



The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror

Natan Sharansky, Ron Dermer

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Natan Sharansky, the famous Soviet dissident who spent a decade in gulags, has authored his vision for defeating terrorists worldwide: launching a flood of democratic initiatives, especially in totalitarian regimes. This book, which gained the attention of President Bush and his administration, outlines Sharansky's strategies - based on personal experience - for making the world a safer place.

The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror Details

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Gary says

Natan Sharansky knows more about resisting tyranny than most, having been incarcerated in a prison of one of history's greatest tyrannies-the Soviet Union, as he illustrated in his incredible memoirs *Fear No Evil: The Classic Memoir of One Man's Triumph over a Police State*

In this book he puts under the microscope the totalitarian states of the world, dissecting the inner workings of fear societies.

Sharansky contrasts fear societies with free societies. The profound moral difference between a free society and a fear society, as Sharansky shows us, is that people in free societies can publicly express their own ideas and persuade people to accept these ideas as well.

Sharansky points out that "moral clarity provides us with a place to stand, a reference point from where to leverage our talents, energies and ideas to create a better world. Without moral clarity, without a reference point, those same talents, ideas and energies are just as likely to do harm as good...A world without moral clarity is a world in which dictators speak of human rights even as they kill thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, tens of millions, even hundreds of millions of people. It is a world in which the only democracy in the Middle East is perceived as the greatest violator of human rights in the world. It is a world in which a human rights conference against racism, such as the one that took place in Durban, South Africa a few years ago, can be turned into a carnival of hate".

Sharansky reminds us that there has never been a war between two democracies. He attacks those who believe that democracy cannot work in certain countries, pointing out that the same was said about Germany and Japan during and just after the Second World War. Today Germany and Japan are among the world's strongest democracies and human rights societies in the world.

Sharansky also condemns the distortions by the world media, painting the masses in tyrannies such as that of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the Taliban in Afghanistan, as being contented. He compares this to leftist intellectuals in the West who praised the Soviet Union as a paradise on earth at a time when Stalin was killing tens of millions of men, women and children.

While Sharansky is hopeful for an eventual peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs, he is adamant that this must be tied to improvements in human rights and basic freedoms in Palestinian society. He condemns the Oslo Process for strengthening and attempting to appease the mass murderer and tyrant Yasser Arafat and his ruthless terror network.

He points out how the human rights principles that once guided him in the Soviet Union remain the cornerstone of his approach to the peace process, that a neighbour who tramples the rights of his own people will eventually threaten the rights of the author's people, and that the only way to create Arab-Israeli reconciliation is to press the Arab world to protect human rights.

Sharansky reminds us that those who hoped for a quick fix to the conflict should not have been surprised when the Oslo process collapsed and Arafat began his war of terror against the Israeli people. For seven years Arafat had been doing what all dictators do, using his power not to promote peace and better the lot of the Palestinian Arabs but rather to turn the Palestinian Arabs into a battering ram against the Jewish State. Money allocated to improve the Palestinian Arab's living standards was diverted to support a vast network of terror.

"By allowing and often encouraging Arafat to create a fear society, a peace process that should have been steadily reducing a century old animus had instead exacerbated it".

Sharansky stresses that he is not opposed to legitimate criticism of Israel's policies. However to distinguish legitimate criticism from anti-Semitism he has come up with what he calls the 3 D Test. If the criticism of Israel contains demonization of the Jewish State, double standards against the Jewish State, or delegitimization of the Jewish State, then it certainly can be termed anti-Semitic.

Sharansky believes that the war between the Jews and the Arabs is not a tribal war but a part of the first world war of the 21st century between the world of democracy and the world of terror.

Leftwing extremists who support tyranny and terror and who do not want people to be free, will of course try to rubbish the book.

But for true lovers of freedom and human rights, this is an essential guide to understanding the great struggle we are faced with at the beginning of the 21st century.

Gyoza says

Natan Sharansky, an erstwhile political prisoner in the Soviet Union, writes about how to accurately tell a free society from a "fear" society (one in which people do not enjoy basic liberties and are kept in check by their leaders through fear of punishment). He makes a good case for why it is in the interest of free societies to conduct their foreign policy in such a way as to link benefits granted to fear societies with requirements that the fear society reform its domestic practices.

