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Case Analysis

Israel and the Egyptian Revolution

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Contents

This study presents Israeli attitudes as they have been expressed by political and military leaders towards the Egyptian revolution; it also investigates what experts in Arab affairs at Israeli academic institutions and research centers have reported. The study examines Israel's surprise at the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, their motives for continuing its support for Mubarak's rule until the last minute, and their reasons for taking a hostile position towards the Egyptian revolution. The study also anticipates the political, military, economic, and strategic effects of this revolution in Israel, as expressed by Israelis themselves.

Since its inception, Israel has invested great interest in Egypt and in its critical role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, both during the period in which the two countries were at war and after the signing of the peace agreement between them. The attention they pay Egypt is due to two main factors: first, Egypt's internal strength as a large and cohesive state with the potential forces and determinants of power that make it *the* Arab state with the ability to hold strong against, and indeed challenge, Israel. Second, Egypt's Arab and regional influences have enabled it to assume a leadership role in collective Arab action for a considerable period of time.

The Camp David agreements, from an Israeli perspective, did not end the conflict between Egypt and Israel; rather, these talks gave it a new form. After the treaty was signed, the conflict continued over a wide range of issues, particularly over each country's status, role, influence, and ability to affect developments in the region. In managing this conflict, Israel relied on its sources of power, particularly:

1. Its military superiority over Egypt and the rest of the Arab states in conventional arms;
2. Its monopoly of nuclear weapons in the region;
3. Its advanced economic standing, evidence for which is its average per capita income, which, for the past two decades, has been comparable to those of some European countries;
4. Its possession of a unified political position on national security issues, in which the Israeli military establishment plays a primary role in formulating security goals and mobilizing popular social support behind them, and in which the Israeli democratic process is founded on ideological, political, and security precepts that have the status of being unquestionable and even "sacred";
5. Its especially advanced relationship with the United States of America, through which Israel receives vital and important US economic, military, and political support that aims to maintain Israeli superiority in relation to all Arab countries.

Based on these factors of power, Israel has in recent decades sought to diminish Egypt's standing, marginalize its role on the Arab and regional levels, reduce its ability to independently impact the course of regional events, and impose upon it an Israeli agenda with regard to the core issues underlying conflict in the region, particularly with regard to the Palestinian cause, in an attempt to transform Egypt into a contractor for Israeli policies towards this and other regional issues under the guise of "mediation," the fight against "terrorism," and confrontation of "Islamic extremism".

A central factor that facilitated Israel's success in achieving many of these policy objectives has been the presence in Egypt of a regime founded on corruption and tyranny, similar to systems of governance in other Arab countries. There should be no surprise then, with this context in mind, that Israel opposed the Egyptian and other Arab revolutions from the first moment, firmly holding to its support for the stability of the corrupt and tyrannical regimes.

PRAYER FOR THE HEALTH OF MUBARAK

Israeli journalist, Aluf Benn, published an article half a year before the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution that was perhaps the most accurate in describing the nature of Israel's position and its relations with Egypt during the reign of Mubarak. Benn opens the article, which appeared under the title "A prayer for the health of the *rais*," by stating that "of all the world's statesmen, the one closest to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak." Benn then cites a highly placed Israeli source to confirm that the ties between Mubarak and Netanyahu "are much closer than they seem" for Egypt; thanks to Mubarak, Egypt has become a strategic ally of Israel rather than Iran, as well as Israel's primary supplier of energy. Egypt has also given Israel the strategic edge and ensured its stability and security, and—thanks to the peace between Egypt and Israel—reduced the burden of Israel's security budget, allowing for a decrease in the size of the Israeli army. After all, this peace has withstood the test of time despite the wars and intifadas on Israel's other fronts. The person responsible for all of this is Mubarak, whose reign over the country was the longest since that of Mohammad Ali. As a result of all of this, "were Israel's leaders given one wish, they might ask that Mubarak be granted immortality."[1]

But the hopes and prayers of the Israelis were not answered by a prolongation of Mubarak's reign. When the popular demonstrations began and their momentum increased day after day, Israel was surprised and shocked; the situation was alarming and indeed critical. Israel's concern was over the person who was its most important regional ally, who had fulfilled that role for the past three decades, and whom it wished—with all sincerity—would remain the ruler of Egypt forever. The situation was critical in terms of the public position that Israel would have to take in the wake of the popular revolution; for if it publicly expressed its support for Mubarak and its opposition to the demands of the revolution, it could fan the flames of an already volcanic revolt. Given the sensitivity of the situation, the office of Israel's prime minister issued a directive to all ministers and government spokespeople asking them not to provide any public statements or responses to media inquiries dealing with the events in Egypt. Both the office of the prime minister and that of the minister of foreign affairs announced that they were closely following the events in Egypt, and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was holding meetings every few hours to discuss and evaluate the situation.[2]

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[1] Aluf Benn, "Prayer for the health of the *rais*," *Haaretz*, May 26, 2010, accessed online at:
http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/Printarticle.jhtml?itemNo=1170543
[2] Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu orders ministers: don't speak about Egypt," *Haaretz*, January 28, 2011. Accessed online at:
http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1212204.

