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Peace vs. Democracy? Israel's Reaction to the Fall of the Mubarak Regime

In Germany and throughout Europe, the upheavals in Egypt and the Arab world were and are met with sympathy, astonishment and apprehension. Right from the start, US President Obama publicly supported the Egyptian democratic movement. In Israel, the response to the overthrow of Mubarak on 11 February was one of shock and grave concern. Neither the country's foreign policy nor its secret services had anticipated this turn of events. To Israel, Mubarak was the guarantor of the 1979 Peace Treaty with Egypt. In a region otherwise hostile to Israel, this "cold peace" was of great strategic value – as is the 1994 Peace Treaty with Jordan. Mubarak was Israel's ally against Islamism and Iran. Mubarak played a distinguished role as a mediator between Israel and the Palestinians. Throughout his tenure, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu met Hosni Mubarak more often than any other head of state - with the exception perhaps of Barak Obama.

That is why one could hardly have expected Netanyahu and the Israeli government to profess sympathy with the democratic movement in the neighbouring country. Netanyahu called Mubarak a friend, abandoned by his western allies. He explained that the toppling of Mubarak would lead to instability and pose a serious threat to peace and security in the region, as it would give teeth to Iran and Islamist movements. He warned that free elections and democracy would result in the Muslim Brotherhood assuming power in Cairo, turning the neighbouring country into "another Iran". This was an allusion to two experiences that have been traumatic for his country. Until the revolution of 1979, Iran had been Israel's most important ally in the region. The Shah was ousted and succeeded by an Islamist regime which today is seeking nuclear technology and publicly threatens Israel. The country's other "democracy trauma" with respect to its neighbours was Hamas' seizure of power in the Gaza Strip. This was only made possible due to free elections that were held in 2006 under pressure from the US government.

The following political equation summarizes the majority opinion among the political class and the Israeli population: Mubarak = stability = peace whereas democracy = Islamist takeover = threat to Israel. It is rare to hear support for the democratic movement in the neighbouring country and the Arab world, and those who see this development as an opportunity for Israel to make lasting peace with its Arab neighbours are few and far between.

One of those few Israeli politicians who welcomed the democratic movements and views them as "opportunities for peace" is president Shimon Peres. In a statement before the Spanish parliament, he said:

"We believe the best guarantee of peace is having democratic neighbours. We are happy to witness this democratic revolution in the Arab world. This is a time to resume peace talks with the Palestinians." At the same time, he called on the West to push leading internet companies like Facebook, Google and Twitter to support reforms in the Arab world.

A remarkable contribution to the discussion came from former director of Mossad (1998-2002), Efraim Halevi, who today heads the Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In his article "Country Strong", which appeared in *The New Republic*, he criticized the use of the word "fear" to describe the mood in Israel in response to the upheavals in Egypt, adding that there is no cause for anxiety since Israel has a strong strategic position, also facing the challenge from Iran. One element that highlights this position of strength, says Halevi, is that the two largest armies in the region, that of Israel and that of Egypt, are both equipped by the United States. These armies will not wage war against each other. A factor that confirms this is the pronouncement by the Egyptian military command, immediately after the overthrow of Mubarak, that the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty is there to stay. In light of the events in Egypt, Halevi would welcome a resumption of the peace talks with the Palestinians and says it is quite conceivable that a Palestinian state can be created in 2011, even before all those important and decisive issues are resolved.

Israel must decide on a policy to respond to the series of upheavals in the region. Will the country want to maintain the status quo and cling to outdated structures? Or will it play a pro-active role in the restructuring of the Middle East – in particular by taking own initiatives with regard to the peace process? And what kind of peace is likely to guarantee Israel's long-term existence and security in the region? That is the crucial question. Will it be a peace with autocrats and their corrupt regimes? Or will it be a peace with governments that have secured democratic legitimacy?

Ever since the beginning of the popular uprising in Egypt, these questions have been hotly debated. Two key actors in this debate present their views, reflecting the entire range of positions and opinions, in the present issue of *Israel Debates*.

Prof. Hillel Frisch of the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Centre for Strategic Studies at the Bar Ilan University refers to the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and expects the upheavals in Egypt to end with the Muslim Brotherhood assuming power. He thinks that Iran will attempt to make the Egyptian Brotherhood their allies, as has happened with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. This could spark civil war. The changes in Egypt could also result in the country losing its leading political role in the region to Iran and Turkey. Prof. Frisch advises the US to lend firm support to the Egyptian armed forces, which in his view is the only option to ensure a controlled transition to democracy. His advice to the EU is to encourage liberal political forces. He fears an Islamist government in Egypt would seriously impact Israel's strategic situation, since the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty would certainly be revised and in the south, a new front would emerge. In addition to this, Islamist rule in Egypt would inevitably lead to the fall of King Abdullah II of Jordan and to increased instability in the region as a whole.

Prof. Yoram Meital, Chairman of the Chaim Herzog Centre for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, is of the opinion that Israel should not be guided by fear and doomsday scenarios when assessing the changes in Egypt. In evaluating the possibilities (pluralistic system) and the dangers (military or theocratic system) he expresses cautious optimism. Despite the many challenges, he believes post-Mubarak Egypt to be in a "good starting position" to move from an

authoritarian to a democratic system. At the same time, he refers to the imponderables involved for Israel and does not exclude that bilateral relations in certain areas may worsen. He assumes that Egypt will continue its strategic partnership with the US and will live up to the peace treaty with Israel, despite heavy criticism. In his view, the Muslim Brotherhood will be an important political force, though no longer the only alternative to a corrupt regime. He takes a positive view of the fact that the young generation, which constitutes 50% of the population, advocate a civil and democratic state.

