



CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

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Transcript

**DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN:
A CONFERENCE IN HONOR OF SIAMAK
POURZAND
PANEL 3: POLITICS OR CULTURE? IRAN'S MAIN
OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRACY**

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Maziar Bahari
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TAMARA COFMAN WITTES: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Tamara Wittes. I'm the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, one of the cosponsors of today's event.

And before we embark on our final panel, I just wanted to take a couple of words to welcome you and to perhaps put into a little bit of context the way we build our policy discussion and our discussion as societies around this issue of struggle for democracy and human rights.

First, let me say what a pleasure it's been to collaborate with the Carnegie Endowment and the Wilson Center on this conference, on a topic to which all three of our institutions are so deeply committed. We all have fantastic scholars and experts working on these issues.

And the fact that we were able to bring these brains together and that they were able to attract such tremendous panelists for a full day is really a testament to what we can do when we work together. And I want to thank Suzanne and Karim and Haleh for all of their work. (Applause.)

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Thanks to all of you. You know, I took over the directorship of the Saban Center just about six weeks ago after having come out of a couple of years at the State Department, where I was responsible for trying to coordinate our democracy and human rights policy in the Middle East.

And coming into the administration toward the end of 2009, my primary focus during my time was dealing with the struggle for democracy and human rights in the Arab World and then dealing with the Arab awakening and the U.S. response to that.

But I think that – that that experience, like many of the issues that we've been discussing over the course of the day and that will be the focus of this final panel, really raise a set of dilemmas for activists inside societies where they're struggling for basic rights, and for those of us outside who are seeking to make a positive difference.

You know, the Obama administration coming in, facing the legacy of the administration that came before has maintained a focus on the fact that the claims of democracy and human rights are universal claims, that they are demands that we can work on internationally using multilateral fora, but that fundamentally – and here comes, you know, the beginning of the big dilemma – change is driven indigenously, by an indigenous agenda and by indigenous effort.

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And I think one of the fundamental lessons from my own experience in struggling to develop the administration's response to the Arab awakening was trying to find the appropriate balance, understanding that it was not our story, that we hadn't driven it, we

weren't going to control it and we weren't going to write the end and that our role was about support. But it was not – we were not going to be able to provide that support effectively if we were primarily focused on getting credit for that support.

I think that when it comes to the Iranian case, these dilemmas that the United States faces in trying to support the growth of democracy and human rights anywhere in the world – trying to support them in the Arab world, when it comes to Iran – those dilemmas are even sharper. And as a policymaker, as I was trying to figure out how to deal with this, the best that I could come up with was the imperative to listen to the voices of those inside, whose struggle it is.

They are the ones who have to make the most difficult and most pointed choices. And they're the ones who have to carry the burden of risk associated with those choices. And that – the most important thing we could do from outside, therefore, was not sort of impose on them a sense of what our role could or should be but try to follow their lead on how best we could play that supportive role.

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I don't know that we always did that perfectly. But that was certainly our approach, and I think continues to be.

And precisely because of that imperative to listen, to understand the dilemmas and choices faced by those inside a repressive society, those who are struggling for their right, for representation – it's precisely because of that challenge that I think this final panel is so wonderfully targeted as our final panel of the day, because it's really going to look at that – what are the obstacles that societies face, that activists face as they determine when is the moment to engage, in what manner to engage, how do you take something from individual or small collective actions to something that has the potential for mass impact. And how do you sustain that in the face of tremendous, tremendous challenge.

And that is, I think, the primary story of the struggle for democracy and human rights in Iran today. So I'll stop there. But I really just want to say, again, thank you all so much for coming. Thank you to all of our panelists for generating such a rich discussion, and thanks again to our three organizers for your work together to put this day in front of us. Thanks very much. (Applause.)

[00:06:43]

KARIM SADJADPOUR: Thank you, Tammy. Thank you all for coming. I wanted to join previous speakers in saluting the Pourzand family – Mehrangiz Kar; Leily, who spoke so beautifully this morning and her husband, Mehrdad and their – and Mehrangiz's daughter, Azadeh, who is in India now but very much with us in spirit. I was thinking as I was listening to the panels and rereading Siamak Pourzand's bio. He had a really Shakespearean life and also a very Shakespearean death in some ways.

And as Leily best put it, when he passed one year ago, his death wasn't a suicide. It was his final act of protest. Our panel here this afternoon is entitled "Politics or Culture?"

Iran's Main Obstacles to Democracy.” And there is this false dichotomy about Iran which I wanted to kind of probe a little bit.

And you know, the first point you oftentimes hear is that, well, Iranians, they wake up in the morning thinking about enriched uranium and denying the Holocaust and it's a population which is, you know, very traditional, and therefore they love living under an Islamic Republic.

And those of us who try to fight against that narrative oftentimes take the other side which is to paint this picture of a society in which everyone is a secular Jeffersonian Democrat. And if only the regime – (laughter) – if only the regime were to fall, then Iran would become Norway.

And you know, the reality is somewhere in between those two. And so to probe these questions, I brought three really fantastic and people from diverse backgrounds who I count as good friends, all of them. I'll introduce them one by one. And we're just going to have kind of a casual conversation amongst us and I look forward to opening up to all of you.

On my far left is Arash Sobhani, who is, for lack of a better introduction, a rock star, a bona-fide rock star. He's someone who, you know – he has an amazing lifestyle because if he was living in Iran, I think he would be mobbed by people, especially women, walking down the streets.

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But here in the United States, he's fairly anonymous. But his videos have huge followings on YouTube. He has sometimes been described as Iran's Mark Knopfler, from Dire Straits. And some of you may have noticed that I was wearing a tie earlier and I took off my tie. And one of my rules in life is if you share a panel with a rock star, take off your tie. (Laughter.)

To my left is Maziar Bahari, who needs no introduction to all of you. Maziar is not only an acclaimed journalist and an author, but he's also an acclaimed documentary filmmaker. He just completed his most recent documentary film about the relationship between Iran and Israel. And he's written a beautiful book, a beautiful memoir about his family and his life and his time at Evin Prison in the summer of 2009 – which again, I really recommend to all of you.

To my right is Nazila Fathi, who again, needs no introduction to any of you. Nazila was for almost a decade – or over a decade – the New York Times correspondent – chief correspondent in Tehran until she had to flee the country in the summer of 2009. And she is now on a fellowship at Harvard University in Boston, although we're hoping to recruit her to D.C. sometime in the near future.

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And I wanted to start by asking Nazila the first question. I'd like to pose it to Arash and Maziar, as well. And that is that when you look back at the 1979 revolution, the iconic images which emerged from that revolution – the iconic faces were faces of bearded traditional men. And when you look back at the summer of 2009 protests, the Green Movement and the ongoing faces of dissent in Iran, I would argue the iconic faces are young, modern, educated women, like Neda Agha-Soltan.