Faced with the persistence of popular protests in Egypt, Netanyahu held a lengthy meeting with the leaders of the security services and his security advisers on January 29, 2011, to discuss the situation in Egypt and the possibility of a revolution and the effects such an outcome would have on Israel. Following this meeting, a senior Israeli official stated that events in Egypt were characterized by a lack of clarity, that no one was able to correctly evaluate these developments, and that "everyone wants to believe that the steps taken by Mubarak will stop the disturbance." The same official added that if the disturbances were to continue and indeed ultimately led to the resignation of Mubarak, the entire network of relations between Israel and Egypt would be looked into.[3] As a result of the sensitivity of the situation, the Israeli foreign minister issued strict instructions to officials not to allow journalists to enter the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not to speak to reporters about Egypt because "the subject is extremely sensitive, and every statement can cause harm." The ministry also took the initiative of evacuating the families of Israeli diplomats from Egypt to Tel Aviv via private jet as a result of the seriousness and sensitivity of the situation.[4]

ISRAEL AS SOLE DEFENDER OF MUBARAK

Israel was not alone in having been surprised by the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution and its momentum, for the surprise also extended to the positions and responses of American and European leaders, who put pressure on Mubarak to undertake reforms, calling on him to refrain from the use of force to suppress the demonstrators. At the beginning of the revolution, while Israel was trying to ensure that it took no public position on developments in Egypt, it was working tirelessly on the diplomatic level to defend Mubarak in its communication with the major countries, trying to convince them to adopt a similar defense of the autocrat.

A few days after the start of the Egyptian revolution, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent secret instructions to its ambassadors in more than a dozen key countries—such as the United States, Russia, China, Canada and several of the leading European countries—ordering the envoys to immediately contact the higher authorities with the demand that the leaders in each country cease their criticism of Mubarak, emphasizing that the stability of Egypt would affect overall stability throughout the Middle East.[5] According to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, there was rising resentment in Israel toward the U.S. and European positions on the "events" in Egypt. According to a senior Israeli official, the Americans and Europeans were being dragged by public opinion without considering their true interests. The official added that even though there was criticism of Mubarak, it was imperative that he be supported, that "friends have the feeling

[3] Eli Berdenstein, "Unease in Jerusalem: lack of clarity over Egypt," *Ma'ariv*, January 29, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.nrg.co.il/Scripts/artPrint/artPrintNew.php?channel=1&channel_news&ts=14042008120049.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Barak Ravid, "Israel to the World: Stop Criticizing Mubarak," *Haaretz*, January 31, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1212546.

that they are not alone. In Jordan and Saudi Arabia they see the reaction of the West, and how everyone is leaving Mubarak; that would have major consequences."[6]

Israel was virtually the only state in the world that continued to support Mubarak and his regime, defending him and warning of the dangers of his ouster, and this despite the daily growth in the size and momentum of the Egyptian protests. In its appeals, Israel deployed the binary of radical political Islam versus the stability of an authoritarian regime that was "moderate" in its policies and orientation towards Israel and the west. In a speech delivered at the meeting of the parliamentarian group European Friends of Israel in Jerusalem, Netanyahu warned of the possibility that "extremist Islamic forces" could take power in Egypt if Mubarak's regime were allowed to fall. In this scenario, he argued, Egypt would follow the path taken by Iran. In the speech, and after laboriously explaining the dangers to Egyptian and regional stability posed by the revolution, Netanyahu claimed that "Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has similar values and interests to those of Europe."[7]

FAILURE TO ANTICIPATE THE REVOLUTION

Israel was surprised by the revolution in Egypt and its success in toppling Mubarak. The Israelis believed that the Mubarak regime was stable and that Mubarak would bequeath power to his son Jamal or to Omar Suleiman. Notably, the revolution came as a surprise to all the agencies that were monitoring developments in the Egyptian and Arab arenas, including the intelligence-gathering and research centers, experts in Arab affairs, university professors, journalists, politicians and military commanders. Notably, these agencies were surprised despite the alarm bells rung by the Tunisian revolution and despite the growth of opposition movements in Egypt calling for democracy whose demands intensified with the increase of workers' strikes and protests against Mubarak's evident plan to hand power over to his son. Israel's surprise was not limited to the outbreak of the revolution, but also applied to the way in which Mubarak was overthrown, as well as to the U.S. and European abandonment of the ousted Egyptian president.

