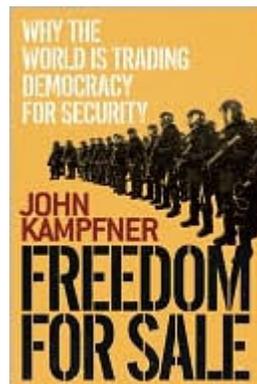


Freedom for Sale: Why the World Is Trading Democracy for Security

John Kampfner , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I am Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I would like to welcome our members, guests, and C-SPAN Book TV. Thank you for joining us.

Our speaker today is the prize-winning journalist John Kampfner. Mr. Kampfner was most recently the editor of *The New Statesman*, a British political magazine. As editor, he won a number of awards, including *Current Affairs Magazine* Editor of the Year.

But his recognition as a journalist doesn't stop there, as he is also author of the acclaimed *Blair's Wars*, which was selected as Book of the Year in 2003 by *The Times*, *Sunday Times*, and *Observer*. Additionally, a series of documentaries on the Middle East for the BBC earned him the Journalist of the Year Award in 2002.

Today, he is head of the *Index on Censorship*, which is Britain's leading organization promoting freedom of expression.

We are delighted that he has chosen the Carnegie Council to discuss his new book, [Freedom for Sale: Why the World Is Trading Democracy for Security](#).

It is in this book that Mr. Kampfner takes a hard look at the global political and economic landscape at the dawning of this century and asks whether you can have economic success without political freedom. I would answer that if you are an American and supported the previous Administration, the answer would be no. After all, doesn't capitalism depend on the market and the market depends on consumers exercising free choice? And furthermore, doesn't capitalism need liberal democracies to survive and flourish—or does it?

This provocative line of questioning began to find its way into international conversations throughout the last decade of the 20th century and into the first years of this new century.

However, with the Russian economy growing rich on oil and gas revenues and China's economy registering record growth rates, it was now seen that economies could grow even with little or no democratic progress. It was now being asked whether it was possible for authoritarian regimes to actually perform better in some circumstances than democracy does, questioning the validity of this widespread post-Cold War assumption.

In *Freedom for Sale*, Mr. Kampfner sets out to examine what he calls "the unwritten pact," which unites a number of otherwise dissimilar countries. It is a pact under which, consciously or not, the population trades their democratic rights, including freedom of speech and open media, for better living standards and political stability. He asks whether the freedom to make, spend, and save money in exchange for renouncing the freedom to question authority is a good or a bad bargain.

Conscientious journalist that he is, Mr. Kampfner looks at both sides of the argument. He begins his analysis in Singapore, where he was born. He then looks at authoritarian societies, like China and Russia, and compares them to established democracies, such as Britain and the United States, to see if in fact the gap is narrowing between democracies and autocracies; and, if so, what would it mean for the future of the East and the West?

For the findings of his incisive analysis, please join me in welcoming this very distinguished journalist, John

Kampfner.

Thank you for joining us.

Remarks

JOHN KAMPFNER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and ambassadors.

Joanne, thank you very much for this very kind introduction and thank you very much for having me.

This is the first event I am doing as the book is launched in the United States. It is a revised and slightly updated version of the book that I launched in London in September, which certainly got people talking and was well reviewed and very thoroughly reviewed. It is now being translated into Italian and Russian, which I am pleased to say, and potentially also into Arabic, with other languages on their way.

My travels have taken me from Oslo, to Singapore, to India, to Brussels, and beyond, talking about these issues, which I regard as universal.

At the end of 2007, the question hit me. The question encapsulated so many of the concerns I had been having about the state of British and global politics and economics, about the state of civil liberties, and, perhaps most importantly, about the state of us, the people: Why is it that so many people around the world, whatever their culture, whatever their circumstance, whatever their geography, whatever their history, appear willing to give up certain freedoms in return for either security or prosperity? That is the question I ask throughout the book.

The choices of destination might seem arbitrary to some, but there was method in it. In order of the chapters, it was Singapore, China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, India, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Why?

First of all, *Freedom for Sale* does not look at tyrannical regimes that rule by the barrel of the gun, where families and parents denounce each other, where the state is an unambiguously malevolent force, and there is no element of consent. Therefore, this is not about, for example, Zimbabwe or North Korea or Burma. In these countries there is no pact between the government and the people, but simply an instinct to survive.