And there's an interesting quote from Shirin Ebadi. She had an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal last month, in which she said something that stuck with me. She said: The 1979 revolution is oftentimes described as an Islamic revolution. But in reality, it was a revolution of men against women.

And what I wanted to ask you is when I look around the world, including in places which are quite traditional – traditional societies like Burma and you see the emergence of figures like Aung San Suu Kyi. My question is whether you think Iranian society is today ready for female political leadership. Is society ready and that figure hasn't yet emerged, or would you say society isn't yet ready for that step?

NAZILA FATHI: Well, Karim, thank you for your kind introduction and my salute to the Pourzand family. Siamak Pourzand's memory and soul is here with us. That's the \$1 million question, I think. The American society was not ready for a female president.

So I wonder whether the Iranian society – and the trend that started in Iran since the 1979 revolution has certainly turned the Iranian society toward a different direction. As you've said, yes, the faces of at least those who hijacked the revolution were bearded men. Before that, there were lots of, sort of, socialist moustaches as well.

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MR. SADJAPOUR: That's right.

MS. FATHI: Women were there too but they were sidelined very quickly, even though they took a part, they were a force during the revolution. But I think the process in the past three decades has drawn many women, both from traditional and secular classes, into society and has empowered them in ways that wouldn't have been possible.

In 1982, only three years after the revolution, women made only 30 percent of university students. Since 2000, they've built (sic) more than 50 percent of university students. And in 2009, 63 percent of them were women. That means Iranian society has been faced with more educated women in the past decade than any other time.

But this is not unique to Iran. I mean, the same thing is happening in Kuwait. The same thing is happening in Lebanon. Iran is very much still a traditional society. I mean, I love this quote by an Iranian political analyst in Tehran.

(Inaudible) – He used to say: We have our feet in traditionalism and our heads in modernity. So we are truly in transition. I think Iranian women have shown huge capability

in the past years – especially in 2009 when the government sort of repressed any voice, shut down newspapers, jailed a lot of activists.

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Women came up with all these creative ways to keep the news flowing. One of them was the love letters. The way women sort of put aside all traditional taboos, started talking about their love and passion for their husbands. And then, in the same way, they were giving news to the society about their partners and giving news to their partners in prison about what was happening outside; was absolutely creative. And it's a kind of literary genre that will stay in our history.

Or for example, the whole notion of men wearing headscarves. On Facebook, it was a huge campaign and who initiated it? A woman – (inaudible). So I think women have shown capability to be good leaders, being very creative. They have found very interesting ways to voice dissent. But whether Iranian society is ready to have a female leader, I'm not sure. I think it has to be put to the test.

MR. SADJADPOUR: What do the men say? (Laughter.) Are Iranian men ready?

ARASH SOBHANI: First of all, I think I agree with Nazila that the images we see from the '79 revolution are not what happened. There were a lot of women active then and Communists and, you know, and then they were eventually wiped out of the images and, you know, the last – on the anniversary there was just the image of Khomeini coming down the stairs.

And nobody was in the image anymore because they got rid of all of them. So I think the women participated in the '79 revolution just as much as the men did. But I think the Iranian society is ready for a female leadership. I think when Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Prize, it was a huge, you know, excitement amongst everybody, all of the activists in Iran. And they were ready for her to actually take a leading role.

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So my answer would be I'm definitely for – and I think it's because it's a civil right issue, you know, what's going on with women in Iran. It's a civil right issue. So it can't – you know, you don't get stuck in all the political discussions that comes with it, like if you come from a leftist or a right wing or whatever. You know, it is not a political issue. It's a civil right issue. So if the right leadership is created amongst the women, I think the society will accept it. That's my take.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Do you agree, Maziar?

MAZIAR BAHARI: Well, thank you for having me here. I know that I wasn't the first choice.

MR. SADJADPOUR: No, thank you. Thank you.

MR. BAHARI: (Cross talk.) We went through a somehow similar experience. And I'm sorry that I may have to pause because I have a splitting headache but, you know, you have to bear with me – and I have to bear my headache. Anyways – and it's an honor to be in the presence of the Pourzand family.

I think in order to understand why Shirin Ebadi said what she said in that op-ed, we have to go back to the origins of Khomeini's movement. Khomeini's movement in 1962-63 did not start because he was anti-imperialist, not because he was anti-dictatorial. His first act of protest was against women's right to vote.

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MR. SADJADPOUR: That's right.

MR. BAHARI: He wrote a letter to His Majesty, the king. And that was – I mean, those were the words that he used – (in Persian): His Majesty, the king. And he asked His Majesty, the king, to change his decision to give women the vote. But no one remembers that anymore.

Even when you talk to women Islamists and reformists, they don't want to talk about why the imam started his movement. And everyone talks about, you know, Israel, Baha'is and whatever.

So in 1979, when millions of women along with men came to the streets, Khomeini, as a brilliant political strategist and someone who knew how to use opportunities, he knew that he had to use women's vote. But at the same time, women – many women from traditional societies, they realized that in this Islamic Republic, they will gain more freedom because the government became Islamic.

And before the revolution, many women who took part in social activities, who went to universities – their families did not let them come out of their houses. So the veil itself, even though it's a symbol of oppression for many women in Iran who do not want to wear the veil, it was a liberating instrument for many women who went out.

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And I think the fact that women became more active in the Islamic society and the fact that women became more educated, it had unwanted consequences for the Islamic Republic. And it made women becoming more aware of their rights, like other citizens. It made women more educated, like what Mrs. Kar was saying about these women with chador – fully clad in, like, black chador, coming, and they didn't know about the origins or their oppression. I think it's right, because women didn't realize.

As a result, you see a lot of women from very traditional societies right now who are still wearing the veil and you see them even in the U.S., the political activists who are in exile right now. And they still – they cannot really resolve that conflict within themselves that whether we should wear the veil or we should not.

But they are – basically what they are doing, what they are saying is if you pay real attention to it, it's against everything that Khomeini stood for in terms of women's rights and everything that Khomeini wanted to create in Iran. So in 2009, when millions of women, again – or thousands of women, at least – they came to the streets and demonstrated against Ahmadinejad's reelection and asked for their votes, I think the government realized this power.

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And as a result, I think the government itself is thinking about how, too, they can assimilate women but in their own head again. Like recently, about a couple of weeks ago, Hussein (inaudible), who is a very radical member of the Iranian parliament – real conservative, one of the people responsible for the killings of intellectuals in the '90s – he said that why don't we have all the speakers and vice speakers and deputies, you know, the heads of the parliament women because then we will get rid of the Western criticism that, you know, we don't give women rights.