Up to the moment of the revolution's eruption, both Israel's Directorate of Military Intelligence (Aman) and the Mossad held to their assessment, which affirmed that "the regime in Egypt is stable," and that "he [Mubarak] faces no immediate threat."[8] Israel did not only fail to predict the revolution, it also failed to actually interpret and understand the revolution after it had erupted. A few days after the protests began, Aman director Major General Aviv Kochavi stressed that "There are currently no doubts about the stability of the regime in Egypt."[9] Former military

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Jonathan Lis, "Netanyahu: Egypt may follow Iran," Haaretz, February 7, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1213820.

[8] Aluf Benn, "Egypt and Israel: the surprise of the revolution," *Haaretz*, February 19, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.haaretz.co.il.

[9] Amos Harel, "Egypt riots are an intelligence chief's nightmare," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1212218.

intelligence chief Major General Aharon Zeev-Farkash also failed in his reading of developments in Egypt, a failure evident during an interview with Israel Radio in which he stated that the likelihood of the Egyptian army successfully crushing the opposition, restoring order, and putting an end to the protests was very high. In the same interview, Farkash denounced the United States and Europe for their positions towards the revolution, saying that he did not understand these positions, or these countries' support for "democratization" in Egypt.[10]

Israeli journalist Aluf Benn compared Israel's—and especially Aman's—failure to predict the Egyptian revolution to its failure to predict the 1973 October War. Benn attributed the reasons for this failure to the following factors:

1. The prevalent thinking in Israeli intelligence services, academic institutions, research centers and among Arab affairs experts of various stripes was that Egypt had a strong regime and a weak opposition subject to the regime's strict control.

2. Since the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace accords, the Israeli security services had intensified their activities in the Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Iranian arenas and reduced their monitoring of what was happening in Egypt.

3. The close and direct relations that developed between security agency leaders in both countries, as well as the direct and friendly relations between the political leaderships, contributed to an embrace of the view of Egypt as stable.[11]

"DEMOCRACY IS NOT FOR THE ARABS"

Two elements are characteristic of the orientation in Israeli political culture towards Arabs: hostility towards Arab unity and hostility towards democracy in Arab countries. Underpinning this hostility are mainly political factors: Zionist and Israeli leaders have believed—and continue to believe—that democracy and Arab unity reinforce Arab power and increase the potential—in the medium and long term—for resistance to Israel and the possibility of a resultant Arab victory.

This view was held by no less a personality than David Ben-Gurion, the founder of Israel and its security doctrine. On January 29, 1949, after reading the political program of an Arab political party that appeared in the late 1940s, Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary that "the Arabs that see the situation clearly have finally appeared." He added: this party calls for Arab unity and "believes that people are the source of power, that everyone has the right to equality in rights and duties," and calls for freedom of the individual to live in dignity and freedom from colonialism. Ben-Gurion then expressed his fear that if Arabs were to proceed in the way advocated by this party, "this is the way for the Arabs, and all the time I am afraid that an Arab leader will emerge who

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[10] "General Farkash: It is premature to speak of revolution in Egypt," Israeli Broadcasting Authority, January 30, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.iba.org.il.bet/%3Fentity%25.

[11] Aluf Benn, "Egypt and Israel: the surprise of the revolution."

will lead the Arabs in this direction. They ignore the internal and external constraints and the time required to achieve Arab unity. Woe to us if we do not make use of this time to grow and fortify ourselves, to occupy a place in the world."[12]

After the Egyptian revolution broke out in January 2011, the vast majority of Israeli officials were overcome by the fear that this revolution could lead to the establishment of a democratic political system in Egypt. The same fear was shared by the analysts, journalists and Arab affairs experts commenting on the Egyptian revolution. All of these people have spoken about democracy in Egypt as a "threat" in various forms ranging from the explicit to the concealed.

