



Report from Iran

Mohammad Javad Ardashir Larijani , David C. Speedie

November 15, 2011



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Introduction

DAVID SPEEDIE: Good evening, and welcome to this very special event at the Carnegie Council. I'm David Speedie, director of the U.S. Global Engagement Program here at Carnegie Council.

We are welcoming tonight Dr. Mohammad Javad Ardashir Larijani. I will not go into a long introduction—you have his biography in front of you—merely to say that Dr. Larijani is a seasoned politician, with a considerable and diverse background.

I will just make perhaps two points. The first is that here at the Council we see as one of our guiding voices that of the great political theorist [Hans Morgenthau](#). Morgenthau wrote in "[The Promise of Diplomacy](#)" his nine rules. Under his nine fundamental rules, he says that "diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations."

He liked to quote the great British parliamentarian [Edmund Burke](#), 18th century: "Nothing is so fatal to a nation as an extreme of self-partiality and the total want of consideration of what others will naturally hope or fear."

It's in this spirit of hearing all points of view that we welcome Dr. Larijani this evening.

The format is that he will speak briefly to us, for just a few minutes, and then he has said two things. First of all, he would like to engage more in a dialogue with you, the audience, and entertain your questions. He has also said that he will welcome difficult questions on a range of subjects.

I also wanted to say that in previous sessions that I have attended, along with some people in the audience here, with President [Ahmadinejad](#) a couple of years ago, all the questions focused on the nuclear issue. While that's clearly on the table, I hope we would have a range of subjects that we want to raise with our distinguished guest this evening.

With that, welcome, Dr. Larijani, to the Carnegie Council.

Remarks

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: [Arabic phrase] I'm very glad to be able to participate in this august meeting.

You mentioned hard questions. In fact, when it comes to Iran, it seems that there is no shortage of hard questions.

Perhaps I would like to mention how we see ourselves, and then you can start to refute that or challenge the way that we see ourselves, and doing that, we can come up with some good results. This is famous from [Hegel](#): "Things start with negation."

If you ask me what is the greatest achievement or the main task that we are engaged in in the past three decades in Iran, it is not the great scientific achievements—which is, in fact, very true. We are one of the best in science and technology in the Middle East.

It's not in [nuclear technology](#), which is a matter of pride for us, as well. We are very happy that we own the [first nuclear power plant in the region](#), and also we know how it works. We built some part of it. We know how to get

the fuel for that. These are matters of pride.

We are very happy that we can put [a satellite into orbit](#). We are number one in the Middle East for that.

But these are not the main achievements. Our main achievement is that we try to create a polity based on Islamic rationality, incorporating the democratic procedures which are practiced in the [Western liberal system](#). We thought to ourselves that [democracy](#) is good, but [secular liberalism](#), we don't like it, so let us create a [democratic structure based on Islamic rationality](#).

The main assumption was that this is possible. The best way to prove something is possible, in the practical sense, is to make it possible. We had, before the [revolution](#), a lot of discussion on the theoretical level of whether it is possible; whether democracy should be only liberal, only secular.

We went beyond that. We just started this practice. Our main experience, which we think is of utmost importance, is to create a polity which has a democratic structure, power structure. People are getting to power by lateral vote and coming down by lateral votes. Main decisions are based on the vote of the people. But it is different from Western experience, in the sense that it is not liberal. It is a democracy based on Islamic rationality.

What I call Islamic rationality—if we say that our government is [Islamic](#), it means that it is a theocracy based on frozen text; take it or leave it. This is not Islamic rationality.

Islamic rationality means a rational structure stemming from ingredients that basically has Islam and other needs. Human beings are getting that and confronting that in the real situation. So Islam could be the source of the sphere of the rationality, the same way that secular liberal sentiments could be the source of a sphere of rationality.

We see ourselves as masterminds of this experience. It is intellectual, it is cultural, and it is political. We see that in other parts of the Islamic world, especially recently in the Middle East, there are [movements](#). In our view, these are very good movements in the sense that they are moving toward what we thought before—that in order to be democratic, we don't have to be Western.