And at the same time, you know, we can have Islamic women at the helm. So it was – I don't know if he was saying it as a joke because sometimes, you know, their sense of humor is so twisted that you don't know if it's a joke or not. But that – most of their actions is funny, anyway. So it's just – that's what they said.

So it's a – I think the government has understood this. And as Omid said, you know, the whole philosophy of the Islamic Republic is us against them; us against women, us against the Zionists, us against the Baha'i, us against the Americans, us against, you know, Chelsea, us against Man United. So it's just that as a result I think they are still trying to solve that conflict themselves, yeah.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Let me follow up with a – move on to a slightly different topic and that's authoritarianism and whether we have, you know, there's an authoritarian regime but to look a little bit at the culture.

And one thing – one anecdote I oftentimes recount for people is that when I was based in Tehran several years back and I would travel throughout the country, one of the questions I always liked to ask people – ordinary people I would encounter – is if they could pick one political leader from Iran's 20th century history to come and take power right now, who would they choose.

And I would give them three options, usually: Ayatollah Khomeini, who is kind of the quintessential Islamist, Reza Shah, who is kind of the quintessential enlightened dictator, modernizer, and Mosaddegh, who is kind of the quintessential democratic nationalist figure. I assumed always that people would overwhelmingly say Mosaddegh because they want democracy, et cetera.

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Overwhelmingly, people would say Reza Shah, would answer Reza Shah to this question. It didn't really matter what their social background was. And whenever I ask my

Iranian friends about this, they say absolutely. I have a friend here, I think he's in the audience who has worked for a long time for Mehdi Karrubi, the opposition leader.

And he told me once, you know, 95 percent of people would say Reza Shah. So my question is, you know, I want to go inside of that question and ask why is it that people – first, do you agree with that promise that there's kind of a certain romanticism about the era of Reza Shah now?

And second, is it because people lack confidence in their fellow citizens and they say, you know, these people are not ready for democracy. They need to be dragged by their hair into the 21st century. What is it exactly that – why this romanticism of that era of Reza Shah? Maybe I'll start with Arash this time.

MR. SOBHANI: Well, first of all, I think – and some people may not like this – but I'm not sure if Mosaddegh was in power for 15 years as Reza Shah was, he would turn out to be a democrat, you know, as people. So I think Mosaddegh was – is portrayed differently than what really happened.

That's, you know, some people may not agree to that. But the other thing is that I think Reza Shah was the only person who actually made tangible changes and created an infrastructure that you can still see. The changes that Mosaddegh made or Khomeini made, you really don't see how it affected your daily life.

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The other thing is that I think it's very important is that there's a difference between freedom and democracy. And when Reza Shah was in power, or when even Shah was in power, I think there was some extent of social freedom, which we don't have it now. So which is better? So I think it all goes back to those questions.

MR. BAHARI: I think the answer to your question is security. The reason that people selected Reza Shah, when he came to power it was because of security. When you look at the era before Reza Shah came to power, Iran was in chaos. People could not travel from one city to another. You know, people could not be safe in their own houses. And Reza Shah came to power, and as most people know, Reza Shah did not want to become a king.

He wanted to establish an Iranian republic. But these religious leaders, who some of them are icons of this government, they wanted Reza Shah to be a king because they said that, you know, in order to have a secure country and in order to secure the religion in the country, they need to have a king.

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And then when you look at the Mosaddegh era, it was exactly the same thing. In the period between Mosaddegh came to power in 1951 and 1953, Iran eventually, you know, step by step because engulfed in chaos.

Some of it was fabricated by the Americans and the British. Some of it was created by the communists, Tudeh, and some of it was because Mosaddegh, again, as a person who was an aristocrat who believed in the idea of democracy but maybe he did not believe in democracy in practice, could not manage the society.

So Iran became chaos. And also, I think this government is – some people say that this government thrives in insecurity and chaos. I think this government thrives in the idea that if it collapses, there will be insecurity and chaos. And that's why Khamenei, after the post-election protests in his famous, or infamous, Friday prayer sermon, he said that – he did not mention anything about the peaceful demonstrations of people, about the election that was rigged.

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He talked about chaos on the streets, said that people, you know, they come and vandalize the shops, people – and the foreign media, they teach people how to make Molotov cocktails and how to kill people. So even this regime, they thrive in this idea that they can bring security. And as Ghalibaf, the mayor of Tehran, said famously during his presidential election when he was running against Ahmadinejad: I want to be an Islamic Reza Khan.

MR. SADJADPOUR: That's right.

MR. BAHARI: You know, so that is the idea, I think. And I think any policymaker outside of Iran who wants to have a – design a policy vis-à-vis Iran should think about this issue of security.

MR. SADJADPOUR: When Ghalibaf made that quote, he said, you know, famously, I want to be the Hezbollah Reza Khan, the Islamist Reza Khan. I was having lunch at your home in Tehran when we heard that. That was summer of 2005. Why would someone who is aspiring to be, quote, unquote, democratically elected president of Iran compare himself to someone who was, by all accounts, a dictator. You can say he was an enlightened dictator, but why?

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MS. FATHI: I think that was his mistake. He didn't realize that it was a different time, a different era and different people. And just to add to your analysis, yes, indeed, the Pahlavi era is still looked upon very nostalgically. I mean, some of the best-selling books in Iran are books written about the Pahlavi era, about Reza Shah.

I mean, the book written by Abbas Milani, Hoveyda, was translated by the government, and it sold thousands of copies. You know what, I'm sorry to say this. Some people may not like it. But I think Khamenei has been by far a much less brutal leader than Khomeini.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Than Khomeini, yeah.

MS. FATHI: Than Khomeini, yes. So in terms of comparison with very recent leaders that we've had, I think I personally still prefer Khamenei to Khomeini. I think people who lived in Iran – the people who remember the time under Khomeini, they see the difference. They feel the difference.

I mean, except for the bloodshed in 2009, we have not seen the kind of massacres that happened under Khomeini, especially the ones immediately after the revolution; and in 1988, after the end of the war when thousands of leftist activists were suddenly sent to the gallows. But regarding Reza Shah, I think it's, as Arash mentioned, it's a nostalgic feel – nostalgic sentiment for the personal freedoms that people lost.

I mean, Iranians had a revolution to have political freedom. But then after the revolution, they suddenly lost their social freedom and their personal freedoms, too. So it is mostly the nostalgic feeling that makes people want or yearn for the days of the Pahlavi era.

But I think people do very well know that the shah was a dictator. What he has left behind, a legacy of development, is one thing. But lack of political development, any foundation for a democracy, these are all things that people see. I mean, he built railroad. It's something that is still left there and people see it, and they praise him for it. He built roads. He brought all the tribal leaders that had divided the country into factionalism under one rule and built this Iranian sort of state, nationhood. These are things that people do remember. But how about foundations for democracy? How about democratic parliaments? They see those things.