The total Israeli antipathy and fear of the establishment of a democratic system in Egypt led the Israeli writer and journalist Ofer Shelah to address the issue in an article titled "Democracy is not for the Arabs." Shelah starts his article by stating that "there is no sane Israeli who is not afraid of the consequences of the events in Egypt"," especially since the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt is of crucial importance to Israel, and any disruption of the agreement affects all aspects of life in Israel. Shelah goes on to say that "there is one thing I hear from those who speak on behalf of Israel and from a large part of the Israeli public, that is: democracy is not for Arabs. For example, yesterday we heard a "general" say clearly that democracy is not for the Arabs, and they are not worthy of it, and that what Israel needs is Arab political systems that are stable, not democratic. Put simply, we need Arab rulers who are dictators dependent on the West."

Shelah then analyzes this Israeli view that calls for dictatorial Arab regimes, concluding that two motives underlie this view. First, the fear that democracy would bring political Islam to power; and second, Israeli arrogance. It "has become psychologically necessary for us that Arabs remain backwards and despotic, that they be unworthy of fundamental human rights"," he writes. In the Israeli view, the Arabs are hundreds of years behind the West and Israel because of their culture, traditions and their unchanging collective nature. It is therefore better for them and the world that they be governed by dictators who rely for their authority on military force and bequeath power to their children. Freedom is not good for them; because their dark nature would explode outward in waves of violence against their community in the event that they are granted freedom. Anyone who thinks otherwise, "especially the fossilized West and the naive man in the White House, simply does not understand the world, or does not live here like us."

Shelah affirms that this is the prevailing Israeli view whether one lies on the left or the right of the political spectrum. The Israeli left, which traces its roots to those who migrated to the country to build a "villa in the jungle," armed with the slogan "a land without a people, for a people without a land," is as marked by this condescending outlook at least as much as the Israeli right.

In concluding his article, Shelah distinguishes his view from that prevalent amongst the elites and the public in Israel as it pertains to the issue of democracy in Arab countries, saying: "I do

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[12] David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman Malhamah (Diaries of War),* third edition (Tel Aviv: Defense Ministry, 1982), p. 964.

not know what will come to be in Egypt ... I know that if democracy is good for us, it is also good for the Arabs."[13]

THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION'S EFFECT ON ISRAEL

The Israeli security establishment and Israeli leaders, researchers, university professors, journalists and Arab affairs experts devoted a great deal of attention to the effects of the Egyptian revolution upon Israel. This interest was multifaceted, extending in particular to the future of the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel; the nature of future bilateral ties; the implications of the Egyptian revolution on the development of Israel's military; the balance of power in the region; the composition and size of the Israeli army; Israel's economic and political standing; Israel's position and role in the region; and the Palestinian issue with its various associated issues.

In order to cover these topics, I will outline the positions of a wide spectrum of Israeli actors, analyzing their writings and speeches on the effects of the Egyptian revolution on Israel and the region.

In the first week of the Egyptian revolution, Amos Harel offered an analysis of the potential effects of the revolution on Israel if Mubarak were successfully overthrown. Harel stated that the overthrow of Mubarak would have a major security impact in the short and long term. In the short term, the covert security cooperation between Israel and Egypt would be affected, opening a space for closer relations between Egypt and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip; in turn leading to a jeopardizing of the status of the multinational force in Sinai; potentially leading to the ending of Israeli warships' access to the Suez Canal. As for the long term, Harel stated that if a radical regime ultimately replaced Mubarak, that would effectively freeze the peace arrangements between Israel and Egypt and, if this happened, it would require Israel to reorganize its military once again to adapt to the new situation. For the past two and a half decades, Israeli military plans have not accounted for a potential threat from Egypt, for the peace agreement with that country enabled Israel to reduce the size of the Israeli army, bring down the time soldiers spend in reserve units, and reallocate funds from the military to the furthering of social and economic goals. Moreover, although the Israeli military did not rule out the possibility of a confrontation with Egypt, the focus of military training, exercises, and planning in the past two decades has focused on confrontation with the Palestinians, Hezbollah and Syria.[14]

A few weeks after completing his term as director of Aman, Major General Amos Yadlin delivered a lecture at the Herzliya Conference on the situation in Egypt and its impact on Israel. In his lecture, Yadlin stated that "If the dark expectations come true" and the Mubarak regime falls, it would lead to a "discussion on a different security budget, and building the armed forces in a completely different way." If Egypt returned to being an enemy, it results in a significant

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[13] Ofer Shelah, "Democracy is not for the Arabs," *Ma'ariv*, February 1, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.nrg.co.il/Scripts/artPrint/artPrintNew.php?channelName=channel_news&ts=14042008120049.
[14] Amos Harel, "Egypt riots are an intelligence chief's nightmare."

increase in the number of regiments and brigades in the Israeli army. Yadlin indicated that this would not happen quickly because such a change would require time, and every new system needs additional time in order to build itself.[15]

For his part, Hebrew University political science professor Yehezkel Dror, a strategic affairs specialist, dealt with the effects of the Egyptian revolution and those of other Arab countries on Israel. Dror saw these revolutions as bringing the region into a new phase for which Israel must be prepared. He also criticized the failure of Israeli intelligence agencies to correctly evaluate and anticipate the situation in Egypt and other Arab countries.

