

Fukuyama in Tel Aviv

PETER BERKOWITZ

March 18, 2004 at 11:00 PM

Tel Aviv

FAMOUSLY, Zionism founding father Theodor Herzl proclaimed that the aim of the Jewish state should be to permit Jews to live as a nation like other all other nations. A century later, contradicting his hopes in ways that might have made Herzl proud, Israel continues to distinguish itself. Witness the remarkable gathering of 1,200 Israelis at Tel Aviv University last Monday evening, along with foreign diplomats, from, among other countries, Switzerland, South Africa, Guyana, and Egypt. Under the auspices of the university's new School of Government, the audience had come to hear Johns Hopkins University professor Francis Fukuyama discuss with former prime ministers and current Knesset members Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu "The End of History 15 Years Later" (disclosure: as a co-director of the Jerusalem Program on Constitutional Government, I shared responsibility for bringing Fukuyama to Israel for separate seminars).

Indeed, it was in the late summer of 1989 in the *National Interest* that Fukuyama

Your video will start shortly

maintained that
evidence had reached a
critical threshold
suggesting liberal
democracy was

establishing itself around the world as the regime most consistent with the desires for freedom and equal recognition built into human nature. Almost before the ink had dried on his article, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union silently disintegrated. The provocation of his thesis, the acuteness of his analysis, and the prescience of his timing helped transform Fukuyama, at the time a policy analyst at the Rand Corporation, into a public intellectual of world stature.

His writings on the end of history remain mandatory reading in political science classes throughout Israel. Of course, following the outbreak of the second Intifada in October 2000, which unleashed three and a half years (and counting) of suicide bombers and which dashed dreams among a wide swath of the Israeli public for a stable and lasting peace with the Palestinians, the end of history seems much further off than it did in the heady 1990s when globalization was on everybody's lips and the Oslo Accords were full of promise.

Your video will start shortly

It was the anticipation of how Fukuyama would relate his thesis to the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the excitement of watching two former prime ministers display their intellectual prowess by going head to head with an internationally acclaimed scholar that accounted for the rock concert like atmosphere in the hall.

THE PROTAGONISTS DID NOT DISAPPOINT. Because of a crucial no-confidence vote in the Knesset, Peres and Netanyahu were delayed. But the show went on, and Fukuyama rose to the occasion. Under the bright lights on the large auditorium stage, the diminutive professor held forth for 40 minutes. With his characteristic calm cogence, Fukuyama rehearsed the key elements of his argument: history displays a broad pattern of human progress; bourgeois civilization will not be transcended; history will terminate not in a socialist utopia but in liberal democracy and market capitalism; this conclusion is fortified by the empirical evidence of people around the world who have voted with their feet for freedom, democracy, and modernization; and it is further fortified by theoretical reflection on human nature which discloses the rationality of economic and political systems based on individual rights and the consent of the governed.

The key question thus

far posed by the 21st

century, Fukuyama

observed, is whether

there is a Muslim

exception to the end of Your video will start shortly

history. Fukuyama

doubts it. He pointed out that the real democracy deficit is not in Muslim or predominantly Muslim countries but in Muslim Arab countries of the Middle East.

And there the problem, he suggested, was not Islam, though he indicated it still awaits its Luther, but bad government and dismal economic prospects that produce an angry alienation on which purveyors of radical Islam prey. What is necessary on the part of the liberal democracies of the world, according to Fukuyama, is the right kind of politics, one that knows that individual freedom is the long term goal but which takes careful account of, and learns to work with, the distinctive culture of Arab and Muslim societies.

BEFORE FUKUYAMA COULD FIELD MANY QUESTIONS, Peres and Netanyahu, briefed by phone on Fukuyama's handling of the first hour during their ride from the Knesset in Jerusalem, walked onstage to warm applause. Both were funny, smart, and well-spoken. It would be an exaggeration to say that either former prime minister addressed Fukuyama's thesis. But it would be peevish to deny that the stump speech each used the opportunity to deliver about his signature theme connected, or could be connected to, Fukuyama's big ideas.

Peres spoke first. We stand, he said, not at the end of history but at the end of a certain history and the beginning of a new one. Never mind that the new history which Peres evoked, and which he urged his listeners to promote, one in which science and democracy work hand in hand to produce unparalleled peace and prosperity, corresponded roughly to Fukuyama's characterization of the end of history.

Netanyahu began by explaining that he rejected the descriptive part of Fukuyama's thesis but embraced the prescriptive part. Never mind that the descriptive and prescriptive parts of Fukuyama's thesis--liberal democracy was in fact and appropriately triumphing around the world because it satisfied genuine and powerful human wants, needs, and desires--were inseparably connected. What Netanyahu really wanted to dwell upon was that terrorism is a monumental threat to liberal democracy, and while inflamed by poverty and oppression, it "is a product of the totalitarian mindset." In concluding that the issue in connection to Fukuyama is not whether he is right about the end of history but rather how we can insure that he is right, Netanyahu agreed with Fukuyama as well as Peres that the world's liberal democracies have a moral and strategic interest in the spread of liberal democracy.

With the hour growing late, Fukuyama was invited to respond to the prime ministers. Again, he rose to the occasion. No professorial qualifications or quibbles or corrections from him. Instead, looking first at the former prime ministers and then turning to face the crowd he brought the evening to a close by remarking with awe

that it says a great deal about Israel that two former prime ministers and current members of Knesset would take time from their busy schedules to discuss ideas with a professor and that 1,200 people would fill an auditorium to watch and listen.

So it does.

Peter Berkowitz teaches at George Mason University School of Law and is a fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution.

PETER BERKOWITZ

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.