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I think -- I don't think people would vote for anyone like Reza Shah. And I think that was one of the big mistakes that Ghalibaf made. He was sort of trying to compare himself with a leader at a time when the majority of people were peasants. Now about 70 percent of people live in cities. They have access to Internet. They are much more globalized than they were back then. So I think we have to be more creative in terms of the leaders that we think would be role models.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Yeah, I could have given people more than three choices -- Khomeini, Reza Shah, and Mosaddegh.

MR. BAHARI: Darius.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Darius. (Laughs.) Go back 2,500 years. (Laughter.)

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Let me move on to the role of religion. I was in Istanbul last week. You guys have probably been going to Turkey as well, now that none of us can go to Iran. And it always strikes me that Islam somehow sits much easier in Turkey than it does in Iran. Iran and Turkey are somewhat similar in that they are large populations, non-Arab Muslim populations. And I just somehow feel that the Turks have a much less extreme relationship with Islam than the Iranians do.

And what do I mean by that? In Iran, you have one segment of the population, traditional society, who showed themselves willing to send their children off to be martyrs in the war against Iraq. And you have another segment of the population, many of those now in the diaspora, who believe that Islam led to the downfall of Persian civilization and that they blame Islam for Iran's contemporary malaise; two kind of extremes.

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My question is, as Iran moves forward, how does the role of religion in society need to be reconciled? And in particular, Maziar, in reading your book and your relationship with your interrogator, he thought he was doing God's work. He thought Ayatollah Khamenei was representative of God and he was doing God's work, and you were basically an infidel.

How do you integrate someone like that in a post-Islamic republic Iran?

MR. BAHARI: I think religion in Iran is becoming more of a personal matter rather than a public matter. And I don't think that some people -- I mean, there are two groups in Iran; some people who send their children to be martyrs in the war and some people who are secular and, you know, who want to live in Swedish-like, Scandinavian Iran.

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So I think most of the people I know in Iran, they are religious. Even members of the communist parties are religious. They -- I was always making fun that, you know, that the Muslims, they have, you know, Muhammad, Ali, Hassan, Hussein and Fatima as the five people they respect. And Marxists, they have Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao as the people they respect.

But they think religiously, in a religious framework. So I think that is different. I think that religion is becoming more of a private matter for most people in Iran, and I think that's the meaning of secularism.

And in Turkey, even though there is a religious Islamist party in power, they believe that, you know, they have to abide by central rules of Islam, but most regard religion as a private matter. But as a political party, of course, sometimes they like to steer people's religious sentiments in order to gain politically. But I think a post-Islamic republic Iran will have many religious people. The majority of Iranians will be religious. But they believe in religion as private.

MR. SADJADPOUR: You know, one thing I left out is that I think, you know, when Turks look at their history, at their peak, you know, when they were Ottomans, they were very much kind of an Islamist power in some ways. Their identity was very Islamic. When Iranians look at their heyday, you know, when they were the grand Persian civilization, it was before Islam. It was Zoroastrian religion. And so, in some ways, that's where kind of this romanticism comes about, you know, pre-Islamic ties.

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But, you know, what are your thoughts generally on how to bring about, you know, someone like Maziar's interrogator – you've also had interactions with these people – how do you integrate these folks in a post-Islamist system?

MS. FATHI: I also want to add that if we want to be really honest with ourselves and with our history, after the invasion of the Arabs into the sort of Persian Empire that was at its weakest point under the Sassanid, it was the Persians that helped make the Islamic civilization. So I think we need to be fair about these things, that that sort of whole Persian identity that some of us Iranians constantly glorify and want to look down at some other racist aspects of our characteristics is not very fair.

I totally agree with Maziar that religion is a way of life. You cannot take it out of Iranian society. However, it's got to be personal. And I think that's one of the best things that the Islamic republic did for people. I mean, Khomeini's political Islam, I think, made it clear that Islam should not be -- should not rule. Religion should be separate. State should be separate from the church, and so should the mosque.

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But we cannot say that it was martyrdom, the idea of dying for God, that drew all these kids into the war fronts. There were people from the upper classes as well. There are Americans who are going to Afghanistan and getting killed, and they also look at martyrdom as a value because they think they are fighting for their countries, for certain values.

Some of these comparisons are very relevant. I think we should stay away from stereotyping that Iranians go and die because they think they are dying for God, and martyrdom is something that is glorified. I met a lot of Iranian mothers who lost their children during the war, and there was not a day that they didn't miss living without their children. No mother, no parent, can stand losing a child.

I think we should separate those images on television where these mothers come and say that they're happy that they sacrificed their children. It was a war, it was -- the country was in a state that needed sacrifices, and a lot of people did make those sacrifices. Iranian society will remain religious. But it's going to -- one day it's going to separate its way -- political system from religion.

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I don't think we can divide Iranian society into religious and secular. And some were willing to make sacrifices for the cause of religion. I think a lot of those people went out and fought for their country.

MR. SOBHANI: Well, I think in Turkey they succeeded in separating the religion from the politics, and while in Iran it wasn't done right. At some point, you know, it just stopped. And then they managed to get back. But in general, I think the Iranians are less religious than Turks if you go outside Istanbul and, you know, if you go outside Tehran.

So I think what's happening, though, is that this religion and this way of thinking of giving sacrifice, of going to war or martyrdom, whatever it is, it's been injected by the government to the society. And that's, I think, one of -- you know, what's creating Iran as a culture today and who has the power to create cultural products and way of -- you know, the way of life, you know, how they live in Iran, in Tehran and other cities.

[00:38:49]

It's the government dictating, you know, this is a holiday. You have to be sad today. This is a holiday. It's Eid, and you have to celebrate. This is a carnival. This whole Ashura thing has turned into a carnival; and, you know, this whole superstitious and the religious beliefs is becoming -- is being promoted with these instruments. So I think that's one of the things that needs to be stopped at some point.

MR. BAHARI: And the other thing I think we should say is that most Turks still have no idea what happened during the Ottoman Empire, and most Iranians don't know exactly what happened during the Ottoman -- during the Achaemenid Empire and the Persian Empire. They had this idea of a vast empire being a superpower, and they like it, you know. So it's the same thing. You know, they are nostalgic about something that is abstract, that they don't know anything about.

[00:39:40]

It's the same thing with many nations, many countries. And, you know, politicians, demagogues, they use that in different senses, like what Hitler did in Germany. He used an idea. He used a number of myths in order to create a political movement. And what Ahmadinejad is doing and Mashaei is doing by reviving the Iranian Islam or Persian Islam -- I mean, not like -- I don't want to say Hitler and Ahmadinejad in the same paragraph, but it's somehow similar.