Dror stated that in-depth study of Egyptian society and the changes it has witnessed challenge many of the assumptions that were prevalent in Israel—and especially in the security services— with regard to the possibility of a revolution in Egypt. He added that such in-depth studies would also challenge familiar hypotheses about the influence of great powers, as these powers are unable to prevent the occurrence of a revolution, and even their direct military intervention would not bring calm and stability. It is for this reason that great powers are adapting to the new situation rather than imagining a desired reality that they attempt to impose, even if this means abandoning friends and allies like Mubarak. This is an important lesson, Professor Dror said, and Israel should heed the implications: continued U.S. support for Israel is not guaranteed in the long run.

Dror argued that the revolutions in Egypt and other Arab countries enhance Israel's geo-strategic standing given its stable, democratic and strong character in the context of a region of global importance caught in a whirlwind of instability. Dror's recommendation was that Israel capitalize on this situation to enhance its international standing, while continuing to hold its traditional position that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the main source of instability in the region.

Dror emphasized that the "events" in Egypt show the increasing power of the "street," potentially bringing new groups into power, groups that may be hostile to Israel. As such, Israel should be ready for the new situation, and try to appeal to the young generation in Arab countries through social media and other means of communication to promote the notion that Israel wants peace, and aims to bring social and economic development to the region. He also called for the strengthening of Israeli deterrence capabilities in order to make clear to the Arabs that a war against Israel would lead to the destruction of whoever initiates it. He further called for the Israeli development of tools and technologies used in repressing and ending large demonstrations and mass protests since Palestinians in the occupied territories may resort to such methods against the Israeli occupation. In any case, Dror argued, Israeli security policy should adapt to the new reality, and it should not rule out the possibility of a war, but he did not specify the state or entity against which the war would be fought.

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[15] Boaz Fieler, "Yadlin: The army may completely change because of Egypt," YNet, February 9, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.ynet.co.il/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-4026362,00.html.

After his evaluation, Dror concluded that the changes affecting the region as a result of the revolutions were fundamental, and that there could no longer be confidence in the stability of existing peace agreements between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries given that the region was tending towards revolution, or what Dror called a "whirlpool." In order to reduce the potential for the forces of this "whirlpool" to be used against Israel, Dror posited that what is needed is a series of peace agreements between Israel and Arab countries, leading "to a comprehensive Middle East settlement, including Palestinian statehood, Israeli withdrawals, settlement of the refugee issue, appropriate Muslim access to the Aqsa mosque, and the normalization of relations between Israel and most Arab and Islamic countries."[16]

RESTRICTIONS AND "EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS"

The Israeli position towards the Egyptian revolution has been characterized by tension and hostility, in many cases exhibiting exaggeration and imbalance. Notable in Israel's position towards the Egyptian revolution—at first in and of itself and later in its success in bringing down Israel's ally, Mubarak—was the Israeli fear that the new Egyptian regime would change the nature of relations between Egypt and Israel. Accompanying this fear were various remarks and writings of Israeli officials and analysts that greatly exaggerated what might be expected from the new regime in Egypt, such as: the abolition of the peace agreement, the expulsion of the multinational force, and the closure of the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli vessels. Tensions reached their peak when Egypt stopped supplying Israel with natural gas for several weeks as a result of attacks on the Sinai gas pipeline.

This was the context of an article by Yitzhak Gal, a researcher at the University of Tel Aviv's Dayan Center for Middle East Studies, in which he analyzed the Egyptian economy, arguing that the maintenance of stability in Egypt's relations with Israel "is vital for Egypt's economic stability, and to the stability of the new regime to be established there, regardless of its nature; for stable relations with Israel directly and indirectly affect key sectors in the Egyptian economy as well as critical interests relating to Egypt's external economic relations."[17] Gal identified these "key sectors" as: the energy sector and its various derivative sectors, the tourism sector and the Suez Canal, U.S. and international aid, the large size of foreign investment, and the significant increase in foreign-currency remittances to Egyptian banks.