Nor do I focus on countries with their own particularities, such as Israel and its conflict with Palestine, or [Hugo Chavez's](#) Venezuela, or post-apartheid South Africa.

Instead, in the course of a year's travels, I focused on countries that, whatever their political hue, had accepted the terms of globalization.

The model I cite is Singapore, the state in which I was born and which I have long felt an affinity towards. I am constantly struck by the number of people I know, good friends, who very eloquently defend a system that elevates individual restraint in return for the collective good. This is what I call the pact, or the tradeoff. Of course, this is shorthand, and I develop my theme in detail. But, even though others bridle at it, I am comfortable with the term.

It simply asks the question: Why do those people in that country, friends of mine, in Singapore, who are extraordinarily well traveled, have very high tertiary degrees, nevertheless feel it quite normal, and even quite desirable, to put to one side one of the most elementary freedoms, freedom of speech?

I had originally envisaged the book as falling into the post-1989 globalization genre, as articulated by the likes by [Francis Fukuyama](#), [Fareed Zakaria](#), [Robert Kagan](#), [Tom Friedman](#).

In other words, I saw it through the template of a new order emanating in the East challenging the hegemony of the West. This was going to be called maybe *The New World Order*. I went on to think about a working title of *The Pact*.

I finally settled on *Freedom for Sale*, realizing that actually we all do it, we all make the trade-off, whatever system of government we live under. Now I realize the universal nature of the pact. We are, whether we live in democracies or authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, closer than we think.

I have not sought to compare countries. I have no score sheet.

The pact is played out in different circumstances and cultures and at different speeds. We each choose different freedoms in our own countries which we are prepared to cede. So, therefore, in some countries it is freedom of expression; in some it is the right to vote out your government; in some it is an impartial judiciary; in others it is the ability to get on with your life without being spied upon; in some countries it is a combination of these and

more.

In day-to-day terms, such restrictions as these affect actually only a small number of people. These people are, I might use the term, people who go out of their way to rock the boat; troublemakers—journalists who criticize the state or who publish information that cast the powerful in a negative light, lawyers who defend them and people like them, such as representatives of NGOs, and opposition politicians and activists.

The rest of the population, maybe 99 percent, carry on regardless. They enjoy what I call their private freedoms, to live more or less as they wish and, most importantly, to make and spend money.

So private freedoms are your freedom to lead your own atomized existence. They are freedom to choose schooling for your children; as I say, freedom to travel; freedom to express yourself in whatever way you wish in your own circumstances; freedom to lead your own private life in the way you wish; or even some freedoms, obviously, that we take for granted that were new in, say, post-communist China—freedom to wear your own clothes and buy your own car. These are private freedoms.

Now, the difference between public freedoms and private freedoms: The public ones are the ones that affect your behavior in the public realm. They are freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom to vote in multiparty elections, and, most important of all, freedom to act vigorously in the public realm—freedom to cause trouble.

How many members of the public going about their daily lives really wish to challenge those with power?

Ladies and gentlemen, one can accept the fact, and one can live quite comfortably with the fact, that one is sufficiently free.

In the global order of the past two decades, the alliance of political leaders, business, and the middle classes was the key to this pact. This arrangement is built on a clear, but usually discrete, set of understandings. What matters in all these societies is that the number of people who benefit from the pact, as I have described, gradually increases and that the state remains flexible enough to meet their various needs.

These could be summarized as property rights, contract law, environmental protection, lifestyle choices, and the right to travel. But the preeminent freedom in the past 20 years, in this era of globalized wealth, has been financial, the right to earn money and to keep it.

The context changed during 2008, as years of steady growth ended spectacularly. The collapse of the banks led not only to economic crisis but called into question the future of governments that had derived their legitimacy through securing sustained well-being for their peoples.

Yet, far from unraveling the pact, in my view the global financial collapse has enhanced it. Western countries that had dismissed the idea of the state as an economic force are once again rehabilitating it. In conditions of insecurity and with the state once again intervening wherever it sees fit, the conditions are propitious to assume even greater control over other aspects of people's day-to-day lives.

The clamor for security that was exploited after the terrorist attacks here in New York in 2001 can just as easily be adapted for any other kind of emergency, such as an economic emergency.

So after Singapore, which I have already discussed, I move on to China. The discussion on China ranges across many themes, but it seeks specifically to identify this question of public and private freedoms.