MR. SADJADPOUR: In this town it's OK to make the comparison.

MR. BAHARI: Exactly. These are two demagogues who are using mythology in order to have political gain.

MR. SADJADPOUR: No, that's absolutely right, these kind of nationalist myths. The comedian Maz Jobrani likes to say that Iran once had an empire. Now it has a condominium. (Laughter.)

[00:40:34]

Let me ask one more question for you before handing it over to the audience. And this touches upon a question which was asked this morning about the Arab spring and why did the Arab spring succeed but the, quote-unquote, "Aryan spring," the Persian spring or the Iranian spring, didn't manage to, at least in 2009.

And I always find it interesting reading Balatarin and other Persian-language sites that Iranians seem to look at what's happening in a country like Syria with great ambivalence.

On the one hand, there's awe at the courage of these people, that now close to 10,000 civilians have been killed, and yet they're still going out and protesting.

On the other hand, I think many people say, well, it's a lot easier to compel people to come out into the streets and get killed for the cause if they believe in martyrdom or they believe that they're dying for God, et cetera. But if you are a somewhat post-Islamist society and you're striving for some sort of democracy, it's a little more difficult to get people to get onto the streets and get killed or kill for the cause.

[00:41:43]

I guess my question is, you know, A, would you agree with that notion? And B, is there something that Iranians would be willing to die for now? Maybe, you know, it's -- I'm talking about in the domestic context, not in the case of a foreign invasion. But could you see some type of mass uprising in which Iranians are willing to sustain this level of civilian casualties in the thousands?

And why don't I start with Nazila.

MS. FATHI: No, I don't see that. I think, demographically, Iran is so different than any of these countries, and even politically. I think it's a big mistake to compare the 2009 uprising in Iran, call it a failure, because it did not manage to bring down Ahmadinejad's government or overthrow the regime and call what happened in Egypt a success.

I think they are different cases, people with different demands. In Iran, the 2009 uprising was completely spontaneous. It was -- and people came out with one demand. They wanted new elections. They didn't want Ahmadinejad as their president. They wanted to make it clear that they knew the election was stolen. They came out in huge numbers, in the millions. They were nonviolent. But they knew very well that there was no alternative.

[00:43:12]

I remember. I was in Tehran. And towards the end, even after the protests turned violent, people were asking each other, OK, so what? Even if we overthrow the regime, what is the alternative? What do we have to replace this regime with? And fears of institutional breakdown are very serious in Iran. That is because of the 1979 revolution and the eight years of war -- bloodshed, insecurity, instability. These are things that people want to stay away from.

And we're talking about a country that 70 percent of its population live in the cities. Those who are in the villages, even in very remote areas, they have children who go to universities in Tehran and other large cities. And these are the activists. Children of these peasants are the real activists in Iran. They go back to their homes with messages, with political messages.

So it's not that peasants in remote areas are not aware of what's happening in the city. They are also concerned about stability, about security, about some kind of leadership. So people will not come out in millions to overthrow the regime. That's one thing.

[00:44:22]

The other thing is that Iranian leadership was much more prepared to deal with street protests than the Egyptians. There was a cartoon that was circulating -- I think it was your cartoon -- that Ahmadinejad was sitting -- yes, it was your cartoon -- Ahmadinejad was sitting before Mubarak left office and he was on the phone with him, and he was telling him, how many times did I tell you to set up your own Basij force? (Laughter.) Egypt never had that militia force to defend the president. And this is a lesson that Khomeini learned after the revolution, when the army turned its back against the shah.

And the third element, which Syria also lacks, is the oil money. The Iranian regime has oil money, and that money has been distributed in Iranian society. When you look at poverty line, Iranians are much better off economically than people in Syria or in Egypt. And when people have things that they care for, they don't want to risk it. They don't want to lose that.

So we are talking about very, very different countries. In Syria, about 50 percent of the population lives in the cities; in Iran, over 70 percent. In Iran, over -- I have to disagree with Nikahang here. I firmly believe that Internet users in Iran build up a huge population now. About 50 percent of Iranians are on the Internet. When I was in Tehran, the Basijis, they all were on Internet.

[00:45:55]

So if they are the ones that want to be integrated in this global culture, you can imagine that a lot of other secularists are also involved. In Syria, it's only 20 percent; less than 20 percent. And in Egypt, even though there were all these talks about technology and how the revolution was built upon technology, the number was much less than in Iran.

So we're talking about a population that is very much isolated, but in its own virtual way is integrated in a much larger global culture. And they don't want to die. I mean, look at the conversation that went on in February 2010 before the last big demonstration. People were talking about it very seriously. Why should we go out and get killed? For what? Who's going to build a democracy? We have to be there to build something from bottom up.

So I don't think that Iranians will come out in massive numbers to overthrow the regime or to stage a revolution. Days of revolution are over for Iranians. They'd prefer to move slowly, bring about grassroots changes, and even put up with people like Khamenei.

[00:47:02]

MR. SADJADPOUR: I'll pose this to Arash and Maziar. I agree very much with what Nazila said, but then it seems we're basically at a dead end, because, on one hand, people have reached the conclusion that the system can't be reformed from within, but they don't have the stomach for some type of a violent revolution.

There's a saying I will hear over and over again from Iranians, which is – (in Persian) – 'you can't wash blood with blood.' So, I mean, what's – how do you see us getting out of this dead end or Iranians getting out of this dead end?

MR. SOBHANI: Well, I think it's obvious that people of Iran want change. Some of our friends, they hijack that idea and they translate it into reform. I don't think that's the case. I think people want a change, and they've showed they're willing to do stuff for it. But since the upper middle class was in forefront of this whole protest, this whole movement, well, they're not willing to sacrifice that much, because they have things to lose.

[00:48:06]

At a certain point, this will start putting pressure on the lower classes, as in the case of, I think, in the Arab countries. And then there will be bloodshed. There will be change at a greater cost. So it's just, you know, people want change. There's going to be change. It's just a question of who's going to pick up the tab when -- you know, when the time comes.

So I think we should all realize that and we should not judge just the upper middle class as the representatives of Iran. The Ahmadinejad government, I think, has succeeded in spending the oil money in silencing the rural areas and, you know, people who are not demanding political freedom as much as the upper middle class. But this is going to end. And when it ends, it's going to be ugly. And I hope that before that, something else happens and this changes it more -- you know, less costly.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Do you agree with that, Maziar?

[00:49:06]

MR. BAHARI: I have to agree with some of the things that Nazila said and Arash said. And, I mean, I think of this regime like someone who has jumped off a skyscraper and as he approaches, you know, the ground says so far, so good; so far, so good.