Fear societies tend to be poorer and less innovative than free ones, so they often need aid, technology, and other things from free societies, but two of the ways they keep their population in check is 1) to distribute the benefits received so as to keep their population dependent on the dictator's good graces and 2) to present the free society to their people as an enemy in order to produce a state of internal solidarity and hostility against it (as if there were a war going on). Appeasement of dictators is therefore counterproductive as it leads to a vicious circle of increasing their power, aggravating tensions between the countries, and further appeasement by the free society.

It was particularly interesting to read this book shortly after George Kennan's *At a Century's Ending: Reflections, 1982-1995* because Kennan has a more traditional view on foreign policy, i.e. stay out of other countries' domestic policy and just concern yourself with their foreign policy. Sharansky uses the relations between the US and USSR during the Cold War and the (seemingly endless) Israeli-Palestinian peace process as examples to illustrate why the traditional approach doesn't work when dealing with fear societies.

Sean Rife says

Good, but a bit overly simplistic and somewhat intellectually lacking.

Dottie Resnick says

I listened to this book, not just once, but twice. It was that good and I still do not think I got out of it as much as I can. Natan Sharansky finished this book in 2005 and although I would really like to hear what he thinks

about the world and how things have progressed since he completed this, I can tell you that it is as pertinent today (IF NOT MORE SO) than it was then.

He was held in a Soviet prison as a Jewish dissident, and supposed American spy for years. During Reagan's term as President he was released and as since lived in Israel. His ideas about a free society versus a fear society, where one can go into the public square and speak freely and openly without fear of being arrested, imprisoned, tortured or hurt by the government or others. I have my doubts that many citizens of the world would be comfortable in that scenario either due to their government or even their fellow citizens. It is scary to think that in America people are shot at nightclubs because it is known as a "gay nightclub" or that people are attacked in Israel because they are not the "same level of observant Jew" as someone else or that people are rounded up (or kidnapped) because they are "outsiders" for whatever reason, race, religion, sexual orientation, political convictions, you name it.

This book has certainly given me a lot to think about and I think that it should definitely be recommended reading for all people, especially politicians and people anyone who has the power or desire to make changes in our world. There is no magic formula, but if we can get more people to think in this way, maybe it can make a difference.

Joseph Stieb says

A frustrating and simplistic book by a guy who is personally inspiring. Sharansky's main argument is essentially a less nuanced version of the democratic peace theory: democratic leaders rely on popular will to stay in power, and the people do not want wars, so democracies go to war less often. He overlooks that the democratic peace is really about democracies not fighting each other, and doesn't really offer any evidence beyond single cases for his argument. He also puts forth a "Reagan and Scoop Jackson" won the Cold War without much serious engagement with the social/economic problems of the USSR or the reforms of Gorbachev. The lesson, then, is that democratic societies can never create lasting agreements with "fear-societies" (code for totalitarians, as intermediate forms don't exist in this argument) because they need foreign enemies to justify domestic oppression. Instead, they must always link concessions or incentives given to these societies to democratization and human rights improvements within that society. Just because this worked in the USSR, doesn't mean it can work everywhere. Sharansky also simplistically claims that that a free people will never choose authoritarianism. Not only does this overlook a vast sweep of historical examples, but it also runs up against the rising wave of right-wing authoritarians in the world today, many of whom were democratically elected.

The bulk of the book is actually about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Sharansky has lived in Israel since the 1990's and is a conservative in the Knesset. I appreciate many of his arguments about how criticism of Israel is absolutely unreasonable in many circles, and I think he's on to something in arguing that without democratic reform in Palestine there can't be lasting peace. He's right to say that Arafat has been a terrible partner for peace, that he and the PA did nothing to reform Palestine or stop terrorism and anti-IS propaganda, and that many Israelis and Americans pushed the peace process too far even when it was clear that Arafat was not reciprocating. However, he also ignores the extent to which Israeli policies, especially the settlements (which are basically not mentioned in this book) contribute to the ongoing stalemate. Either he's being dishonest or simplistic here (I felt that way throughout most of the book).