I was struck during my travels at the great candor of my conversations— not just one-to-one chats, but even roundtable discussions as well. Everyone is agreed that the rate of progress has been remarkable in the past three decades. The acceptance of the G20 as the true global forum is, as many commentators have already pointed out, not just recognition of the relic status of the G8, but tacit acceptance of the role of the G2, America and China, as the big power players.

But where does China go from here? Or, more to the point, exactly what kinds of reforms are sought? To what extent will political and human rights reform ever take place?

Nobody seems to know. "Out-of-bounds markers," to use a golfing phrase that is increasingly popular in China, keep on shifting from day to day, from region to region.

Free speech, even if formally circumscribed in China, particularly on the Internet, is alive and well on the streets and in semi-private situations. The government is trying to manage and channel it through a combination of technology, modern-day spin techniques, and old-fashioned brute force.

What I found most intriguing was that the middle classes seem to have the least vested interest in political plurality, in granting the vote to hundreds of millions of poorer people with different political priorities. This is not purely a party-driven phenomenon. The lack of constitutional democracy is, for the moment at least, a desired part of the deal, driven by the middle classes. The government knows that the delivery of comforts to the private realm will determine its success and determine the longevity of the hegemony of the Communist Party.

I move on to Russia, which I have been visiting regularly for 30 years. I focus on people I have known from a time when the expression "to get hold of something" was more important than "to buy," when foreign travel was allowed only through officially sanctioned groups.

These friends celebrated the failure of the coup in 1991 and the subsequent collapse of their autocratic system. They discovered new freedoms and reveled in them, before [Boris Yeltsin](#) consolidated his power by manipulating the election in 1996 with the tacit approval of the West. Democracy became associated with chaos and sleaze.

The ascent of [Vladimir Putin](#) in 2000 was in keeping with his time, a security clampdown coinciding with a surge of wealth, thanks to the global price of oil and gas.

As their country became richer and more assertive, my Russian friends would recite a slogan, that the only three Cs in the English language that were important to Russians were—and you may have to be British to understand this—Chelsea, [Courchevel](#), and Cartier.

While doubting journalists and human rights campaigners continued to ask questions, the vast majority acquiesced in the pact. These jet setters continued to fear that their fortunes and their properties could at any point be seized. That is why they took their money abroad. But they enjoyed the fruits of their private freedoms and they left the politicians and those in the security elite to rule unimpeded.

The next chapter looks at the most pure symbol of the global pact, the United Arab Emirates, specifically the brazen and gaudy city of Dubai and the more discreet and oil-rich Abu Dhabi. The saying during the boom times on the floors of finance houses in New York and London went, "Shanghai, Mumbai, Dubai, or good-bye."

From young British traders, to Russian mobsters, to Belize celebrities, the ruling sheiks offered steady wealth, from property deals to tax-free salaries, in return for keeping out of trouble. You'll note that phrase comes back again and again.

In Dubai they were even more accommodating, putting religious concerns to one side to allow Westerners to lead their lives as they wished, prosecuting them for sexual or drunken displays only *in extremis*. Monuments to conspicuous wealth sprung up all around, as hotels and apartment blocks vied with each other for luxury.

The sheiks believed their model was immune to the Western economic crisis. Dubai, in particular, took a major hit, and now we know the consequence.

The second part of the book is the most challenging part of the book. It looks at the countries that profess adherence to liberal democracy.

I begin with India, which prides itself on having the world's most populous multiparty system. As China's economy soared ahead, parts of India's corporate elite wondered whether their form of governance was an impediment to prosperity.

India's rich devised its own pact: it would provide for itself the basic services that the state had failed to deliver. It would make few demands in return. It would require the government to leave it alone to make money and to keep the poor away from its door.

This arrangement was challenged less by the global economic crash, more by the [terrorist attacks in Mumbai in late 2008](#). For the first time, the affluent classes were caught up en masse in the violence that has long afflicted India. They demanded protection.

"Of all the countries in the world, why choose Italy?" you might ask. It matters, not because of any particular geostrategic relevance, but because it serves as an example of a sham democracy.

In terms of its institutions, Italy fails on almost every count. The three checks on the executive—parliament, the media and the judiciary—have seen their independence and their authority eroded. Corruption is rampant. And yet, three times its voters, freely and fairly, have chosen in [Silvio Berlusconi](#) a man noted for his financial irregularities, his affection for autocrats like Putin, and his general vulgarity. He has outwitted his opponents with consummate ease and is seeking to expand his powers.