MR. SADJADPOUR: It is a he.

MR. BAHARI: Yeah, it is a he, because there are no she. And, you know, I don't think that this regime can survive with the policies that it has. But the skyscraper is so high because of the oil money, because the government is sitting on rich natural resources. It's not the oil money. It's the gas money. It's other national resources. And Iran can use its geopolitical situation.

So it is a very rich government. And, you know, Ahmadinejad said that we have dollars for the next two years even if we cannot sell our oil. So maybe he's telling the truth; maybe not. Who knows? But the fact is that it's a rich country. But I think there are two main differences between what is happening in Iran and in Arab -- in some -- like in Egypt or in Tunisia, where I was last year, last September.

[00:50:22]

One thing is that, as Nazila said, people approach any kind of change in Iran with trepidation. They don't want a sudden change, because they saw that in 1979 and they saw that, you know, it can bring chaos and something even worse than before.

But also, something that a lot of opposition members are shy to talk about is the fact that Khamenei, as a person, is much smarter than Mubarak and -- what was his name?

MR. SADJADPOUR: Ben Ali.

MR. BAHARI: Ben Ali. And, you know, Khamenei -- and also, he's somehow learned from the mistakes of the shah and Reza Shah, that he knew that, especially since 1998, when the student uprisings happened, he knew that he needed a group of people who are willing to die for him and who are willing to kill for him at the same time.

And as they say that, you know, if you have a military might, you don't have to go into a war, he knows that if you have a bunch of people who are willing to kill for you, then people don't come out and get killed. So he has this group of people.

[00:51:39]

But Mubarak, because of his personal corruption, Ben Ali because of his personal corruption, could not have people who would die for him. Khamenei has created this image of him as this island of stability and cleanness in a sea of dirt and instability; that, you know, if I'm taken away, then the whole thing, you know, engulfs. A lot of people believe that. I think it's wrong. I don't think that you can be a clean leader. You cannot be a good leader in a chaotic, dirty situation. But that is the image that many people believe in. And many of our reformist friends, they believe in that as well. I mean, that's why they tried to reach a compromise with Khamenei.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Let me hand it over to all of you. I'll take -- I'll try to take two rounds of questions. I'll bunch together three at once. And please try to be as concise as possible and introduce yourself.

Gary, please, in the front. A microphone will come.

[00:52:44]

Q: Thanks. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report.

And I was just thinking that this is only the second thing on Iran this week at Carnegie that I've been to. And when Suzanne was moderating her panel, I was thinking, the last two or three weeks I've been to three Iran panels that Suzanne has been doing at three different institutions, and as a result of which I'm thinking about a couple of phrases that came out of years of going to Iran. And I want to put those out and see whether they still have some saliency.

It has been said in certain of these sessions, going back a number of years, that the Iranians don't want regime change. They want the regime to change. They've had their

revolution. They're not looking forward to another one. Second -- and I'm skipping around -- it is said that Khomeini sought legitimacy in the barracks, not in the mosque.

[00:53:46]

MR. SADJADPOUR: Khamenei.

Q: Khamenei. I'm sorry. And so when I think about the prospects for the kind of change that I think a number of us think about, I think less about the Arab spring and I think more about the models of China and Russia, and that the thing that I'm struck by is that Deng Xiaoping made some conscious decisions to modernize, from an economic point of view, to keep the republic healthy. Decisions in Russia were of a different sort, and the collapse was really an economic one.

And so my question is, if there is to be something on the order of grand change in Iran, what is most apt to be the source of it? And is it, for example, that oil will, you know, be priced at \$20 a barrel? Is it -- it's some of these social and cultural factors that you've been talking about today. I'm just interested to see, of the people who think about this, where they think the most likely catalyst for change is apt to come from.

[00:55:22]

MR. SADJADPOUR: Thank you. Let me go in the back in the middle there, please.

Q: Hi. Susannah from POMED, the Project for Middle East Democracy. When listening to you, I do -- I'm a -- I have a little bit of a -- a little bit of concern of how very simple and seemingly inevitable the Arab Spring, particularly the Egyptian revolution, seems when, by no means was it.

I spent four-and-a-half years, between 2004 and 2011 in Egypt, and there were a number of failed revolutions. But no one, on January 24, thought the revolution was going to happen, and they didn't think it on the 25th or the 26th or the 27th. It was the 28th that really made some -- a lot of Egyptians believe that there was something possible.

And -- but I still agree with what was said earlier, that change comes from within, and in many ways, we won't be able to control that; we can't sort of throw dice in a certain direction and hope that it lands on a revolution or extreme reform. But can -- but at the same time, security concerns from an outside have a way of numbing opposition in countries.

[00:56:38]

Is there a way that the U.S. can help to try and -- to not instigate this kind of fall-in-line security concerns?

MR. SADJADPOUR: Thank you. Nikahang, please. In the front, please.

Q: Thank you. Probably this question will be for all of you. Basically, you guys have been in touch with people inside the country after leaving Iran. But it's getting harder and harder for people to be participating in social movements and even entering social networks -- virtual social networks.

But something that actually happened in Egypt and was very powerful were real social networks working close to virtual social networks. So how do you think real social networks, or traditional social networks could be empowered, and how could people outside the country help people inside the country, even through the Internet, to teach them how to use real techniques?

MR. SADJADPOUR: Good questions. If you guys can be brief, we can do another round after this. Why don't I start with Arash.

MR. SOBHANI: Yeah, I think I'm going to just give one answer to all of these four questions at once. (Chuckles.)

First of all, I think we don't want happened in Egypt to repeat in Iran. And I don't call it Arab Spring, I think. And the other thing is that I think we have real -- we're losing time; it's a race against time. It's the benefit of all the countries in the world, like -- I should say except North Korea or Syria or, you know, the axis of whatever -- that we see a regime change in Iran sooner than later.

[00:58:29]

And how can we expedite that? I think there are ways that, in case of Arab Spring that you mentioned that there were revolutions before that, the U.S. government and the West, they kind of -- you know, they pulled back and they just let it fall. Same as '79 Iran. I think that -- they didn't do that in the 2009 uprising in Iran. So -- I don't know if I --

MR. SADJADPOUR: Well -- go ahead. Go ahead.

MR. BAHARI: Yeah. I mean, in answer to your question regarding China, Russia and the similarities to Iran, I think that the Iranian -- the people at the helm of the Iranian regime right now, they would love to be in a situation like China or Russia, to be superpowers that can dictate democracy change, whatever, on their own terms to the United States and the West.