We could be democratic still enjoying a lot of things from our indigenous culture. Culture is not frozen things from museums and paintings or music or things like that. Culture in this sense is the engine of daily life and the way that we judge, that we understand.

For that reason, from day number one that [the events in Tunisia](#) appeared, we were among the first countries that welcomed this process. We are very happy. We think the end will be very good for our view of the way that the Middle East should be shaped in the future.

So any degree of progress in democracy in this region will be translated, in our view, in our interest. It may take a little bit of time, but it is the vision that we have. This is the way that we see ourselves and we see our environment around us.

In fact, based on this thinking and the assumptions, we understand that, while countries like the United States are very nervous that Iran should not go fishing about these events in the area, that Iran should be prevented to get advantage from the changes in the Middle East, I think it is not possible to prevent that, because this is naturally coming.

I have pointed to that issue because it is totally ignored by the Western community. The way that I understand it, they don't think that we have any valuable experience in creating a polity. When I read articles and books looking to our vision, the only thing [they say] which is good in our vision is when it becomes quite a Western type of liberal system. If it is not like a liberal system, it is not democratic. Maybe they are worth it for a while, but culturally and in terms of civilization, it doesn't have too much to offer.

But we think this way: if we succeed in creating good polity, then we are contributing to the human experience much more than just our advancement in science and technology, which we really, in fact, are very interested in as well. So this is the way that we look at ourselves. I really appreciate if you try to break me.

I remember when I was a student in Berkeley, when I got a flat over there, in the kitchen there was a little remark, "Try to break it," because over there the garbage was not carried, so we should put it over there and try to dump it there. I was putting all the bottles aside. I was afraid that they would break. The manager said, "No. I put in here a sign. Try to break it, because it doesn't break."

So please try to break me. Then I will learn more.

Thank you very much.

DAVID SPEEDIE: We're not in the business of breaking our guests, Dr. Larijani.

Essentially, if I may sum up, Dr. Larijani has given us a very interesting *tour de raison* of how Iran sees itself, and how it sees its geostrategic neighborhood. It's an evolving, dynamic process that's by no means finished, and it may be misunderstood by the West. Some challenging thoughts there. I'm sure we're ready for some questions.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Doctor, for coming.

Iran has a wonderful history. I was just at the Metropolitan Museum and just visited the redone Islamic wing. It's a fabulous culture, over thousands of years.

Your bio states that you are a scientist, a teacher, but you are also adviser to the head of the judiciary and secretary general of the [High Council for Human Rights](#). In defining democracy, where would you place the words "legitimate peaceful dissent"?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: First of all, my interest in the human rights issue is almost a life interest. It goes back almost 40 years ago, before the revolution. I was a political dissident myself, and I was jailed during the time of the [shah](#). So I tasted the meaning of how to be suppressed and how to be jailed and what else.

So human rights became part of my activity before the revolution, and after the revolution as well—before revolution, as an NGO [non-governmental organization] and working as a private citizen, as a student. After revolution, the question was how in the governmental structure we can promote human rights. Human rights are promoted through different avenues—NGOs, national bodies, and also governmental agencies.

This was the beginning of my cooperation with the judiciary, from immediately after the revolution, in the sense that one place that the attention should be paid—one place, not the last one—is the judicial system. Perfection is the worst thing that somebody should claim, but I think this is the reason that I started to work with different judicial periods in Iran, and different agencies have been created.

About seven years ago, the High Council of Human Rights was born out of a series of other institutions beforehand. Perhaps I should claim the credit for that. I worked hard to create that as a national governmental structure, in which the head of the judiciary is the head of this council and five ministers are members of that council, the ministers of foreign affairs, intelligence, justice, and others. The head of police is a member of that council. The head of prison administration is a member—all the bodies, the prosecutor general.