It is easy to dismiss Berlusconi and his antics, but his enduring popularity among a large swathe of the population highlights the extent to which notional democracies can thrive on, and even depend on, the same exercise of arbitrary power that authoritarian states are criticized for.

In 1997 the accession of a center-left government in the United Kingdom that prided itself on its liberties should have been an inspiring moment. Yet, in a decade, Britain has gone a long way to dismantling civil liberties. It now possesses a fifth of the world's closed-circuit television cameras, on a small island; it has some of the world's most punitive libel laws, which I am happy to say we are in the process of changing; and has recently imposed a law, under the guise of anti-terrorism, that allows for the arrest of anyone taking photographs of the police or members of the armed forces.

A government that was seeking one of the longest terms of pretrial custody for terrorist suspects proudly brandishes its authoritarian credentials, arguing that they are generally well received by the public—and in many cases they are, particularly before they are closely analyzed.

I look at a government that abrogated its responsibility to produce a more equitable society. Instead, in a demonstration of what psychologists might call displacement theory, it exercised what power it had to clamp down on public freedoms. I'm keen to understand how British society seems to ready to acquiesce in the erosion of those freedoms until rather late in the day.

My U.K. chapter has been seen by commentators as my most critical. I do not disagree.

My last destination is here, the United States, where the pact has been played out most visibly. The chapter traces the effects on society at home and abroad of 9/11, the Iraq war, and the abuses that surrounded the "war on terror."

[George Bush's](#) neoconservative mission had grown out of a mixture of hubris and frustration. The removal of [Saddam Hussein](#) would be the catalyst for the overthrow of dictators in the Middle East and beyond.

That it failed was the result not just of double standards, but of a deeper confusion about democracy promotion. Was democracy an end in itself or was it a means to an end? Should multiparty elections be encouraged in states where the outcome might produce regimes hostile to the West and to the concept of liberal democracy, or might internally produce ethnic or political instability?

Domestically, Bush presided over a security clampdown that was rarely challenged by mainstream politicians or public opinion. The U.S. media showed itself to be largely supine, failing to hold power to account on many of the gravest issues.

As the writer [Michael Kinsley](#) wrote in late 2001, in reference to the calls by the then-Attorney General, [John Ashcroft](#), for journalism to confine itself to more patriotic thoughts: "Almost no one is dissenting. It is hard to dissent from the core proposition that the perpetrators of a crime as monstrous as 9/11 are worthy targets of America's military and diplomatic power." He wrote: "But journalism en masse has been replaced by an unprecedented floor of patriotic gush and mush. John Ashcroft can relax, because people have been listening to their inner Ashcroft."

To what extent would the arrival of [Barack Obama](#) reverse the democratic erosion at home and America's loss of democratic credibility abroad?

Certainly, the nature of his election provided a much-needed boost to the credentials of America's constitutional democracy. It is far too early to call the Obama Administration. There are enough instances of the glass being either half-full or half-empty to reserve judgment.

The cruel irony, however, is that a new Administration, in which many around the world are pinning their faith, has begun its work just at a time of eroding American power.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, the events of the past decade have surely undermined the claim that the enrichment of a country or the growth of a middle class provides an impulse towards greater liberty. [Barrington Moore's](#) thesis of "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" has surely been refuted by the past 20 years of materialist aspiration.

During this period, people in all countries found a way to disengage from the political process while living in comfort. Consumerism provided the ultimate anesthetic for the brain.

My discoveries are discomfiting, but it is more useful to understand than to judge. It has always been the instinct of the politician to seek power and to hold onto it, by fair means or foul. Less understood are the reasons why so

many of us—in authoritarian and, yes, in democratic states alike—succumb and why so few of us ask why we do it. Whatever system we happen to live under, our priorities are more similar than we would ever want to admit.

Thank you very much.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: We had a speaker here about six weeks ago, [Timothy Ferris](#), a wonderful science writer, and he was talking about some of the things you are talking about. He had a theory about China, and I want to ask you what you think of it, because it sounds at odds with what you are saying.

He, coming from his science background, thought that the denial of the public freedoms you mention would in the end undermine Chinese progress. He cited the example of scientific conferences that he went to, where scientists, mixing freely, speaking freely, with no restraint, traded all kinds of ideas, incentivized one another to make progress. He basically said ten years from now, if the Chinese economy is still rumbling forward while still denying its people public freedoms, his whole thesis would be undermined. What do you think of that theory?