[00:59:18]

But Iran is not a superpower. It's not a small power but it's not a superpower. So I don't think that the changes that happened in China and Russia can happen in Iran. And that is actually a national complex, but also it's a complex that the people in the regime have, that, you know, they think that they are superpowers but they're not. So they have to really understand that they cannot -- and that is something -- and Iran always reminds me of -- I

don't know how many of you follow British football, West Bromwich Albion. It's a -- it's a team in the Premier League that always relegated to the second, you know, league and then comes back to this. So it's like the West Bromwich Albion of the nations -- that, you know, it is not a superpower. So I think that is the answer to your question, and Iran needs different kinds of changes that we don't have time to talk about it now.

In terms of what Nikahang said and what you said in terms of what the U.S. government can do -- and I think that's what U.S. government can do is something that will make a lot of people happy, like Nikahang and myself and others is to invest in means of communication, invest in free flow of information within Iran and from Iran to outside of Iran and outside of Iran to Iran.

The U.S. government can invest in a lot of things. One of the main things is satellite Internet, something that the -- it's -- only the U.S. government and maybe the U.S. military can do that. And if someone comes and calculate the cost benefits of having a navy ship and, you know, building a satellite, you know, Internet, I'm sure it is -- it is very difficult because of legal challenges and every -- but if there is a will, they can do that, they can manage something like that.

Easier than that is to manage VOA, which we have representatives here. I mean, Henry Wooster was here and was talking about Facebook having 60,000 followers, Twitter having 20,000 followers. Voice of America Persian can potentially influence and affect millions of people in Iran, 20 million, 30 million, 40 million people in Iran, eventually, 80 million people in Iran. And for -- but it is just a wasted opportunity. It is irrelevant, it is inefficient, it is badly managed, it is -- it does -- has a content that no one really cares about. And they look at the BBC in order to, you know, improve themselves. And I think that is something that the U.S. government can do.

[1:02:10]

It is -- again, it's not an easy challenge. It -- maybe they have to fire a number of people, they have to restructure it -- I don't know what it is, but it's not impossible to do. So I think things like the Twitter account and Facebook have virtual limits. They're nice. You know, it's good to have that, but they don't have that much of an influence. So I think the real investment that the U.S. government -- and that will really benefit the American people, American taxpayers, American government because they are creating allies in Iran, those people who are being exposed to those -- that information, they are the best allies that the U.S. government can have in the future.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Nazila.

MS. FATHI: I'm going to try to merge the answers -- two answers. I -- by no means I was trying to simplify what happened in Egypt; it certainly was something that was

long in process. I just meant that Iran and Egypt and Tunisia and Syria, they're all different countries, different goals, different values, and it's totally different time and demographics.

[1:03:23]

And just to go back what Nikahang said, I don't think change in Iran would come without real social networking on the ground. Iranian revolution wouldn't have been possible if workers at the oil refineries hadn't gone on strike. That was the final blow to the Shah.

In Egypt, workers at the Suez Channel even went on strike. The unions, teachers, they all became united in Iran. That has never happened. And we are way -- far away behind from that. Regarding your question, I think there was a time that we thought or we hoped that the Iranian leaders are going the Chinese way, that they're going to make some economic compromises, give some political liberties but keep the system there.

But I think that the tide turned against them in 2009, and they showed that they had no intention of going that way. I have no doubt that this regime is going to fall one day, and it's not going to be very far away. And that -- it was in 2009 when the majority of people came to this conclusion that this regime is not going to be reformed. But they don't want to go out there and have an uprising or a bloody revolution, make sacrifices. I think we're going the Russian way now of 1989. This regime is so rotten from inside, economically, politically. The price of loyalty has gone up, and without windfall, oil revenues, I wonder how the Iranian regime is going to maintain that. There was a time that I remember, the leaders were saying in early 2000 that they could buy loyalty with 10,000 toman, which was like about \$10 back then. But now it's over millions. Ahmadinejad kept giving the oil money out so generously that a lot of these people are not willing to make any sacrifices for the regime if they're not paid well.

[01:05:20]

I think the regime is going to just fall apart from within. Two of the very awful examples are how the regime has been rewarding its very, very loyal commanders -- (name inaudible) -- and Rezaei -- these guys were commanders of the Revolutionary Guards, two very, very loyal force to the regime. And both commanders had made very serious sacrifices during the war. I mean, they liberated two Iranian provinces practically with human shields. And how were they rewarded? Both of them lost their children just recently in the past three years. So I have no doubt that this regime is going the Russian way. It will crumble. It will fall apart.

[01:06:10]

MR. SADJADPOUR: I'm going to take two last questions and then hopefully three brief answers. Mehrdad had a question. Did you – do you still have a question? Yeah, please.

Q: First, I want to thank you, Karim, and Carnegie Endowment. This is such a thought-provoking panel. Thanks to the panelists. I guess I just want to briefly touch on two concept that were discussed. Number one is the concept of change – regime change versus the reform. And I agree with the last comment Nazila made. I think we cannot define the – what the population demands because there is no way to measure that; there is no survey, no public opinion survey, nothing like that.

But I think – and the regime change is something that will happen during the process of any uprising movement. For example, in the '79 revolution, it wasn't a revolution against an entire regime from the very beginning. In the summer of '78 the demands were completely within the frame of constitutional change. They wanted the king to be the king, not to have the power, and free elections and so on. But during the process that – those demands change. And it turned out to topple the entire system. And that pattern may happen without anybody noticing if there is – if there is such uprising.

[01:17:31]

But the second one is the balance between the religion – if I may make a comment on the second issue – it's the balance between the religion and the culture and politics in Iran, which I think during the last century we were not fortunate enough to have a balanced relationship between the two. We had at some point a very progressive or modern government, which at least at the very – at the personal level, they were very behind the average person in the society when it comes to – they very secular when it comes to religion.

And on the other hand, it changed to having Khomeini or the Islamic government which was, as Mehri has mentioned, was way behind the average Iranian. So we didn't have that balance over the century. And I hope that perhaps if we can bring that balance in future, separate the religion from the politics – not culture, because it's not going away; it's not supposed to go away – but from the politics, and that then would resolve the issue of having people like Maziar's interrogator – they exist in every society, even United States, Canada and everywhere else. But they are not in the position of power. They are not in the interrogator's chair to persecute the freedom of expression and (other ?) individual. Thank you.

[01:18:50]

MR. SADJADPOUR: Thank you, Mehrdad. I wanted to get Bernard Hourcade, who's one of France's top experts on Iran – I will give him the final word. Please.

Q: Bernard Hourcade. I'm working in Paris and now in Wilson Center. And I do agree what was said about society. I see two major obstacles to democracy in Iran. One is sociological; the second one is geographical. We are speaking about the revolution '79. I was there in – (inaudible) – in Tehran, and we were surprised to see in the streets 1 million

of ladies coming from the south of Tehran, these black shadows – one million. They came back home safe.