So over there we look to the human rights from a governmental point of view. The basic idea is that, first of all, human rights are not a Western commodity. We wanted to think of it as a barometer of civility in our society. We may not agree with the literal meaning of some of the texts, basic texts, in human rights.

We think it is very much secular. But it has enough room for maneuvering in it to inject in it a meaning which we think is more proper. This is not strange. The texts are not frozen, after all. We are reading that we should make a meaning for that. It is faithful to the texts to a good degree, but definitely we don't look in a secular way.

Political dissent is a major issue in any polity. When I came to the United States, it was the end of the [Vietnam War](#), and I was witnessing, especially in Berkeley, how the issue was hot there. Every single word that somebody said was connoted to be a [Marxist](#) or a [communist](#). [Herbert Marcuse](#) was kicked out of the University of California in San Diego because he was heading a Marxist group, for example.

The question to me was why this is so sensitive. Once I was sitting in Berkeley, Evans Hall, which is the mathematics department. There was a huge student protest. Then police came from the sky, by helicopter, by horse from the sides. Four students were killed.

[Ronald Reagan](#) was governor of California. Then at the night, he came on TV. It was very interesting for me—I was following it word by word—how he explains his action. We were contemplating building a polity, but we wanted to see how they run it.

In his way of saying things, he was waving his head and saying, "Look, you fellow Americans are paying us your taxes, to safeguard our [capitalist](#) system or [free-market economy system](#), not to let these communist stooges to come up and pollute your society." For me, it was an important way to deal with this issue.

Political dissent has two parts in dealing with it. One is the legal part. In our legal system, to have a political view is free, and you can make activity. But there are two main limits for that. It is not unlimited.

The first limit is that you cannot offend Islam. For example, if a group thinks that [Islam is the opium of society](#), like Marxist groups, they cannot produce a legal, formal political campaign for their views. It is totally banned. The prosecutor general would submit a subpoena for them that they should stop doing that.

The second one is that to indulge in any activity which is to bring down the regime, not by vote, but by breaking the law and the security of the state—I know the words "security of the state" are very ambiguous in some sense.

It is exactly this place that all dictators will come in. If you ask any dictator, "Why do you prosecute these people?" they say, "Well, they were working against the security of the state." I know this is true. But security of the state is an immense issue from the point of view of governance. As I said, I'm looking to human rights from the point of view of governance.

When I was a student, I was looking to that as a political dissent, but here from another point of view. We cannot ignore the security of the state. The security of the state is so important, even in liberal democracies—after [9/11](#), I saw that a revolution happened in the United States in terms of civil liberties.

I was living here before and then I saw afterward. I saw that a lot of things that one couldn't imagine could happen before 9/11 happened in the United States afterwards—from a special way of interrogation, from police detention, even based on very little information of the intelligence people, and others.

So in that sense, I think this is a second limit. Let me get more practical—for example, [Baha'is](#). Baha'i is not considered a political activity in Iran. Nobody is prosecuted because he is a Baha'i. But as a cult which you can get in and you cannot get out—if you get out, you will be punished—they are pursued, definitely.

As a group who is working, for example, in coordination with intelligence services of [Mossad](#), though it is Baha'i—well, it doesn't matter that it is Baha'i or not. Even a [Shia](#) who works with Mossad immediately will be pursued by security people. He may get a capital punishment if his involvement against the state is too high, regardless of being Baha'i.

I just want to underline that security is a limit to some form of dissent.

QUESTION: Frank von Hippel. I'm a physicist from Princeton University.

I've been involved in discussions with Iranian officials for the last several years over the nuclear program. I was also involved during the [Cold War](#) in discussions with regard to the U.S.-Soviet arms race.

One thing we found very useful was discussions between scientists; scientists who were listened to by the governments, but not actually part of the governments. I have been interested in the possibility of such a dimension to the U.S.-Iranian discussion. There are a number of scientists who have been involved in these discussions—looking for counterparts. You have been mentioned, actually, as a possible counterpart for discussions, brainstorming kinds of discussions that governments can't really have, to discuss possible ways out of the nuclear impasse.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Thank you.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Is that an invitation?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Should I put a comment on it?