And then, I am going to violate a rule I have never violated before, to ask you a second question. But I think you will indulge me when I tell you why.

During the years I lived and worked in the U.K., John Kampfner was a superb political commentator for the BBC. The second question I want to ask you—there is an election upcoming in the U.K. in May. Three questions: Is [David Cameron](#) the next—

JOHN KAMPFNER: I know the answer.

QUESTIONER: —is David Cameron the next prime minister? Will [Gordon Brown](#) remain as prime minister? Will you have a hung parliament?

JOHN KAMPFNER: Right. I am but a journalist, not a soothsayer.

On the first point, you absolutely get right to the heart of the question and the challenge for these 21st-century authoritarian regimes.

In policymaking terms—I don't think sophisticated policymakers do it anymore—there has to be a new set of polity and policy to understand where these authoritarian states are coming from and, more importantly, where they are going, as distinct from Cold War-style totalitarian regimes. They share many common manifestations, but they are not the same. The reason, in my opinion, they are not the same, is they know, or they are beginning to try to work out, how to switch the tap on and how to switch it off again.

The simplest thing is just never to switch it on, and then just lock people up, don't let them travel, don't let them do things. That is quite a simple approach, and it is also quite a simple approach to rebut.

The two main impulses for a certain relaxation in China and in similar countries are:

- One that you cite, the question of academic freedom that creates creativity, peer review, a stronger learning basis, a stronger sense of challenge in business circles, is absolutely discussed. What they are trying to work out is how you do it in a very limited context that allows this kind of constructive debate to take place without it ever moving into the political arena.
- The other one that is always cited is the one about governance—in other words, you need an element of investigation and of criticism in order to smoke out corruption, at a local level particularly and at a regional level, and if you don't have that, you will have continuing corruption and bad governance.

I don't think they have worked it out.

My next point is not directly related to your question but stems from it. I am absolutely convinced this whole thinking that a lot of Chinese and Russians and others continue to propagate—namely, "Just give us time; we want to get to the same place"—is actually not the case. There is a good argument to say where they are is roughly where they wish to be—with improvements, which is quite different.

On the U.K., I don't know what the baseball equivalent is, but in soccer terms the conservatives were five-nil up

at halftime and they have let in four goals against a very bad team in the second half, and they are five-four up, and their backs are against the wall. It is astonishing.

In broader democracy terms, it is a very discouraging state of affairs in the U.K. You have a government that is pretty widely disparaged. Gordon Brown has been the butt of so many jokes and sympathy over the last three years, and yet he is a doughty campaigner and he is clawing back some points.

David Cameron seems to have many of the worst manifestations of [Tony Blair](#)—I know you all love him; someone has to—in terms of being good on chat shows, he looks good and he talks well, but that's actually being quite superficial. That is David Cameron's problem. His problem is: How conservative can he be—I suppose similar to the Republicans here, how much you go for your core conservative vote and how much do you reach out? So he is not having traction.

The real party to watch, which is the party that I have now come to endorse, is the third party, the Liberal Democrats, who are now approaching 25 percent in the polls against Labour in the early 30s.

It seems very likely that we are going to have a hung Parliament, with no party having an overall majority, having for the first time a kind of European-style coalition government. But it is going to be unstable at a bad economic time.

QUESTION: We have run a number of articles over the years that have taken issue with this whole concept of the increased monitoring of populations, feeling that it hasn't achieved what it should and it has in fact restricted a great deal of personal freedom, and unnecessarily and ineffectively. However, [Paul Berman](#), the liberal writer, has probably expressed it best in his book, [Terror and Liberalism](#).

The question still remains: How do democratic societies protect themselves against individuals who are not anarchists, who do have some connection to an international attempt to overthrow societies—and they are not wearing uniforms, but they are waging combat against you? So you are kind of left unprotected. So what do you do then?

This is a real challenge. We can talk about limitations on freedom, but then the practical applications of it become something else. So take it to the next step.

JOHN KAMPFNER: As I hope you will find in reading the book, the book is not challenging the basic premise of what it takes to produce a secure society. I have kids. We were in London the day the tubes and the buses were bombed. You want to have a secure and a safe society.

The question is: How far do you want to go? It is an art, not a science.