According to Gal, the energy sector and its derivatives include: oil and gas for consumption and export, the manufacturing and refining of oil, supplying the Egyptian market with petrochemical products, and electricity production. The overall contribution of this sector to the Egyptian balance of payments is equivalent to $25 billion. The sensitivity of this sector to Egypt's

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[16] Yehezkel Dror, "Facing the Whirlpool," *Haaretz*, February 4, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1213335.
[17] Yitzhak Gal, "Egyptian interests require the stability of relations with Israel," *Tsomet HaMizrah HaTikhon*, 1:3, March 6, 2011. Accessed online at: http://www.tau.ac.il/dayancentre/framepub.htm.

relationship with Israel, according to Gal, stems from the fact that the bulk of the Egyptian oil and gas extraction takes place in fields that are in close proximity to Israel; any destabilization of the security situation with Israel may directly disrupt this sector. Heightening the sensitivity of this security situation is the fact that the majority of these fields are at sea, rendering them vulnerable to attack in the event of a disruption in the security situation. Moreover, there are dozens of international companies working in these fields, in addition to five hundred international service companies, all of which would be averse to operating in areas vulnerable to security risks.

Gal also noted that the Suez Canal and tourism would be harmed in the event of instability between Egypt and Israel. These sectors are of great importance to the Egyptian economy; revenues from usage fees for the Suez Canal have reached $5 billion per year in the recent period, in addition to over $1 billion for related services. As for the tourism sector, Egypt has succeeded in raising the number of incoming tourists to 14 million in 2010, 3 million of whom traveled to the Sinai in a single year, thereby increasing tourism revenues over the past decade by a factor of four.

According to Gal, the revenues from the large volume of foreign investment in Egypt and the significant increase in the remittance of foreign currencies to Egyptian banks, as well as U.S. and international aid, account for 35%-40% of total Egyptian revenue, equal to revenues from the Suez Canal and tourism combined. Gal notes that the sensitivity of the Egyptian economy to its relations with Israel is not a function of the economic relations between the two countries, but to the possibility that a deterioration of these relations and the emergence of an unstable security situation would directly and indirectly harm Egyptian economic relations with the United States and other parties. The size of the economic interaction between Egypt and Israel is not large; it is quite minor in relation to Egypt's overall foreign trade.[18]

THE "EARTHQUAKE" AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

On March 13, 2011, Israel's Institute for National Security Studies organized a day-long seminar on the impact of the Arab revolutions—and the Egyptian revolution in particular. Participating in the seminar were a group of prominent political leaders, security officials, university professors, researchers, and Arab affairs specialists who put forward their thoughts, analyses and recommendations with regard to the political impact of the Arab revolutions on Israel and the region. The presentations given at this seminar clearly show that the participants saw the Egyptian and Arab revolutions as pulling the region into a new phase, creating new and serious challenges for Israel. In what follows, I offer a summary of the main points of these presentations.

Tzipi Livni

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[18] *Ibid.*

Kadima Party leader and head of the opposition in Israel, Tzipi Livni considered the region to be witnessing an important historical process, the results of which are hard to know or predict. According to Livni, Israel needs to clearly determine what it wants without waiting for the results of these revolutions. Nor should Israel wait for these regional developments to play out before reaching a final settlement with the Palestinians. Anyone doubting this should ask themselves whether they would have preferred to see riotous "unrest" in the region and the toppling of the regime in Cairo before or after Israel reached a peace agreement with Egypt. In her view, it is clear to everyone that it is better for Israel to be at peace with the Arab countries before they witness revolutions. In the past Israeli leaders have said that it is unacceptable to sign peace agreements with undemocratic Arab states. Today these same leaders are opposed to such peace agreements, because these countries are on their way to democracy.

Livni added that when young people in the Arab world came out to the streets, they did not do this because of Israel, but to demand their rights. It is also clear, however, that "extremist groups" will try to exploit this opportunity to gain more power through elections. These groups will exploit the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in order to increase their strength. As such, instead of letting it drag on, this conflict should be resolved now so that it can be removed from the regional agenda. Parallel to this, she added, there needs to be a global campaign that seeks to establish an international legal prohibition on "racist groups or those that resort to violence" participating in the elections of Arab countries, obliging all who wish to participate in such elections to oppose violence, adhere to the laws of the state, and accept the agreements signed by the state. This would all steer the democratic process in the region in a positive way.