DAVID SPEEDIE: Would you welcome this kind of thing?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Oh, definitely. Let me say that—you are a physicist. [Feynman](#) wrote that he was invited to get some consultation to the president of the United States. Then, at the middle of that, President—I don't know who it was, [Johnson](#)?—he said, "Get rid of this crazy man."

So scientists, when giving consultations to the politicians, should be very cautious not to go far away.

But anyhow, I really welcome that. Plus a good number of scientists in Iran are educated in the United States. This by itself is a good bridge. It is good also that a good number of scientists in the United States have come here from abroad.

I really welcome that. It's quite possible. There were some kinds of discussions between scientists on this issue before. Definitely it is a very good idea.

QUESTION: I'm Hadia Barani [phonetic]. Welcome to New York, Mr. Larijani.

Really, I would appreciate if you would give direct and honest answers to the issue that has just come up: peaceful political dissent.

I want to ask, since you have many times said that there is freedom of expression in Iran and there are no human rights violations, how come is it that all the prominent leaders of all peaceful movements—such as [Bahareh Hedayat](#), [Majid Tavakoli](#), Abdullah Momeni from the student movement; prominent human rights advocates and lawyers, such as [Nasrin Sotoudeh](#) and [Seifzadeh](#); and prominent journalists, such as [Issa Saharkhiz](#), [Ahmad Zaid-Abadi](#), Bahman Amouee—all are in prison since the evening of the [disputed election in 2009](#), and all of their charges under the [judiciary](#), which your [brother](#) heads, are acting against national security?

You just noted that dictators use security as a way to quench free speech. We have hundreds of peaceful people that you cannot say have done anything besides their writings or speeches or ideas behind bars.

How can you reconcile those two positions, the reality inside Iran's prisons and how you are putting the situation to us tonight? Thank you.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: First of all, when you say "all," in an exclusive way, it means that if somebody is a writer and he doesn't write against the Islamic structure, he is not a prominent writer; or a defender of human rights should be either promoting a secular system, or is not a defender of human rights. I think you should not say this easily, that all the prominent writers and defenders of human rights are in prison. This is not a rigorous way to say it.

But the point is that we had an election. One of the contenders thought that he is the winner, Mr. [Mousavi](#). He had more than 45,000 observers from his side in the ballots across the country. All of his observers signed the numbering and enumerations in different ballot places. But they decided to not accept the result of the election and not to go to the legal system usually used by different candidates to challenge the result, but to bring the people to the street and said, "The only way is that everything should be stopped."

This was a death of the democratic structure that we tried for 30 years to erect over there, because the result of the ballot is a sacred result. If nobody respects that, then what is left? We should start again. Who is legitimate? Who is not legitimate?

So our argument with him was, "Look, if you don't like the result, you can come up here and say, 'Okay, you don't like the result,' and go to the system. Even at the end, you can say, 'Still, my heart is not very much with it, even if I cannot prove it.'"

This happened to me myself. I was for long years a prominent member of the Parliament. I lost the election. It was a bitter taste, if you lose. But anyhow, I lost it. Then I thought that I really won the election.

How come I did not win it by numbers and votes? Then I made a petition. Still I believed that some of my votes disappeared. But I could not prove it. I accepted the result. There was no other way.

The incitement to [violence which happened in Iran](#)—fortunately, the number of lives that we lost, 20 policemen and 12 civilians, it was limited. Still, it is very sad. But I think this incitement to violence was the major source of the argument of the prosecutor against these people.

I'm not going to say whether it was absolutely correct or not. In the legal system, there are moments that we should just [say] whether this is exactly the type of crime that's reputed to the person. But these people have been defended in the court for several times. The court went to the appeal court and then was approved in the higher courts as well.

So I can say that the judicial process went through, at least formally, but substantially this is up to the legal person to see whether it was rigorous in all its steps or not.