Just remove it from terrorism for a second. Just look at ordinary criminality. Somebody said to me—just going back to the question of closed-circuit TV in the U.K., I was saying: "Do I really want a fifth of the world's cameras looking at me?" The average person, next time you are in London going about your business, you will be filmed 200 times.

Now, you will probably say: "Well, what's the problem? I'm not doing anything wrong. No one is going to be really looking at the film anyway."

Somebody once said to me, "There is no problem, you see, because it doesn't work"—which I don't think is a particularly good defense of it.

But, seriously, somebody said to me: "What is your problem, because you want your daughters to come home safe at night?"

I said, "Well, yes, of course I do. But does that mean I need a camera on every street corner in order to deliver that?"

It works. Basically, after our own smaller version of 9/11, 7/7, [Tony Blair](#) proclaimed, "The rules of the game have changed"—and, yes, they have—but "How far do you want to go; where is the balance that you wish to strike?" is the perennial question.

The only point that I think philosophically governments need to say to citizens—but it's very hard for them to do it politically—is that government, the state, cannot provide absolute security, and if you want the state to provide absolute security, you have to go elsewhere. There are countries that do provide that.

So as soon as you accept that you cannot have absolute security, as soon as you accept that you can walk out of

this building now and be shot or bombed, then you are already in the same place that I am in, which is saying: Where is the trade-off? That is the debate—it's how far.

What, in my opinion, was troubling for me in this country in the 2001-2005 period—but in other countries it has been manifested at different times too—was not the quite legitimate and understandable response of the government; it was the lack of challenge, such as the challenges I have sought to elucidate, from mainstream journalism and from others in public life, to say, "Yes, we are all traumatized by security attacks, but there has to be a carefully calibrated and not kneejerk response."

QUESTION: You seem to be analyzing the situation as a journalist—that is, what is going on now. But in a place like the Carnegie Council, we often want greater depth, in the sense that there are different historical traditions that explain tendencies in a country, beginning with China, for example, which has always been authoritarian, with the Middle Kingdom trying to control the rest of the country, or Russia, or so forth.

There is the new pride, especially in China, of this growing importance in the world, which encourages people to accept what is going on, possibly as you are describing it. But, on the other hand, if we go to the Anglo-American traditions of debate and democracy and glorious revolution and possibilities for change in the political system and so forth, one would imagine it would be more of a debate—if not on certain issues, then on others—that it's just part of the political process. What would you suggest this would mean for the future, at least having a longer time continuum?

JOHN KAMPFNER: You make very valid points.

I made constant reference in the book to cultural specificities. However, what I conspicuously refrain from doing is using geographical or genetic justifications for patterns of behavior. I personally think that is too easy.

I take great issue with [Lee Kuan Yew's](#) theory of "[Asian Values](#)". I had great fun debating that at the National University of Singapore with [Kishore Mahbubani](#) and with others.

Of course there are specificities to all societies. You allude to an historical strain in Anglo-Saxon thought as distinct from various manifestations of continental European thought. But these strains can be used as cultural justifications for certain patterns of behavior that I think are a little bit too easy.

For every Singapore, there is Hong Kong; for every China, there is Taiwan. There is even within cultural norms quite great variations in patterns of political behavior.

The other point that I think is rarely explored, and perhaps could be explored by others in future times, is if you look at globalization in terms of capital flows and in terms of the behavioral aspects of purchasing and branding over the past 20 years—and this book is very much about 1989-2009 and what has happened to societies during then—what is so fascinating is the interplay between the homogenization of societies through globalization, and yet also the cultural specificities that you are talking about—and those are still being played through now.

But the anesthetic that I talk about is a cross-cultural one, and it is one I think that has been under-discussed, except in a somewhat rhetorical sense, and the effect that conspicuous consumption and the elevation of conspicuous consumption to being pretty much the primary driver of a society, in just about every society, and what that has done, not just to the other priorities, but also to the internal dynamics of those societies.

I think it came home to me when our own Gordon Brown said, six months or so ago, when the economy was at one of its lowest ebbs, that citizens had a patriotic duty to shop.

QUESTION: Arguments about democracy and efficiency of authoritarian regimes was a constant theme during the 1930s. Around the beginning of the Second World War it appeared that the authoritarian and the totalitarian regimes were far more successful than the democracies. People cite the fact that ultimately the democracies won as basically the best argument in favor of democracy vs. authoritarianism.