Ehud Barak

Israel's defense minister and head of the "Independence" Party (which he founded after recently resigning from his position as leader of the Labor Party), Ehud Barak stated that Israel is living through a critical period in which two fundamental processes are unfolding, both of which will have important repercussions on Israel. First, Arab regimes are being subjected to an "earthquake," the likes of which have not been witnessed in the region since the fall of the Ottoman Empire; second, Israel is being enveloped by a political-diplomatic tsunami that will reach its peak in September of this year. The waves of this tsunami carry an attempt to delegitimize Israel, aiming to push it to a point like that at which the South African apartheid regime began to collapse.

Barak stated that there is no short term threat emanating from Egypt, for border stability is as important for Egypt as it is to Israel. The situation, however, may lead to a weakening of Egyptian security control over the Sinai, potentially leading to the smuggling of arms and some small problems on the Sinai border.

Barak predicted that is would be difficult to move the political process forward because the role of the U.S. in the region had been weakened, and it would be difficult to obtain Arab League support for such a process after the fall of Mubarak and the changes experienced in Egypt and

the region. According to Barak, authoritarian rulers play an important role in maintaining the stability of the region, and are more comfortable for Israel than they are for their own peoples. The greater importance of the Arab masses and public opinion brought about by the revolutions in the region will lead to a proliferation of obstacles in the paths of Arab leaders hoping to reach a settlement with Israel. Israel should take the political initiative, however difficult that may be, because this would reduce the potential risks facing Israel. Israel should also take the initiative to stop the political-diplomatic tsunami (of delegitimization) in order to maintain relations with the United States, and to create a rift or at least to carry out good management of the conflict with the Palestinians and the other Arabs. Even if the Israeli initiative fails because of a Palestinian rejection, simply putting it forward would serve Israel's purpose of halting the process of its increasing isolation. This is a vital Israeli interest.

According to Barak, the uncertainty currently prevailing in the region due to the Arab revolutions obliges Israel to remain vigilant and very powerful militarily, economically and socially. Israel will not be able to allocate budgets for security preparations needed to counter the threats and risks arising from changes in Egypt and other Arab states, as these would be at the expense of the Israeli economy and society. As such, Israel is in greater need of U.S. support. Moreover, it is by no means certain that the wave of peaceful demonstrations will not reach the Palestinian areas, something that would only add to the burdens and challenges faced by Israel.

In his speech, Barak stressed that it is imperative upon Israel to take action, to work against the wave rising around it. It should take the initiative from a position of strength and demarcate the boundary line between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank in a manner that best serves its own interests, and in a way that guarantees its continuation as a strong state with a Jewish majority. It is imperative that Israel takes action, because inertia is more dangerous than the Israeli public imagine; as an export-dependent country, such stagnation exposes its economy to risk.

General Giora Eiland

In his speech, former Israeli National Security Advisor General Giora Eiland stated that the Arab revolutions would have negative effects on Israel in terms of three core issues:

First, for the past three decades Israel has based its actions on an important premise: that if for whatever reason tension arises between Egypt and Israel, it would not be allowed to reach the point of armed confrontation regardless of what is happening on other fronts. This enabled Israel to focus its efforts on the other fronts without fear of the outbreak of war on the Egyptian front. Now the situation has changed, and there is no certainty that the premise will continue to hold true with the passage of time. In the short run, any regime taking power in Egypt will maintain the status quo in Egypt's external relations—even if this regime is "extremist"—because its first priority will be to address internal problems. In the long run, however, the situation will be different, depending on the new Egyptian regime's orientation. This may lead to a change in Israeli security assumptions. Such an outcome would be very expensive and require considerable

additional resources in order to ensure that the army was prepared and equipped to work on the Egyptian front.

Second, it is expected that the Egyptians will be less thorough in guarding the border with Israel in the Sinai. This will lead to increased smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip, an augmentation of Hamas's power, and a rise in attempts by some groups to carry out military operations at this border.

Third, the changes brought about by the revolutions and other developments in the Arab region will have an effect on what Israel takes into consideration when planning military operations, including those military operations against the Palestinians.

In concluding his speech, General Eiland stated that the lack of clarity in the region as a result of the Arab revolutions obliges Israel to proceed with extreme caution, to wait and see what will happen, and not to take any political steps in the direction of a political settlement.

Professor Itamar Rabinovich

Itamar Rabinovich, a professor of contemporary history at Tel Aviv University and a member of the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with Syria which took place in the 1990s, saw the lack of clarity in the region arising from the "earthquake" in the Arab countries as just as much a threat to Israel as it was a threat to the ruling regimes in the Arab world. For this reason, he stated, the Arab regimes as well as Israel should work to maintain stability to the greatest extent possible. The United States, he said, has lost some of its standing in the region because U.S. President Barack Obama quickly gave up on the old ally of the United States, Mubarak.

