

IRAN

Have you visited Iran? When?

I visited Iran only once, briefly, in May 1992. I was with Ahmad Chalabi as part of the International Committee for a Free Iraq to monitor the elections in Kurdish Iraq. I was also due to lecture at Tehran University on Saddam's war crimes in the Iran-Iraq war. Unfortunately, on our way back, security officers arrested us arbitrarily and we spent a few hours in jail. President Rafsanjani ordered them to release us, and to make apologies. But I was upset and did not give the lecture.

Iran supports Hizbullah in Lebanon. You have sometimes been critical of Hizbullah.

How do you view the future of this relationship?

I believe in creating a common ground between Lebanon and Iran that transcends the divisions inside Lebanon over Hizbullah's weapons. My belief is that the issue of the weapons cannot be solved by force, even if it were available. At the same time, I do not believe as a jurist that any state can operate normally if a faction is armed outside its full control. This is not an easy problem to solve, and it is also regional.

How do you view the relations between a Lebanese president and the new president of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian?

Dr Pezeshkian carries with him hopes for more openness in Iran, and change towards more open societies is always good. Dr Pezeshkian also repeated his dedication to Palestinian rights, and I support the necessity of regime change in Israel to dismantle its apartheid nature. And I welcomed his argument for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons. We must outlaw the assassinations of Iranian nationals, especially nuclear scientists, just as the assassination of Lebanese nationals must be prevented.

How do you see Lebanon's relation with Iran and the wider region developing if you are elected president?

There are always two dimensions in relationships between countries. One is based on the national interests of each, and they sometimes clash; the other is based on affinities, cultural and historical. On common national interests, we can develop mutually enriching economic relations on the basis of the 'geographical platform' suggested by president Pezeshkian, and

there is a shared view of the Israeli state as a colonial entity which robbed, killed and expelled the native inhabitants.

VIEWS ON THE WORLD

As an academic, you have published more than 40 books on different subjects. Which books do you view as your most influential ones, and, briefly, why?

Some of the books are "edited books". Others, about twelve of them, are monographs where I am the sole author. I try to be varied in my scholarship.

My first monograph is the book mentioned earlier on Muhammad Baqer al-Sadr's thought and his Najaf milieu (1993). My Introduction to Middle Eastern Law (2007) results from two decades of research and teaching and sought to formulate a new field of study, Middle Eastern law. Later, I wrote Philosophy of Nonviolence (2015), an altogether different topic. My latest monograph is a treatise on law in Saudi Arabia (2023). I have just completed a book on the making of the Lebanese Constitution in 1926, where I also develop what I hope to be a new theory of democracy.

Do you think there is a thread running through your life scholarship?

I suppose my attachment to universal human rights and to the right of people to enjoy a life free of physical violence form the running thread of my scholarship. The tension between the coercion of law, which is the expression of the State monopoly of violence, and the right to nonviolence, which is a basic human right, sits at the heart of my political philosophy.

Is it not utopian to advocate nonviolence in a world with such violence in it?

Yes and no, however contradictory that sounds. The major revolutions in the last thirty years were nonviolent. The whole Soviet world was brought crashing down by the people power, without a single shot being fired. In Lebanon in 2005, Syria's military presence was also ended without violence. Much of the early Arab Spring was nonviolent. But look at state of the Arab world today! Nonviolence succeeded first and failed afterwards. Utopian? The jury is still out. But I do not, will not, believe that failure is inevitable.