PS: One can see why George W. Bush gravitated to this book as he put together the "freedom agenda" policy in 2004 as IQ started to go downhill. The book is self-righteous and lacks critical thinking or complexity.

Sound familiar? Be careful of this book: Sharansky is an inspirational person who I think means well, but it may be that his experiences have made him too much of a moral absolutist. Or maybe he's just bringing out the Mearsheimer in me. Still, this is a good book for scholars of Neo-conservatives, human rights, democracy, and totalitarianism.

David Veloz says

A short book that deserves...

Some consideration today. Natan Sharansky wrote this book in the mid 2000's when the focus of American and Israeli policy was to promote democratization in the Middle East. Fast forward to 2016 and with the failures of the Arab spring, the raging civil war in Syria, the chaos in Libya, and Iraq teetering on the edge of disunity, Israel becoming more rigid on the peace process, and worse of all the rise of ISIS, anyone who reads this book could easily dismiss Sharansky as a naïve human rights activist from the cold war years gone by. But the genius of this book is that the issue of democratization today, not just in the Middle East but around the world, is growing in importance. Fear societies, societies Sharansky describes as repressive of basic fundamental rights which make a democracy possible are on the rise today. From Russia to Asia fear societies have openly called into question the need for democracy, and are actively undermining the democratic world order. In free societies, those societies Sharansky describes as those which protect fundamental rights that make democracy possible, there has been a growing acceptance of fear, and the morality of fear societies. The acceptance of fear societies as moral equals is chipping away at the democratic foundations on which free societies rest. I don't need to spend time talking about a certain presidential candidate whose whole campaign is based on fear or the Russian autocrat that is actively undermining free societies in western Europe; and the lack of belief in the democratic hopes of the people in Syria, Libya and other societies of the Middle East that genuinely yearn for democratic change but which were instead abandoned when they mostly needed the aid of free societies. The book has its flaws since Sharansky doesn't develop a more nuanced theory as to the importance of democracy overall and instead spends too much time examining and explaining away controversial Israeli policies. But overall it is a powerful defense of democracy and democratic societies. In today's world this book should be read again and again.

Tom says

To be honest, I couldn't finish this book (I read more than half). While I agree totally with the author's point(s) I just got tired of reading his self-adulation (if that's even a word).

Douglas says

There is no doubt one may disagree with Natan Sharansky's approach or political ideology as a means; however, one who is adamantly a supporter of democracy cannot argue against Sharansky's end: democracy promotes freedom and security. And except for megalomaniacs, the majority of people in the world crave freedom. Sharansky calls for all democratic nations and peoples to reclaim a much needed quality and characteristic for all humanity: the need for moral clarity. We must listen to a prophet's voice!

'Izzat Radzi says

Updated May 5th :

Kalau hendak dibaca buku bagaimana polisi Israel—atau sekurang-kurangnya apa dalam kepala rejim US dan sekutunya Israel- dibuat, bacalah buku ini. Kalau tidak, tidaklah buku ini disarankan oleh salah seorang pembunuhan besar-besaran, bekas presiden George W. Bush. Meskipun sangat ‘berasap kepala’ setiap kali penulis ini –yang merupakan politikus parti politik Israel, Yisrael Ba’aliyah Party selain pernah menjawat jawatan Menteri- cuba memperkakaskan prinsip ‘demokrasi’ dan ‘kebebasan’ namun sebenarnya, seperti kita selalu maklum, dalam definisi cita-cita imperialism. Saya pasti anda biasa dengar ayat : “*We will bring democracy to you.*” Ya, inilah dia buku yang, ironinya –sama ada sedar atau tidak- melondehkan sendiri ‘niat murni’ orang putih ini.

Nah, kalau nak kritik hal ini, buku Amartya Sen *The Argumentative Indian* sendiri sebut, mereka di Barat ini ingat bagus sangat seolah prinsip keadilan, kebebasan dan demokrasi ini asal mereka sahaja, dan segala yang bukan barat ini orang gasar sahaja. Lihat di India misalnya, dahulu lagi Akbar dalam pemerintahannya mengetengahkan perdebatan antara agama selain menggariskan hemah dan adab yang perlu diikuti dalam berdebat. Bukankah keterbukaan idea, pertukaran pemikiran satu bahagian dari sifat demokrasi?

