

# A Global Perspective

## Interview with Christiane Amanpour

**GJIA:** In the past half-century, the number of democracies has increased substantially. Some believe democratic growth is inevitable, given that other forms of government have proven to be poor advocates for their own citizens. How do you view the future of democratic growth?

**Christiane Amanpour** is Chief International Correspondent for CNN.

**AMANPOUR:** I think that democracy is almost everybody's default setting. People, given a chance, want democracy. That said, you have to ask the question: "What do you mean by democracy?" Here in the United States, some believe that there is only one kind of democracy and that others should embrace that kind of democracy. I think a lot of people around the world want a democratic system that is culturally, politically, and historically appropriate to their own experience. Nonetheless, most embrace the universal values of freedom, the right to elect their own leader, a fair and impartial judiciary that is not run by the state, and a free press.

The rule of law is very important to people all over the world. For many people in non-democratic nations, that is the scariest thing: the lack of rule of law, whereby punishment, arrest, torture, and imprisonment are arbitrary. And there is no recourse. If you ask the majority of people in the world, this is what they will say. If you then ask them: "Well, do you want Washington-style democracy?" they will answer: "Some of it,

but not all of it.”

Right now, the United States is perceived as trying to impose a certain style of democracy on the rest of the world. And it is a shame that it is perceived that way, because there is a certain amount of heavy-handedness that is used by the current administration. And it is a shame because I think most people would eagerly embrace democracy, even U.S.-exported democracy, if it was done slightly more gently, and with much more concern and sensitivity for the realities of what goes on outside the borders of the United States.

**GJIA:** You have covered a number of conflicts in which ethnicity played a major role. Some of these conflicts were followed by international intervention—such as in Bosnia—that led to the establishment of a nominally democratic structure. Yet in some cases, this democratic structure has helped the rise of extremists. Is it wise to push for elections and for establishing democracy soon after a conflict?

**AMANPOUR:** Yes, I think it is wise to push for establishing democracy, but not to over-emphasize or neglect the need for immediate imposition of security in a post-conflict environment. One of the

enforcement: enforcement, not blue-helmet peacekeeping, but peace enforcement, which means the immediate establishment of the rule of law and security. Security, security, security: this is what most people want and need after the fall of an authoritarian regime or after conflict or ethnic cleansing. In Afghanistan, there needed to be an immediate imposition of security, but the United States and its allies were not prepared to send out peacekeeping troops beyond Kabul. The lack of security has permitted the return of warlords.

In Iraq, we are not even at that point, because the lack of security is so fundamental. Even the basics of a proper democratic process have been impossible to establish. I blame most of the problems on the lack of security in the initial phases of the post-war period. At this time last year, there should have been hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops, as the U.S. Army Chief of Staff at the time, General Shinseki, himself predicted would be needed. Instead of tired troops who had waged a very quick, convincing, and well-fought war, there should have been a proper plan for the immediate deployment of a post-war security force to create the environment for the flowering of democracy, reconstruction, and

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leading British generals, in fact the head of the British Armed Forces right now, whose troops are active in Iraq, told me a while ago that the essential component of modern war-fighting is robust peace-

human rights. Although plenty of press and newspapers have flourished, in general the pillars that support democratic progress are absent. I think it is fantasy to imagine that you can have authoritarian

dictatorship one day and democracy the next. It is a process, it is something that needs to be worked on. It is very, very difficult, and in Bosnia, as you mentioned, the West wanted to have elections very quickly. It is true that, in the initial years, the immediate beneficiaries of elections were the nationalists, the hardliners, many of whose parties had been in the forefront of prosecuting the war. But in the intervening years, this has changed substantially for the better.

**GJIA:** So would you say that trying to put democracy or elections in place before security is established is not a good idea?

**AMANPOUR:** I believe it goes hand in hand. You cannot expect democracy to flourish in the black hole of violence, insecurity, abuse of human rights, control by war lords or factional voices. You must show the people—whether they be Afghan people or Iraqi people or whoever else that you have liberated—that you are willing to stay the course; and not just stay the course in terms of time, but also in terms of what you are willing to do to make a proper transition to peace.

**GJIA:** A fundamental debate pits those who view democracy and economic liberalism as triumphant against those who see growing differences along cultural lines. Where do you fall on this debate? Do you believe that there is a universal force that is pushing the world towards democracy and those common values that you alluded to?

