries with it international legitimacy and local legitimacy, it will not succeed.

Second, have at heart the longer-term potential and interests of the people and not the government or not just the government and if they are separate, if they are antagonised to each other, think of the people rather than the government in the country you are dealing with and in that, a sense of timing becomes necessary.

Thirdly, allow choice. The people themselves on that territory have to make the choice. It cannot be imposed. And allow time for that and for institutions to grow.

Fourthly, expect a rough passage. There is a J-curve built into the promotion of democracy where things get worse before they get better. If you are going to do it, be prepared to bear the pain of the early years. I actually think that with time, Iraq and Palestine will eventually go right and that it will, in certain senses, have been worth it, but the cost has been greater because of some mistakes. So keep going with the right incentives, thinking construction rather than destruction. If you keep going consistently and last through the bad times, it can still work.

But finally, fifthly, it is important to begin creating an international framework, with some caveats, with some protective staging, where democracy means something at the international level above the national level. I think with those ingredients, the promotion of democracy - and the United States will have to be in the lead and has already delivered a huge amount of greater freedom around the world - has a chance of succeeding. But it is not going to be a quick or easy process.

Thank you very much.

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