Dimulakan buku ini dengan penulis, Natan mencatat pengalamannya hidup dan dipenjarakan oleh Soviet Rusia. Beliau kemudiannya menubuhkan kumpulan pendesak, Helsinki Group untuk menuntut golongan Yahudi dibenarkan berpindah ke Israel. Saya setelah menghabiskan buku *Woman’s Cause* tertanya, mengapa beliau dan kumpulannya -yang menurutnya mendapat sokongan besar AS- tidak pindah sahaja ke Amerika, yang telahpun bertapak komuniti Yahudi yang besar? Kalau telahan saya, ia bukan hanya disebabkan bangsa Yahudi beliau (setelah juga dialog dengan Peter Slezak).

Disini, saya mula bermasalah bila penulis - ketika dia beromantis dengan hidupnya dalam rejim Soviet - mendasarkan seolah-olah orang lain tidak menghargai nikmat kebebasan (lalu membiarkan mereka rela diperintah pemerintah korup tirani lagaknya) sedangkan apabila mereka bebas memilih pemerintahan yang menjamin kebebasan -contoh dalam kes Palestin dan Hamas- ia tidak diktiraf oleh pihak Israel dan AS, malah kerap kali dia ini –meskipun bertaraf menteri- terus-menerus merujuk Hamas dengan kumpulan penganas Islam (Islamic Jihad Terror Organization) sehingga kita kelu tak terkata; memang inikah imej Hamas dalam kepala mereka (AS/Israel dan sekutunya)? Pelik pula apabila perarakan massa, orang awam di Edinburgh Scotland sekitar 2014 mengakui lagi mengiktiraf Hamas sebagai parti politik yang sah, ‘negara’ sebelah pun ‘tak tahu’. Boleh pula, dari masa ke masa –selain menelanjangkan kedangkalan perancangan kabinet dan kerajaan Israel- mereka hanya berurusan dengan Yaser Arafat, kemudian Ehud Barak yang mereka longgokkan dana berjuta-juta untuk memeterai persetujuan, tetapi kemudian dikhianati. Bukan sekali pula itu!

Belum lagi dikritik sikap tidak berperikemanusiaan, seolah-olah apa yang mereka lakukan tidak bersalah. Membunuhan orang awam, merampas tanah asal penduduk, memenjarakan kanak-kanak malah! Tetapi, kerap kali mereka berdolak-dalik (*gas-smoking*) dengan sama ada mengalih perbahasan ke perkara lain (misalnya asal negara itu kacau bila) atau memperkecilkkan -jika tidak menghilangkan- kewujudan insiden-insiden berdarah dari tanah tempat ia tumpah. Atau dari sudut lain, cuba helah murahan dengan mengetengahkan ‘victim card’ yakni *anti-semitism*.

“*Another phrase that is often mistakenly applied to the conflict, the ‘cycle of violence’, is no less morally*

obfuscating. There is no moral equivalence of Palestinians terror attacks and Israeli counterterror operations. The Palestinian terrorists are deliberately targeting civilians. Israeli military operations do sometimes unintentionally harm innocent civilians, but Israel never targets civilians. Israeli counterterror strikes are meant to save innocent life and Palestinian terror attacks are meant to take it..."

-h. 212

"The first D is the test of demonization. Demonization has always been a primary expression of anti-Semitism. Jews were portrayed for centuries as the embodiment of all evil. They were accused, among other things, deicide, drinking the blood of non-Jewish children, poisoning wells, and controlling the world's banks and governments. To determine whether criticism against Israel today is legitimate or whether it is anti-Semitic we must ask ourselves whether the Jewish state is being demonized. Are its actions being blown out of all sensible proportion? For example, the comparisons between Israelis and Nazis and between Palestinian refugee camps and Auschwitz –comparisons that are heard practically every day within 'enlightened' quarters of Europe- can only be considered anti-Semitic. Those who live in refugee camps clearly lives in miserable conditions. But even those who would wrongly blame Israel for the fact that four generations of Palestinians have lived in these camps cannot legitimately compare these camps with Auschwitz."