I want to say that even right now in the present-day Islamic Republic of Iran, those who advocate a secular system more than the Islamic democracy have at least ten newspapers. For example, there is a famous newspaper called [Shargh](#). All the articles in it are advocating a secular system. It is published every morning, and it has a good audience. There are others.

The way that one wants to promote his idea is very important. I do not want to say that no excess has been done. It is impossible to curb the excesses when the violence erupts. We cannot put a policeman with another policeman to watch this policeman, and then there is another one to watch the second one.

But I want to say that this edifice that we have over there to build a democracy based on Islamic views is a young one. It's only 50 years old. So a lot of concepts should be developed in that.

One of them is that we people, citizens, should also learn how to play the game in such a society. In order to promote your idea, you may go in a way to offend Islam or may not.

For example, there are people who are against the [executions in Iran](#). They write articles about that. For

example, they say that—this is called the prudence argument—if you have executions, it doesn't bring the number of crimes down. Another one is the fallibility argument. It means that if the judge made a mistake, then it is irreversible. And a bunch of others. So these arguments are presentable. You can go and talk about it.

But if somebody comes and says Islam is a very bad and violent religion because it had in it execution approved, so the prosecutor will pursue you, why you said that.

So we should learn how to play the game in this environment. It's a cultural matter.

If you want to live the way that you live in France and you can publish a caricature of the [Prophet](#) as well, you may get capital punishment in Tehran.

But if you have something to say about some law—and the content may be the same—but in the way that you should pursue that, there is a big difference. I think the first presumption of civility is that you should honor the legal structure, and within the legal structure, you should promote your ideas.

QUESTIONER: [Not at microphone] Actually, incitement to violence doesn't appear in any of those indictments. But since we're talking about rule of law, what are the charges against Mousavi and [Karroubi](#), who are in incommunicado detention for eight months, and again [inaudible] would not file charges?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Their charge is basically incitement to violence.

QUESTIONER: [Not at microphone] Where is this written, what is the charge [inaudible] have never been written down or [inaudible]?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Written? What do you mean by written?

QUESTIONER: The judiciary has not produced any charges, has not charged them.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: This is the reason that they are under surveillance, in-house surveillance. Yes, they have the charges. They may have other charges as well, but different dossier.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Hamid Akhavi. I'm dean of technology at one of the colleges in New York City.

I would really like to thank you for taking your time and coming here, sharing your thoughts with us. But I must say that I need at least three hours to refute everything that you have said here. I am just going to cite some of the examples you gave us.

A few years back, there was an article published in one of the newspapers in Iran by [Hashem Aghajari](#), who technically copied that from someone else. In his article he pushed for elimination of execution. In Iran they asked for his execution because his article was against *qisas*, the rule of law. He quoted in his article that, according to Prophet Muhammad, killing one person is not just killing one person; it's killing a generation. But, still, they said since he is against execution, he should be executed because he's not really obeying the rule of law.

My fundamental question is this. When you see a government—and I'm glad you brought up the question of governance—if you see a government who feels it is representing God on this planet, where is the room for democracy? Where is the room for human rights? Where is the room for women's rights?

Once you have a government that sees itself—I'm really happy that you are acting as, "Everything was planned. We talked about this a few years before revolution. I had this future for Iran planned when I was in Berkeley, California." We all know it's not true. You're making it up as you are going along, and that is why—

DAVID SPEEDIE: You asked an excellent question about religion and governance. Can we leave it at that and avoid ad hominem attacks? Thank you.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: I'm very glad that you are raising this issue. We can indulge in a very good discussion.

The first claim that you made—first of all, Aghajari has never been executed and his charge was never writing an article against *qisas*. He made a speech on [Hamadan](#) and he kind of defamed some of the imams. He said these people are claiming things which any foolish person also doesn't claim.

Then the charge was against him that he's defaming the sacred symbols in the Shiite theology. The case was brought against him. But in about two months, he was out of prison.