Other observers say the reason democracies won is, number one, the extraordinary economic capacity of the United States to generate weapons, and also the ability of the Soviet people to defeat the Nazis.

If our democracies can't produce the kinds of economic wealth that people have been hoping for, how much hope is there really for democracy as such?

JOHN KAMPFNER: That is the very question. That is the nub of the issue. The victory in the Cold War was primarily—the economic victory of the Cold War was the driver, it was the driver, it was the impulse. If you read [Mikhail Gorbachev's](#) pretty good [op-ed](#) in *The New York Times* a couple of days ago reflecting on [perestroika](#)—I lived through perestroika and [glasnost](#) in the former Soviet Union—it was an economic impulse, "We cannot go on

the way we are going on," that led to the political reforms that happened. It was the lack of viability of the Soviet centralized economy that produced the changes.

Now, again, the 21st-century challenge of these authoritarian states—Russia is on a different level because its economy is both highly powerful but also highly mono-based on oil and gas, and diversification, in spite of all the exhortations, has not happened. It is frighteningly powerful, particularly to Central and Eastern Europe, where, in terms of provision of energy, it has great potential to bully, but it doesn't have a great deal of potential elsewhere.

But obviously, the challenge with China and Brazil and elsewhere is what is happening to the Western economic model, whose success provided an imprimatur to the political model. As soon as that is being challenged, as we are now seeing with America's continued spats with China, then it is a much greater challenge to democracy.

My issue with democracy and democracy promotion is twofold: It is, first of all, attractive if the economic benefits to the recipient countries are clear and unambiguous, and that to some extent is not the case; and secondly, the best form of democracy promotion is one where you have your house in order when you start promoting it, and too often in the two Bush Administration periods that wasn't the case.

QUESTION: Curiosity. Your book says "democracy," "trading democracy." "Trading liberalism" is understandable. But my understanding of the word "democracy" is the majority rules. In your statement about Singapore, you said 99 percent of the people—and I'm just using your statement—"willingly accede to this loss for their private freedoms." My sense is that is democracy. It might not be liberalism, it is certainly not constitutional republicanism, but it is democracy.

Is it the quarrel that the majority is happy with doing what it is doing? Or are you saying, as you are saying in England with the cameras, 99 percent of the people like cameras, you do not? And I don't either, by the way.

So the question comes down to: How do you use the word "democracy," as opposed to maybe "the greater good says liberalism should triumph over the years"? But democracy is in full force and effect in these countries.

JOHN KAMPFNER: Singapore has specifics. It does have the veneer of multiparty elections. In fact, I think in the last election the opposition gained somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of the vote, although I think it gained only two or three members of Parliament out of—I don't have the numbers—out of 70, and that is because of particular electoral procedures taking place.

China, I was struck by the extent to which—which is a question that often comes with democratization in particular Muslim states as well—how the middle classes, the people with power and with aspiration, saw a danger in the disbursement of political power to "one person, one vote" because it would produce unintended consequences.

That has in Washington policy circles been the great debate over the last 20 or 30 years: Do you spread democratic values or do you spread democracy itself, which are not necessarily the same thing, and is democracy the behavior of a society more in line with those that democratic states conform to? If you give universal votes, you do not necessarily produce that outcome. I say that purely neutrally; I do not say that in terms of advocating one or the other.

I do use the terms interchangeably at times, because what I am questioning is not necessarily—I suppose for me, being very much a free expression advocate, to which you guys would say "so what?"—you have a First Amendment; we don't. Advocating free expression in the U.K. is actually quite—you are regarded as a little bit strange. Somebody described free expression as a rather fundamentalist aspiration.

I suppose the issue for me is the desire for people to enter into the public realm. It is a vigorous body politic, it is a vigorous civil society, manifested in whatever way suits the specificity of that country. If multiparty democracy produces that through representative democracy or through executive democracy, that's fine. If other mechanisms and methods produce that, that is fine too.

What has happened is the retreat from—you can have democracies, but just as you have in the world—I think it peaked, according to Freedom House, in 2000 or 2001, the number of countries that it categorized as democracies.

The issue in my book is, not so much the quantity of democracies that tick certain boxes, but the quality of those democracies. The most effective democracies are those where you have the most active body politic, the most active citizenry, taking part in the debate, in the construction of that society.