-h. 224-225, Bab: **The Battle for Moral Clarity**

Boleh pula dia bajet suci, sehingga mual membacanya.

Nah, tambah pula membanding beza yang selain tidak setara, apa yang mahu dibuktikan? Ouh, generasi mereka terdahulu pernah tersiksa, Palestinian ini tidak mengapa kerana tidak apa-apa sangat? Inilah juga dikritik Sen bila ada golongan ekstremis fundamentalis Hindu, yang dikepalai BJP seolah nak menghukum orang India Muslim sekarang atas 'dosa warisan'.

Ini yang Peter Slezak marah benar apabila beliau –meskipun seorang Yahudi- mempersoalkan, pembunuhan besar-besaran, kezaliman dan berbagai lagi tindak-tanduk ketidakmanusiaan ini perlu dihentikan. Kerana ia memang ada dan terbukti. Boleh pula si Natan ini membuatkan mata dan buat pekak telinga yang Israel –yang mempunyai kelengkapan ketenteraan dan persenjataan antara yang tercanggih didunia- beralasan mereka membina tembok untuk mempertahankan diri dari serangan orang Palestin.

Sergah Peter Slezak: "Serang? Serang dengan apa? Kamu ada pesawat F6, kereta kebal." Boleh pula Natan ini pergi ke perbahasan lain, "Ouh kami menentang dictator negara lain, Iran, Mesir bla2", bila orang cerita yang hangpa duk bunuh orang sesuka hati.

Untuk membongkar hal ini, saya sempat mencatatkan buku cadangan beliau yakni Jewish History, Jewish Religion, The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities.

Saya tutup dengan satu perenggan yang menunjukkan betapa banyak merepeknya penulis ini. Mungkin saya akan give-away dalam Book Exchange, sekurang-kurangnya dapat buku lain!

"On September 11, 2001, nearly 3000 Americans were massacred by nineteen fanatical Muslims. A few hours later, when mourners were holding vigils in the street of London, Tel Aviv and Seoul, Muslims were dancing in the streets of Ramallah and Baghdad. Overnight, a mass murderer like Osama bin Laden became a hero to tens of millions of Muslims. How then can we honestly say that freedom, democracy, and human rights are the 'universal values of the human spirit?'

..The Islamic faith is not seen as the only strike against democracy emerging in the Middle East. Many also see the treatment of women in the Muslim world in general, and in the Middle East in particular, as a force militating against democracy. Whilst the West still has a long way to go before full equality between the sexes is realized, most people would consider it light years ahead of the Muslim world."

-h. 32-34, bab : **Is Freedom for Anyone**, dalam "But The Arabs Are Different"

Bacaan lanjut:

Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return dimana Said, Chomsky, Pappe, Finkelstein dan Masalha masing-masing mempunyai tulisan berasingan yang membicarakan tentang hal Palestin dan Israel

Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy oleh Chomsky yang saya kira sesuai melihat nada berlagak besar Israel ini.

Blood and Religion : The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State

Gaza: Beneath the Bombs yang mendedahkan pendustaan di siang hari Natan.

Cliff says

Sharansky, a former refusenik turned Israeli politician turned philosopher, is part memoir, part political philosophy, and a lot of interesting discussion of issues both contemporary and past, and what they mean.

I think one of the most interesting things about the book was his discussion of double speak and double think, of what it means to think and talk and believe in a "fear society," where the default is to either mask what you think, or to never really allow yourself to think it out of fear. The former Soviet Union was such a place, and Sharansky desperately doesn't want other places to be the same. Including his Arab neighbors in his new home in Israel.

Sharansky is often called a "neo-con," a term I'm still not convinced anyone could really pin down aside from it's critics meaning of it, in which it means little more than "warmonger," and perhaps even "Jewish warmonger." But whatever the case of his beliefs about the efficacy or prudence of conflict with "fear" societies based on abuses of power, his descriptions of them are real and meaningful. And I don't think anyone can read the history of the Soviet Union and not understand why he's so passionate about of what he speaks.

Abdulrahman says

While I agree with the basic idea of the book, the writer shows lots of hypocrisy when trying to bend his principles to defend Israel. He also stated clear lies as facts of history (when talking about the peace treaty between prophet Mohammad and his enemies in the city of Mekka).

