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'The Case for Democracy'

#### SUMMARY

Natan Sharansky, author of "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror," talks about the influence his book seems to be having on the Bush administration.

#### Transcript

RAY SUAREZ: The author is Natan Sharansky. The book is "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror." It's Sharansky's argument for spreading democracy and against appeasing dictators and tyrants.

In it, Mr. Sharansky draws heavily on lessons learned in part during his time as an Israeli cabinet minister and during his nine-year ordeal as a political prisoner in the Soviet Union. Since his 1986 release from prison, he's lived in Israel, where he's now minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs.

He joins us now to talk about the book. And maybe we can begin by having you explain your basic theory. What's a fear society and what's a free society?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, I propose here town square tests, which goes straight from my experience in Soviet prison, where you share your cell with different people with different views: Russian, Ukrainian nationalists, a priest from Lithuania, a Christian from Siberia, and so on.

And they all want to live in different types of societies, but they all want to live in society where they are not punished for their views. So I call it town square test.

If you can go in the center of the town square and you can express your views and you will not be punished for this, so you live in a free society. If you are punished for this, if you are afraid to express your views, you live in a fear society.

RAY SUAREZ: So in your view, the Cold War was basically a confrontation between one really big powerful fear society and one big powerful free society?

NATAN SHARANSKY: It was a lot of fear societies on one side, led of course by big fear society of the Soviet Union, and some free societies on the other side and some fear societies on the other side.

Not everybody in the West was a free society. But, yes, mainly it was the competition, the confrontation between fear societies of the communist regime and free societies of the West.

RAY SUAREZ: You had an interesting criticism for how the United States handled itself in its confrontation with the Soviet Union. You say the United States wasn't tough enough?

NATAN SHARANSKY: It's not only the question of tough or not tough. It's the question of moral clarity. Whether you understand that your security in the long run always depends on the freedom of the other countries.

That if -- you cannot really make a serious deal with dictator and hope that it will guarantee your stability, because while democracies are basically peaceful-- the leaders of the democracies have war as the last possible choice-- dictatorships are belligerent.

Dictators need external enemy to keep control over their own people, and that's why appeasing all the dictators is always in the end dangerous for the free world. That's why the policy of appeasing dictators, whether in the form of appeasement of Hitler in Germany or whether in the form of Détente with the Soviet Union, was always dangerous for the free world.

And that was why criticism of the United States of America, that sometimes they succeeded to make linkage between human rights and security, as in the end of the Cold War, their confrontation with the Soviet Union, Jackson's amendment and the Helsinki agreement and Reagan's evil empire, and so on, and it was very successful.

And sometimes they failed to do it. They support what they call our "friendly dictators," like Saudi Arabia, for example. And there they pay a very heavy price for this.

RAY SUAREZ: In the case of the Soviet Union, this was a rival, a country that you were -- that the United States was in confrontation with. It also had a very large nuclear arsenal. Are the rules different when your opponent is not only somebody who you oppose philosophically but somebody who can be dangerous?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, the case of Soviet Union shows that the one who is the most dangerous opponent. But if it is dictatorship, it means it's a very weak society from inside because it spends all its energy for controlling its own citizens.

You can use this weakness and link your policy to this country with the question of human rights and destroy -- not destroy it, to help the society to fall from inside by expressing open solidarity with dissidents, by linking any type of assistance or cooperation with this country with the equation of human rights. You can win without one shot, without sending one soldier there.

RAY SUAREZ: So a little less compromise, a little less appeasement, a little higher standards, is that what you're saying, in your relationships with these opponents?

NATAN SHARANSKY: No appeasement at all. Compromise when it is absolutely necessary for your own security survival, and the clear linkage between human rights and international relations, clear understanding that your security depends on the freedom of those people.

That it's not important how these leaders of that country treat you; It's important how the leaders of that country treat their own people, because democracy which hates you is much better than dictator who loves you.

RAY SUAREZ: But can any country choose what its enemies decide to do? Can any country require certain things of its enemies?

NATAN SHARANSKY: No, but of course you cannot demand from the other country what kind of regime they will choose or the leaders. But if that country needs your support, if it wants to get your assistance, to get your money, to get your technology, to get your cooperation, you can put conditions.

And these conditions have to be connected not with the fact how you treat me but how you treat your own people. It's important to understand this problem that we cannot impose democracy, it's a strange thing. Yes, of course you cannot impose democracy, you cannot force people to be free, but you can impose dictatorship.

And you are very often imposing dictatorship by supporting dictators, by supporting the dictators because you believe it's good for your security and that's why you support or impose the dictator, or help to impose dictatorship on the other people. Then it's bad for those people but it's also bad for your security.

RAY SUAREZ: The president of the United States has been recommending your book; the secretary of state has been recommending your book. In a recent speech, she even used the town square example that you gave us. Has the United States recently been following the advice contained in your argument?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Two things have to happen. First of all, the leaders, politicians have to step up to this principle about the difference between fear societies and free societies. You understand that you cannot have reliable partner and you cannot guarantee a stable peace by strengthening fear societies.

And that did happen. The president of the United States of America made this, I would say, almost revolutionary change by saying in his speech, our security depends on their liberty. Freedom somewhere is good for stability everywhere.

And while I don't really remember the exact the formula of what was in my book and what was in his speech, but this idea was stated very clearly. Now we have to move to practical policy towards each country, to connect it with practical steps, whether it is about your enemies or whether it is about your friends.

A lot has to be done. It will not be easy because it is not an idea which is popular. For a long time I felt myself almost a dissident, this time not in a Soviet prison, but in my own country, in my own government. I'm glad now that I am not the only dissident. I'm glad now that the leader of the free world is such a dissident.

RAY SUAREZ: Well, let's talk a little bit more about your country, Israel. Yesterday your prime minister was with the president of Egypt, with the new head of the Palestinian Authority talking about peace between Israel and Palestine. Is Israel following your advice and demanding more, asking more of the Palestinians?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, first of all, of course I'm very glad that we are sitting and talking and discussing and having our summit that wasn't possible in the last few years. No doubt that the change of the leadership is giving the reason for new optimism.

At the same time it's very cautious optimism. I'll tell you why from my point. If you saw at yesterday's summit, they will talk about security. They will talk about Palestinian state. There was almost no connection with democratic reforms.

And if we learn some lesson from the past, from the so-called Oslo peace process, it is that you cannot build peace process on support of a dictatorship. You cannot hope that strong dictator like Yasser Arafat will fight, and I quote, he will fight the Hamas, the terrorists without restrictions of democracy better than we can do. That was a mistake.

Today we have to embrace new leadership, only as this new leadership embraces democratic reforms. Is there a chance for this? Yes. But we in the free world have to be very firm in this linkage.

RAY SUAREZ: Natan Sharansky, thanks for being with us.

NATAN SHARANSKY: Thank you very much.