**AMANPOUR:** You can call it whatever you want. People in the West call it democracy. Around the world, they call it freedom. Whatever word you want to use, I defy you to find anybody anywhere in the world who says he would rather be living

with his hand shackled, his eyes blind folded, his ears plugged, and unable to benefit from the basic human freedoms in life. Whatever you want to call it, that is what people want.

The fundamental question relates to how democracy is developed, enacted, and built upon to suit various parts of the world. In terms of liberal market values, there has been a standard since the fall of communism in which the first impulse of American policymakers was to focus primarily on market reforms.

In the former Soviet Union, there was a push to turn Russia and the other republics into market economies overnight. Well, time has proven that this an impossible thing to do without hurting many people and without risking that all the nation's capital will land in the hands of a few shrewd and perhaps well-connected entrepreneurs. There has to be some kind of economic fair play as an initial base. But I think that to a certain extent, the market is the right kind of economy for most places, but with safeguards. It cannot be savage capitalism, as the pope said years ago. The pope spent his whole life trying to defeat communism. Some countries, including his own, emerged very well from communism. But as he has said, you cannot go from a state-run system with safeguards for the people into free-market capitalism overnight without plunging people into a terrible abyss.

**GJIA:** Iran offers a look into the forces that might determine the future of the Middle East. Specifically, Iran illustrates the struggle between modernization and religious conservatism. Do you think Iran can be a determinant in the wider struggle between these forces in the Middle East?

**AMANPOUR:** Iran is a very complicated country. It went from monarchy to an Islamic theocracy, neither of which was democratic. In the last few years, Iran has become one of the more democratic countries in the Middle East. There is constant political conflict between the forces of democracy and reform and the forces who oppose reform.

I believe that the forces of reform and democracy will eventually win. But, like many people, I thought it would happen sooner. The latest parliamentary elections, earlier this year, were extremely significant. The reformists were routed, as many of them were prevented from standing for elections. The conservatives, who themselves had been routed in the previous election, now control the parliament.

I think the people of Iran have been on the cutting edge of democracy in that region ever since 1997, when the people of Iran first elected the reform-minded President Mohammad Khatami in a surprise upset election. An overwhelming

**AMANPOUR:** Yes I do, in much the same way that Iran's Islamic Revolution 25 years ago impacted the rest of the region. We are still witnessing the aftershocks of that revolution around the world. I think democracy in Iran would be a standard-bearer. It would be a strong message to people around the world, and particularly in the Islamic world. It is, in my view, the Islamic world to which we need to pay a huge bulk of our attention.

**GJIA:** What should be the U.S. approach towards Iran? Some advocate a hard-line approach. Others have said that pouring money into Iran would actually help, while pressuring Iran would have few positive consequences.

**AMANPOUR:** I think American administrations have wrestled with the best way to treat Iran. There is such a complex, political reality in Iran. Europe has had its own critical dialogue and constructive engagement with Iran for years, and to some extent it paid off in some issues.

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majority of Iranians supported the reform candidates, those who believe in democracy, the rule of law, and opening up Iran to the world. The people of Iran have spoken, and there is no doubt about what they want. But they have not been allowed to have it yet because of their own complicated political mechanisms.

**GJIA:** If Iran were to move closer towards democratic reform, do you think that would impact the rest of the region?

U.S. administrations did not quite know who to back when. People said that if you back the reformers, this will stigmatize them, and the conservatives will point at them as puppets of the United States. Others said if you do not back the reformers, then they will not have the moral weight of the United States and the West behind them. It is very difficult to know how to play the political game in Iran. And then there are the added complications in the United States in terms

of policy right now regarding the nuclear issue and the issue of state-sponsored terrorism. All of those complicate the situation. But I think if you just take it down to the popular level, the Iranians are way ahead of the game when it comes to wanting democracy and trying to enact it.

**GJIA:** There has been much talk about how satellite networks could help liberalize the Middle East. Pan-Arab satellite networks do play a role in orienting political debate in the region, especially with regard to Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, the promise of liberalization remains distant. What role do you believe the satellite networks play in the region today?

**AMANPOUR:** In my opinion, when al-Jazeera first burst onto the scene it was welcomed by many in the Arab world—and around the rest of the world—as a breath of fresh air, a gutsy alternative to turgid state-run media in the Arab world.

Al-Jazeera's main issue has always been the Israeli-Palestinian war, and it has covered the plight of the Palestinians in minute detail, generating much sympathy and outrage in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Al-Jazeera and the rest of the burgeoning Arab satellite channels do not pretend to be objective or neutral on this issue, regularly bashing Israel and also blaming their own Arab governments for not doing more to help the Palestinians. Al-Jazeera infuriates many Arab governments.