QUESTION: I have lived in this country for over 40 years. I don't mind the cameras. I think we should have

more. The fact is that it has become much safer living in Manhattan over my time here. The police have been increased in numbers and you can actually walk down the street and see police pretty well on every street corner in Manhattan—or you used to be able to until the budget cuts.

I wanted to change the perspective on this, because you talked about security and democracy. I wanted to talk about public finance and democracy, because I have a fear that when our society is taken away by the local Gestapo or the local Taliban we will have better teeth, we will have shoes on our feet, and our prosthetic devices will be pretty modern, but we will have declined because we cannot control our public finances.

When I came to this country, the states would always bail out a municipality, and if a state got into trouble the federal government would bail out the state or help the state. Everybody is broke now.

My grandchildren go to school in Wyoming, which has a very small population. The school is excellent. They build new schools when it is necessary, they pay the teachers, they equip the schools. The reason is the state has a lot of money from coal royalties and oil and gas royalties, and they have abolished the rule *in perpetuum*, they have dynastic trusts.

So what I am saying is maybe the socialist model for the big states, like New York and California and the U.K. and Europe, are going to ruin us. What do you say to that? [Laughter]

JOHN KAMPFNER: I'm not really sure where to begin.

The book is not a book about different economic models. This is not about more centralized continental European—although some of these clichés are just that. So it is not comparing and contrasting economic models.

It does reflect anxieties around the financial crash, but more around the question of—I have been surprised and disappointed, both during the final stages of writing the book and subsequent to writing the book, about the lack of follow-through on any really serious questioning of economic models—whichever economic model you subscribe to or other one—resulting from the financial crisis, whether that is the indebtedness of states or whether that is the culpability of the financial services sector or whatever else.

There was a bit of a discussion of that at the beginning of last year, and now the only question in town appears to be, "When are we all going to be emerging from the recession?" and continuing as we were, albeit with certain improvements in regulation on derivatives and other areas. That is really the only economic comment I make.

I think that, whatever economic construct you come up with, you can construct a healthy democracy around it as long as there is enough creativity in the system.

I am not across the level of U.S. indebtedness, but certainly in the U.K. we are looking at 15-20 years of retrenchment coming up.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask you how do you think religion in the various countries you visited affects the culture, dictates how we believe, and so on and so forth?

JOHN KAMPFNER: I was debating with somebody who has done a book just on that very subject last week in London, so I would defer to others.

Again, I would be entirely neutral in terms of the desirability or otherwise of religion to play its part in the body politic, as long as the arguments were aired in a very healthy and robust way.

What worries me in this country, and what worries me in other countries too, is the increasing tendency to regard the other point of view as out of bounds. So in terms of religion, I don't see it playing a significant either negative or positive role in the question of the public freedoms and the private freedoms. The freedom to worship is a very significant private freedom, and it was one of those that was denied to many societies for very long.

But, beyond that, whether it should become a public freedom—as soon as you turn it into a public freedom, by definition you are almost turning it into a public requirement, which is a different thing.

QUESTION: Could you discuss the impact of education and the Internet on people's aspirations?

JOHN KAMPFNER: The Internet for far too long has been generally regarded as the great emancipator, as the great leveler, as the great educator. It is all of those three things.

What it is now, however, in my opinion, is a great agitator. In many ways, what the Internet is doing—I mean there are many honorable exceptions, such as the protests in Iran last summer, courtesy of Twitter, and within a

matter of minutes or hours the political dynamic had changed, albeit temporarily. So it does have still the power—or at least social networking has the power—of galvanizing.

What the Internet appears to be doing, I think advertently, is increasing the atomization of society. You can find out what it is that you as an individual and you as a family need to find out for yourself, but it is in many ways removing people from the public realm as much as placing them in the public realm.

It's quite interesting. The more sophisticated authoritarian regimes are getting increasingly clever about switching on and switching off the tap of the Internet. You can give people sufficient amounts of information; then, as soon as you think they are getting excess doses of it, you switch it off again; then you switch it on again and you allow people also—it's the function of the kettle: If you allow people to let off steam, again through the Internet, through social networking sites, it keeps them off the streets. So it does, interestingly, work both ways, and it is working in different societies at different levels.

In Russia there is very, very, very little Internet censorship of any description, and that is largely because of an aging population and the lack of Internet influence on public life. Whereas in many younger societies, demographically younger societies, the need to control it is far greater.

JOANNE MYERS: That concludes our program today. I want to thank you very much for joining us.

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