Brendan Steinhauser says

A compelling case for supporting freedom and democracy in foreign affairs. The author was a dissident in the former Soviet Union who became a powerful voice for opposing tyrannical regimes around the world.

Jeff says

Pros

1. Sharansky is an engaging writer. He has a considerable amount of passion for the subject, which helps carry the book along (and which is also one of the cons).

2. Sharansky does a good job of providing a history of one aspect of the Cold War, the dissident movement in the East Bloc and its importance in the final denouement of that conflict.
3. Sharansky provides an in-depth narrative of Israeli/Palestinian politics during the 1990s.
4. Sharansky's basic points - that democratic societies are better to live in than repressive societies, that there is nothing inherent in any person mandating they have to live in an authoritarian regime, that a world in which people have broad freedoms, rights and responsibilities is better than a world in which people are pawns in the games of autocrats - are hard to argue with.

Cons

1. The problem with Sharansky's thesis is that he is never convincing in his assertion that every culture is amenable to democracy and the rule of the individual. Some cultures lend themselves to rule by an authoritarian government, whether it is secular or religiously based. That is not to say that democracy and the rule of the individual can't *change* a given culture so that they become reconciled. Rather, this change would mean a radical shift in that culture.
 2. The history of the Israel/Palestinian conflict is interesting, but a 70 page tangent. It does little to support his thesis.
 3. His thesis about the outcome of the Cold War, while accurate as far as it goes, is woefully incomplete. One could certainly look at the inherent economic flaws in the Soviet communist system, the sclerotic leadership class, the over reliance on military force for holding the Soviet Empire together, the failure of the neo-Marxist liberation movements in the post-colonial world to deliver anything except for a new set of oppressors, etc, for the way the Cold War ended.
 4. His argument that democracies are more peaceful is weak, given that the age of what we would recognize as modern democracies (a broad franchise, a robust legislature, a focus on the individual as the basic unit of society) is fairly new. The farthest back you can push this is the early 20th century. One could argue that it actually came later, with the end of segregation in America and the end of the European empires. Either period is distorted by the global wars of the first half of the 20th century - in which democracy seemed to be in retreat - or the Cold War - in which the Free World had an external threat that set limits on just how much they would clash. Even then, there were periods of tension within the Western Alliance (e.g., Suez 56, the lack of FW support in Vietnam). While there was never a serious threat of war amongst the Western democracies, this was in part due to the existential threat of the USSR. So, while free society democracies - societies in which people have an unfettered voice in some key aspect of the policy decision process, whether direct (voting on a given policy) or indirect (electing representatives) and in which there is a free political voice (both personal - me on a soapbox - or public - me writing in a newspaper) - may be more peaceful, the period we are looking at has features that make that conclusion problematic. In earlier, proto-democratic eras (the lead up to World War One) combatants (some, not all) on both sides were along a spectrum of limited democracies with free presses and the citizenry went enthusiastically off to war. Further, democracies have not proven themselves to be more peaceful than other forms of government. Our own history is full of wars and military operations, few of which were forced on us. I'm not arguing against democracy, just that the democracy=peace meme is flawed.
 5. Finally, while he is passionate and engaging, there are times when this passion leads to either assertions or to tangents that do support his basic thesis.
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Kathy says

Mr. Sharansky is a former Soviet Jewish dissident and political prisoner who has championed the cause of democracy and freedom. In this book, he makes a strong case for the power of free, democratic countries to

encourage freedom and democracy throughout the world. He argues that democratic countries throughout the world are much safer for America than are any kind of dictatorships. He even argues that America can play a strong role in bringing democracy to the non-democratic middle east. He shows how America and Israel have missed many opportunities to press for human rights for oppressed nations and therefore has missed opportunities to increase their own security. The book reads well and argues forcefully, yet calmly. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the condition of the world, human rights, and the security interests of the United States.

Matthew Trevithick says

This book definitely has a powerful (and reassuring) central idea: namely, that democracy is a force for good in the world and worth spreading. Unfortunately, the examples Sharansky uses (Germany and Japan) make for absolutely poor comparisons to Iraq and Afghanistan.