But since 9/11, these channels have exploded onto the international scene in an unprecedented way as the principal conduits for video tapes and messages from Osama bin Laden and other terrorists. The war in Iraq has brought them

into an even more critical view. In Iraq, they are viewed by the US-led occupation and my many Iraqis as the voice of the terrorists and insurgents. Because they are often there when insurgents strike, many Iraqis suspect they are working hand in glove with the insurgents. Also, in Iraq al-Jazeera and the Arab media are the only conduits for tapes of hostages and beheadings claimed by networks of al-Qaeda suspects, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and others.

**GJIA:** Recent Pew Global Attitudes polls indicate that world public opinion is increasingly anti-American. As a journalist, you have many occasions to observe this first-hand. How serious is this problem for the future of U.S. foreign policy? Do you believe there is a deep anti-American trend that is making U.S. foreign policy much more difficult to conduct?

**AMANPOUR:** In the past few years, I feel perceptions in the Middle East have been divided in the following way: you have diehard anti-Americans, diehard pro-Americans, and a very large group in the middle, who may be convinced of the merits of American influence.

This large middle ground, I believe, is there for the winning. You can win those hearts and minds. But since the war in Iraq was first mentioned, that huge middle ground has diminished and shifted against the United States. My impression, though, is that opinion has shifted against the current U.S. foreign policy, rather than against America or Americans.

I think there is still hope of eventually bringing these people back into the tent. But right now, people perceive that they are being dictated to by the United

States, they are being talked down to, and their views do not matter. They perceive that this administration's foreign policy as aggressive, unilateral, and pre-

world that gave the world a chance. That should be the key aspiration of politicians and diplomats, of people who go out into the world and want to do something with

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emptive. As the Pew poll points out, this opinion is not just found in the Arab world, but all over the world.

**GJIA:** The United States has developed the strongest military in the world and, in terms of conventional military power, it remains unchallenged. As a country that has long espoused promoting values in its foreign policy, how should the United States use this military power to promote its values?

**AMANPOUR:** Ever since 1990, American military power, combined with diplomatic and political power, has been used to very good effect. Bosnia and Kosovo stand out very clearly. A number of U.S.-led humanitarian interventions were the right thing to do. Somalia turned into a disaster, but to go in and stop the famine was right. It is a shame the rest of it turned out so badly.

I think that American military power can be used in very positive ways. But as that British general told me, the essential component of modern warfare is robust peace enforcement. I would add to that nation-building. One of the greatest Americans was George Marshall. His name is on a program for which the whole world should and does say "Thank you." It created a climate after World War II in Europe, Japan, and around the

their lives, and of those who want to use American power. That is the paradigm. That is the example.

Nation-builders are the unheralded heroes. They should be given much more credit than they are; they are kind of shunted to the side for some reason. For American power to be fully effective, you need the good will and the active support of the rest of the world. You need your allies on board. You need people to commit troops, and not just in token numbers. You need real international cooperation. The president of a major American university said at a recent dinner, that never has U.S. power been so great, nor its influence so little. That should not happen. There's something wrong there.

**GJIA:** To look at a specific example, you recently returned from Sudan. Do you think that there is room for more U.S. intervention in Sudan?

**AMANPOUR:** Many might not think that Sudan warrants much American attention, but it has, in fact, had a significant amount of American attention under the Bush administration, for several reasons. The war there has been raging for decades between the Islamic Arab Sudanese government versus the Christian and pagan peoples of the

south. The United States has been involved in peace talks and peace negotiations. That is a good thing. Their involvement is partly spurred by the Christians in the United States who want to see an end to the war and the south protected. There is a lot of oil in Sudan just being discovered, and the United States, I believe, thinks that it will get a lot of its oil in the future from Sudan. So there are concrete reasons behind U.S. involvement. But it is a good thing for the Americans to be involved and try to bring an end to that war.

**GJIA:** Should the international community take action in Darfur?

**AMANPOUR:** I believe that. I witnessed Bosnia and saw the positive effects when the United States finally stopped the genocide there. The same in Kosovo. But I have also witnessed Rwanda, where the world took no action, and the genocidal catastrophe that followed. I do not know whether it is going to get to that point in Sudan. I certainly believe that, after a late start, the Americans and other leaders are trying to put a lot of political pressure on the government of Sudan to stop the wholesale slaughter in Darfur. It must be stopped. With a huge amount of pressure and international attention, there may be a chance.