So you see that to raise against a person a charge is not equal to—that is done in any society. It could be raised against him. But he has never been executed, and after two, three months, he was free as well. So, yes, he was detained for that reason, not about *qisas*.

Secondly, to claim that we are representative of God on the earth—this is the type of theocracy that you had in the [Christian](#) world before. Our polity doesn't have any similarity to that. We are creating an earthier structure, when I say the polity, based on Islamic rationality. So we are human beings believing in Islam, and we are trying to create a rationalist structure for our society.

The model that you are claiming is exactly the reason that a lot of Western people cannot understand the nature of our experience, because beforehand in the Christian world, there was theocracy and the church was claiming that they are representative of God. In fact, we don't have an institution called "church." In Islam there is no church as an institution. We have Islamic academics. It means that they understand Islam and they should teach others.

The government by itself is totally an earthy structure. We commit our mistakes, like any other government, and also we do a lot of progress, like any other government. We are susceptible to mistakes and capable of doing progress at the same time.

We think this is the gift of God to us. Made as rational creatures, we can move, we can correct, we can change. This is the best thing that we can attribute to God. God did not make us like computers—well, this is disputable. But we can make a decision after free will, yes.

QUESTION: David Aaron, from the RAND Corporation.

Thank you very much for coming here and sharing your thoughts with us.

I would like to return to the nuclear question, but perhaps not in the way it's often addressed. My question is this. Your government insists that the program is for peaceful purposes, and not military purposes.

Why not? Why wouldn't Iran want to have nuclear weapons? It's surrounded by other nuclear powers. The nuclear weapons would provide a deterrent. It would demonstrate your technology. It would generate a certain amount of prestige, at least in some quarters. Why have you decided not to do it?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Two reasons. Number one, it is more liability than asset in terms of security and deterrence. This is a very important factor.

Look to Pakistan. They have the bomb. From a technological point of view, they are far beyond [sic] us, because to produce a bomb—you have a physicist in here—is much easier than to have modern technology capable of producing power and other things. Nuclear technology is a fantastic area of technology and science. To produce a bomb is not so much involved. It does not add to our security. It is more liability for us.

We have accumulated enough strength in our military muscle, which is quite enough to confront any imminent threat. But we should not work on the futuristic threats. As far as we can repel any imminent threat, that's enough for our security. Our muscle is strong enough for repelling imminent threats.

Secondly, there is a religious reason for that. Ayatollah [Khamenei](#) ruled as a [fatwa](#) that it is against Islamic jurisprudence that we produce mass destructive weapons.

Personally, I do not agree with this [fatwa](#). But he is a [mujtahid](#), and so he said that. I do not know if Imam [Khomeini](#) also shared this [fatwa](#) or not. But right now a good number of [ulemas](#), the jurisprudence experts, agree with Ayatollah Khamenei's view. As a leader, he is pushing his perception on that.

As I said, I personally do not agree with this position. I do not think that to produce an atomic bomb is totally ruled out, that it is [haraam](#), it is forbidden. But I agree with the fact that to have a bomb is more liability for us than asset.

Our asset is the knowledge and technology that we have. This cannot be erased. Even if somebody put a bomb in [Bushehr power plant](#), we make another one.

If they kill two or three of our scientists, we have 100 others. We can produce scientists. They are educated. They know physics. They know mathematics. Even if they say that you are forbidden to teach physics and mathematics, then we will start from lower part and they start to come up.

It is impossible to deprive our nation from this capability. I think this is a very strong capability. This is the one that we stake on it. We spend on it in our R&D [research & development] programs.

Since it became a matter of pride, I think the United States—in some way, we should be thankful to them, because they pushed a lot of young people to have an interest in that and say, "Well, we should go and learn that to show them we can do it." So we have recruited more easily young scientists to come to this area.

QUESTION: The United Nations recently appointed a [special rapporteur](#) on the situation of human rights in Iran, who [recently published a report](#) documenting various human rights abuses, including torture in prison, arbitrary detention, and the like. I was wondering if you could speak to why the Iranian government doesn't welcome the special rapporteur into Iran.