[01:09:29]

Thirty years later Agha-Soltan was in the street, she was supported by Internet, and she was killed. So I am thinking about this cultural gap between an elite – it was Ambassador Toscano spoke about that this morning – the gap between an elite and the rest of the population. If we are focusing only on Internet or media, of course, it's part of elite. Ten million people, 20 million people on – 75 million – (inaudible) – in Iran would be following something else. But we have also to think about that. The cultural gap is amazing, especially with a new generation of the people born after revolution. And these people have never met a single foreigner in their life. Of course they knew exactly what's going on here in Carnegie or in California, because they are educated today.

[01:10:21]

And that's a second point, the geographical gap in Iran. In Iran there is no more than 2,000 foreigners living currently in Iran – 2,000, including engineers, diplomats, women and children. Because of sanctions, no foreign companies are working in Iran. But even in society that it was said, not in – even in the villages, they have got children trained at university. So they do exactly what is – (inaudible). They don't need from Internet. They don't need Voice of America, other things, to know what's happening in the world. They know that, but they cannot have the experience of that.

So my question is –Tehran is not Iran. And in Tehran the 2,000 foreigners are living there. And we are, all of us, in touch with these 2,000 people and their 5,000 friends who are in Tehran. And the gap between this city and the others is huge. So my question is – somebody spoke from the State Department this morning about the crash program in media, in Internet and so on, so forth. I do believe that it is counterproductive, and it will make several – (inaudible) – killed in the streets, and counterproductive.

[01:11:28]

Instead of having a crash program, to be in Iran physically. If you want to make a baby, you can get in touch with somebody through Internet, but at the end of the day you have to meet people physically. Now maybe we are in the time where it is necessary to find – not to speak to the Iranians through Internet, but to be in Iran – (inaudible).

MR. SADJADPOUR: Thank you, Bernard. I see you learned the Persian cultural tradition of verbosity as well. (Laughter.)

Arash, why don't you –

MR. SOBHANI: Well, I think being in Iran – when you say being in Iran, you mean opening up offices, embassies, things like that? Or –

Q: (Inaudible.)

[01:12:06]

MR. SOBHANI: OK. Well, you know, they know that the minute they open up, they going to fall down, that – Khamenei knows that. Khamenei is avoiding negotiations; he's avoiding to come to conclusions on the table, because he knows the minute the Americans or the Westerners start coming to Iran, that's the end of it. So he won't allow that – for that to happen. He's smarter than that. So you won't see that happening. We won't see that bringing change.

But what I'm – as a final word, I just want to say this. The order, the change in Iran either has to come from bottom to top, which we all agree that it's – Iranians are not going to pay the price, for various reasons – or from top to bottom. And how can we make that happen? I think that's the challenge.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Nazila.

[01:12:51]

MS. FATHI: I totally agree with you that presence is so different than all these virtual contacts. But as Arash said, I don't think it would be possible to have more foreigners or more Westerners on the ground in Iran. And just to go back to what Maziar said, I'm a believer in technology. And I think what technology has done for Iranian society wouldn't have been possible without it. I mean, just look at the discourse. The discourse that is out there is shaped by technology.

Iran was one of the earliest countries in the region that had satellite TV and Internet. And you know, people who brought it – it was Javad Larijani, one of the most prominent conservative figures, who brought Internet to Iran. I had email in '92. Internet was still expensive, but you could have email. And it was on the Internet that people started writing about – Omid was writing on his weblog. These messages were picked up by satellite TV and amplified into the country.

[001:13:53]

I'm sorry; I believe people in remote areas are connected. I went to very remote areas. I went to Zabol, near the border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, in a sandstorm. The only visible modern equipment were satellite dishes. So when I listen to BBC Persian or VOA Persian and I hear people calling from Birjand, I believe it. People are connected. There are lots of them watching these programs.

And the discourse – I was asking Medhi Yahyanejad about some of the conversation that was going on in February 2010 on Balatarin, because those conversations were historical. People were debating before the last big demonstrations whether we should go out on the streets and make sacrifices or whether they should stay home and start build more serious discussions. The discourse is already there. And this is very important, I think, for a society that saw change through violence just a decade before. In – during the protests in '99, people were saying we should go out there and kill. This was not the discourse in 2009,

and it was possible because of technology, satellite TV and Internet. And Americans are not – we – I don't think Iranians want Americans on the ground or any kind of help. They just don't want to make communication more difficult for them. And the sanctions have made it very, very complicated.

[01:15:24]

Iranians cannot even buy Skype credits to speak on safe lines. Iranians cannot get the satellite Internet that is over Iranian skies because of the sanctions. So I mean, if Americans just lift some of these restrictions, it would make things easier for Iranians.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Last word to Maziar, who has an incentive to be brief because you have a flight to catch to London.

MR. BAHARI: Exactly. (Laughter.) Well, his question was not that brief; so I will have to –

MR. SADJADPOUR: That's right. Please.

MR. BAHARI: – extend my brevity a little bit. I think what you're saying in terms of the elite being – you know, having a gap with the masses of people is true. And when we look at the revolution in 1979, as they say, it was the revolution of the oppressed, "Mostaz'afin." And it is true that at that time the gap between the elite of the society – I'm not talking about the rulers; I'm talking about the intellectuals, I'm talking about people like Mehrangiz – and the masses, it was very wide – the gap between.

[01:16:23]

But through education, through politicization of the clerics, through especially satellite television and the Internet, this gap narrowed and narrowed. And that's why the government became afraid of people like Mehrangiz, who could work and say – I mean, what she was saying in 1992, '96 and 2000 was not that different; but in 2000 she had more influence on the masses. Shirin Ebadi had more influence on the masses. And that's why they had to drive these people out, because the government is worried about this narrowing gap between the elite and the masses.

And I think Nazila is right, that the Internet is all over Iran. Maybe in some small village close to Zabol, they don't – not every person in the village has the Internet. But there is one person who has the Internet, and they get – you know, they get a lot of – government – actually the government asks people to get a lot of information from the Internet – the government information.

[01:17:33]

But also they get other kinds of information, from the BBC, from Radio Farda and others. So I think you're right in terms of the – that narrowing gap that is happening in Iran, and it is really frightening the government. And if the U.S. government and especially the

West – and especially the U.S. government – wants to have a peaceful transition in Iran, they have to narrow this gap as much as possible through investing in free flow of information.

MR. SADJADPOUR: Thank you to Arash, to Maziar, to Nazila. Thank you all for coming. And salutations to the Pourzand family.

MS. FATHI: Thank you. (Applause.)

[01:18:21]

(END)