Despite the prevailing lack of clarity resulting from the Arab revolutions, and despite the absence of conditions for reaching a peace deal, Rabinovich warned that Israel cannot just wait without doing anything. Human rights discourse is increasingly taking hold around the world, the International Court of Justice is increasingly important, and criticism of Israel is on the rise. As such, a political process is required, and there are a host of things that can be done that lie in the space between doing nothing and reaching a peace agreement.

Professor Shimon Shamir

A professor of history at Tel Aviv University and former Israeli ambassador to Egypt, Shimon Shamir asserted that Israel has been hurt by the wave of uprisings in the Arab states, and that the Arab peoples consider Israel to have stood by the regimes that have been ousted. He argued that the central question is one that centers on the damage to Israel affected by the fall of Mubarak. If pragmatists take power in Egypt, he argued, it is reasonable to expect that the peace agreement will be maintained but that the overall relations between the two countries will be eroded. If it is the Muslim Brotherhood that takes power, the expected scenario is a bad one.

General Amnon Lipkin-Shahak

A former Israeli military chief of staff, General Amnon Lipkin-Shahak compared the Arab revolutions to an "earthquake," arguing that the Israeli government is not preparing a plan to deal with the consequences of this "earthquake" because the good economic situation in Israel and the absence of U.S. pressure on it encourages apathy among the Israeli public. But the tsunami waves rising from the Arab revolutions will reach Israel, he warned, and it will have to make a choice between allowing the waves of this tsunami to decide the fate of the region, and taking the initiative itself to propose the political direction for its future.

The example offered by Lipkin-Shahak involved a scenario in which non-violent Palestinian demonstrators, emboldened by the Arab revolutions, move en masse towards Israeli army checkpoints in and around the occupied territories. Israel has no good means to handle such a situation. Lipkin-Shahak concluded his speech by demanding that Israel propose a solution to the conflict, warning that the lack of an Israeli plan would lead to increasing erosion of support for Israel around the world.

Oded Eran

Head of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies and a former ambassador to Jordan, Oded Eran stated that the "earthquake" that hit the Arab states has made the reaching of a peace settlement with the Palestinians more difficult. Such a settlement, he said, was already difficult to attain before the "earthquake." Since it is not possible to maintain the current status quo, action must be taken in the space between complete inertia and a permanent solution. The minimum requirement for the current period is that some areas of the West Bank be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, and such action can be taken without strategic damage being inflicted upon Israel. As for the Syrian track, it is the more important one from the strategic perspective because an agreement with Syria would remove that country from the Iranian orbit, thereby weakening the Iranian axis. The Israeli political arena, however, would not allow for such a development.

Yossi Beilin

Yossi Beilin, former leader of Israel's Meretz Party, stated that the position that the Arab revolutions had nothing to do with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was untenable. The Arab revolutions have increased the weight of Arab public opinion, he argued, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict holds an important place in the positions of Arab publics, and as such Arab regimes will face difficulties in the future if they want to engage in and support the political process, more so than in the past. If today there is a state or an authority that is ready to reach a settlement, it is best to enter such a settlement with it now rather than holding off for an uncertain future. The regimes of the coming period may be more legitimate, but they may also refuse to reach a settlement with Israel.

Conclusion

Since the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, Israel has taken (and continues to take) an aggressive stance towards it for many reasons, including:

1. The Egyptian revolution overthrew the regime that for three decades was the most important strategic ally of Israel in the region, and that offered Israel—according to what seems to be an Israeli consensus—priceless services;
2. The revolution carries in its folds the realistic possibility of the emancipation of Egypt from the tyranny and corruption of the previous regime, replacing it with the building of a modern democratic state, one that is reconciled with its past and present as well as with its Arab surroundings, that works to build itself and recover the status it deserves, and also regains its independent role. This is what Israel does not want;
3. Israel has stood, and continues to stand, against democracy in Egypt and other Arab countries. It has always preferred despotism and corruption, deploying the "political Islamism threat" as a scarecrow because Israel, according to its experience, can create common interests and understandings with the narrow, authoritarian and corrupt Arab leaderships at the expense of the Arab peoples, often behind their backs;
4. The Egyptian revolution, and the other Arab revolutions, have shown the importance of Arab public opinion, which stands against Israel's belligerent policies;
5. Israel fears the spread of the "earthquake" to the occupied Palestinian territories, namely that the Palestinian people will adopt a non-violent popular means of mass struggle in their resistance to the occupation following an Arab spring in which such mass protests have already managed to rid the Arab world of two tyrannical regimes.