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: It is true that Mr. [Ahmed Shaheed](#) came out with a hastily put-together report, which is a copy/paste of other reports before. He did not need too much work to do that. He just took others and put it as a report.

Our difficulty is not with the rapporteur. We announced years before that we welcome any rapporteur, especially thematic rapporteurs, to come to Iran and investigate anything. More than seven thematic rapporteurs came to Iran in the past ten years and produced their own reports.

You know, these rapporteurs, when they come, they do not produce positive things usually. They go for the flaws. This is true when they go everywhere.

Our problem with the special rapporteurs and some of the thematic rapporteurs is that they lack a methodology to do their work, so they produce a report which is not professional. I'll give you a very concrete example.

Dujou Honaire [phonetic] was one of the thematic rapporteurs who came to Iran, investigating the independence of judges and lawyers. Then he said, "I want to visit 32 prisoners."

We said, "Okay. How many hours do you want to spend with them?"

He said, "At least two hours."

We said—a simple calculation—"You need 64 hours."

He said, "I want to stay only two days in Tehran."

I proposed to him, "Look, be rational. At least pick two and spend eight hours with each of them. It may produce more substantial things for you."

He picked three and he spent more than three hours with each of them.

Anyhow, we say that a special rapporteur—any rapporteur—should come with an agenda. If they come with a list of 500 accusations gathered from here and there, this is not a professional start. They should start from some way which is solid.

We have a good proposal, which is, in fact, endorsed by the high commissioner as well. We said, "Look, one good thing is [UPR](#) [universal periodic review]."

During [Iran's UPR](#), we agreed on about 123 recommendations. A special rapporteur can take each one of them. Then he can ask at least three questions: What are our laws about that idea—for example, free speech? He can survey our law. He should understand our law, where our law—what is the limit.

We do not have absolute tolerance, I claim that openly. I believe absolute tolerance is a lie, but anyhow, we do not have it.

But we have our own tolerance, which is limited, but I think is good enough to be a democratic structure, is good enough to bring a politician down, and that's good. But it's not absolute.

So he can review our laws. He can review our practices, how our laws are implemented. He can go to special cases. Then he can spend enough time.

The special rapporteur is also welcome to do his work, but he should tell us if he wants to produce—if he wants to come to Tehran, spend a couple of days, and make an interview, and then go out, and he says, "Okay. I went to Tehran. Oh, the situation is more miserable than it is in the report," then he doesn't need to bother to come to Tehran.

He can say that when he's outside. But if he wants to do a professional reporting, he's welcome there. He can spend months in Tehran. Then we are happy to see his outcome.

The thing with the reporting and with the resolutions of human rights is that it is doing more damage to human rights promotion than to promote that. It is becoming totally politically agitated, and it is a means to put pressure on Iran. Well, we're used to that for 30 years. We don't feel the pressure too much, because our body is used to this pressure.

Anyhow, this is our position toward the special rapporteur. We are indulged in the discussion with the high

commissioner. We are expecting her to visit Iran early next year. The preparatory committee is coming to Tehran in December. This is the main agenda I want to discuss with her.

Let us pave the way for this special rapporteur, because already two thematic rapporteurs are going to visit Iran next year. Their agenda is more manageable.

But for the special rapporteurs, we have very high sensitivity. I personally think, if he doesn't come with a professionally sound way to make his reporting, there is no reason that he should be welcome in Tehran.

QUESTION: [Not at microphone] You publicly invited him—

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: I did that publicly and officially. He can spend more than a month, because—I'm kidding—he has three wives. He can get the fourth one as a Persian one.

QUESTION: Thank you for this opportunity to be with you.

When I led the first delegation of [FOR](#) [Fellowship of Reconciliation] to Iran in 2007, it was during a period when Iran was hosting a global conference on jurisprudence. It was a reminder of how widely distributed Islam is, and Islamic jurisprudence, globally. The ayatollah at the [Friday prayers](#) lifted up the thought that perhaps Shia jurisprudence offered a better interpretation of human needs than other approaches. But that was in the context of that week.

You said earlier that you saw Islamic rationality, as modeled in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the way the Middle East should be shaped in the future. Did you mean to constrain the applicability of this model only to the Middle East or is there a wider global Islamic application to this Islamic democratic model?

MOHAMMAD JAVAD LARIJANI: Even in the Middle East, I'm not prescribing Iran's experience. This is the reason I said Iran's experience, not a model.

I'm very cautious to use the notion of model. It may not be applicable in social life. Model is good for scientific things. Right now it's very fashionable to say that Tunisia—modeling Turkey or modeling Iran.

I think this is a bad way to think about the evolution of social phenomena in our society. It should be called an experience. They should create their own experience. They can look to us. They may not like one part of it. They may like some part of it. But they should go through it.

In mathematics, if somebody doesn't produce a proof, he is not a mathematician. He should go through it. Even if the proof is 100 times written in books and you can say it is proven by that guy, you should prove it yourself.

In the civil experience, we should go through it ourselves. So I'm against any modeling.

But the Muslim people in the world can learn from us—not to copy us or to copy us, in both ways. Other people of the world also can look to us to see as an experience. Why not? We look to the Western experience. In our [constitution](#), you see that the models of the United States were there. Our judicial system is based on Islamic jurisprudence and the [French judicial system](#).

So we learn from others. Why do others not learn from us? They should get rid of egocentrism. The world is so good, we can learn from each other. So I'm against any modeling.

To say that our jurisprudence is better than the Sunni jurisprudence is not a professional way to evaluate our jurisprudence. What we have is very sophisticated jurisprudence. This is true, in a number of senses. For example, when it comes to the legitimacy of power, our jurisprudence has a lot of interesting notions. If I explain them for you, you see that it is very modern. You heard that a lot in the Western literature.

Also, we have the concept of prudence. It is very important that prudence is a key issue, whether this act is prudent or not. We call it the notion of *masalahasweh* [phonetic].

We have the concept of *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* means that you should rediscover the [laws of Sharia](#) in any situation. It is not fixed to all the times. We should make it time-variant.

I think these concepts—prudence, the concept of *ijtihad*, the concept of legitimacy of power—this idea of legitimacy of power, it means that if anybody gains the power who is not legitimate and he's not entitled to rule, then we are not obliged to obey. I think this kind of argument is very interesting.

I think the Sunni jurisprudence is also interesting in some respects. They are looking to the end—the difference, I should say. They are, we call it in Arabic, *maqasid*-oriented. It means they look to the end more than the means. We look to the means more than to the end.

Personally—this is a personal evaluation—I'm against any [utopian](#) description of a state or any model of behavior.

To say that a good state is a state in which such-and-such should be—there shouldn't be any injustice, everybody should be free, nobody should be hungry—I think this is the way that [Aristotle](#) put his utopian structure and [Plato](#) described.

I think the end—forget the end. We should have a rational way of behaving while we have hungry people, while we have arrogant people, while we have a lot of bad things. Also we have good things.

So we are oriented to the functionality rather than the end. We think if we have a good method of functioning, let us see what the end could be. Maybe the end is something that even we did not expect. It maybe even better than what we were expecting.

So this is the difference in our jurisprudence. We are means-oriented, behavior-oriented. Our Sunni brothers' jurisprudence is *maqasid*-oriented. We can discuss that in more detail. There are plenty of interesting things in that area, yes.

DAVID SPEEDIE: On that philosophical note, when I quoted Hans Morgenthau at the beginning, "Diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations," I guess I should have added that Morgenthau, being the founder of American [realism](#) in foreign affairs, certainly did not mean that we necessarily invariably agree with or capitulate to, but the point is, we listen.

So we've listened. We've asked some challenging questions. I think you've given some very frank answers, Dr. Larijani, and for that we thank you.

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