Dr. Ralf Hexel
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Herzliya, 8 March 2011

Gauging the Implications of the Egyptian Crisis

by Hillel Frisch

Egypt's political crisis that began with widespread disturbances and the unusual removal of a leader as a result of popular unrest is likely to have an impact equal or even exceeding the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Egyptian military coup of 1952, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and "the fall of Iran to the West" in 1979. Unfortunately, the fall of Iran to the Islamists was mitigated by the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In the present crisis, the only potentially mitigating factor, a parallel unfolding of events in Iran, seems unlikely. Though we are early in the crisis or transition - revolutionary situations often degenerate into civil war and foreign intervention over a considerable period of time - one can try assessing its potential impact on Egypt's future, Egypt's role in the region, the role and position of the United States and its regional and international allies, and its impact on Israel's relations with the region, all of which will be the subject of the following analysis.

An Islamic or Democratic Egypt?

Clearly, the hearts of most citizens in democratic states sided with the demonstrators during the peaceful demonstrations in Egypt. Many of these demonstrators not only expressed their sincere and moving aspirations for democratic change, enhancement of human freedom and citizen rights, but emphasized as well their desire to do so in peaceful fashion. Sadly, while

our hearts are with these demonstrators with democratic aspirations, our minds must not be. Reason must prevail over emotion for the sake of those demonstrators seeking democracy, let alone for the interests of most, if not all, democratic states.

Why reason and emotion clash in so many revolutionary situations has to do with the simple fact that the liberal and democratic demonstrators became prey to organized violent fanatic groups, ending up with a regime that trampled their rights to a far greater extent than the regime they strove to change. It happened in revolutionary France when Robespierre finished off the royalists and the liberals, in the Russian revolution when the fanatic, small but ruthless Bolshevik movement overcame the social democratic and liberal majority, and in the most telling precedent for Egypt, in the Iranian revolution when the demonstrations set off by the secular Western-leaning middle class in the universities ended up being high-jacked by Khomeini, the fanatics amongst the Mullahs and the Revolutionary Guard.

Egypt risks being one more lugubrious case of unorganized and peaceful democrats, conservatives and liberals being devoured by the more organized and fanatical Muslim Brotherhood. The 2005 elections, which were relatively credible if not free, strongly suggest this outcome. The Muslim Brotherhood candidates, running as independents, secured 88 seats. The other four opposition parties (of which only

two could be considered really democratic) secured in total 7 seats, less than ten per cent secured by the Muslim Brotherhood. Even if the Muslim Brotherhood is neither very strong nor popular as a recent article in *The New York Times* suggested the real issue is not absolute power when central power dissipates but **the relative power** between the Islamists and the liberal-minded unorganized demonstrators, which the chronic weakness of Egyptian opposition parties, some of which are nearly 30 years old, can hardly offset.

A Muslim Brotherhood takeover is likely to be even relatively peaceful and democratic for two additional reasons. Newly empowered publics in transition periods typically spawn an overabundance of political parties. In the first free elections in Poland, 75(!) parties contested the elections; in Hungary 50. Assuming that the Islamic Brotherhood secures 20 per cent of the seats, the remaining 80 per cent is likely to be divided by tens of other parties giving it effective control. How free then will Egypt be after the free elections? In truth, the Islamists will secure more than twenty per cent. The Egyptian voter, weary of the instability that is likely to characterize the period up to elections, will vote for the Muslim Brotherhood slate in the hope of securing a political stability, which the fragmented non-Islamist parties will not be able to deliver if there are many of them. This is what happened in the 2006 Palestinian council elections when Palestinian voters voted for a unified Hamas against the highly fragmented and chaotic Fatah movement. Four years later, Hamas under different circumstance, refuses to hold elections, confirming that Palestinian voters hardly became die-hard fundamentalists.

A very clever strategy the Muslim Brotherhood is employing (based on the Iranian precedent) only enhances its prospects. The organization has cleverly decided that it will not participate in governments up to the elections. Revolutionary periods are characterized by higher expectations and lower economic and administrative

performance. Governments under the growing gap between expectations and reality can only fail, especially as they will be at loggerheads with the military over the rate of change and the depth of reforms. As technocrats, opposition leaders such as Baradei and more recent luminaries like Wail Ghoneim of Google fame who might be co-opted into government lose their credibility in the face of anti-government and anti-military demonstrations, one movement will retain its pristine image on election day –the Muslim Brotherhood.

But the decimation of the democratic opposition is hardly the only implications of a potential Muslim Brotherhood takeover in Egypt. Revolution in important states typically ends both in civil and external war or intervention. This sequence of terribly bloody events occurred in the French, Russian and Iranian revolutions. Again, Egypt seems to be a good candidate for both.

The prospects for protracted civil war run high because the Egyptian military clearly knows what happened to the powerful Iranian military under the Islamists. Senior officers were murdered, the army was discredited and more than partially replaced by the Revolutionary Guards, not to speak of the loss of professional satisfaction of being trained and provisioned by the United States military. The officers who were spared purges or death later paid for the regime's onslaught on them in the battlefields of the Iranian-Iraqi war when they came to the war demoralized, badly provisioned and with untrained troops. One can assume that the Egyptian military will not give in to a similar fate without a fight.

Egypt's Role in the Region: Are the Arabs Exiting History?

Even in the best-case transitions, the state undergoing revolutionary change loses regional and international standing for a considerable period of time. This is what happened to the French state in the first decade into revolution, the Soviet Union and the revolutionary republic

of Iran. The reasons are obvious. Projecting power abroad usually requires a unified state whose domestic resources are also used to secure the state's regional and international interests.

Again, judging from these parallels, the loss of standing might be more severe in the Egyptian case since the crisis only deepens a long process of Egyptian decline at the expense of other regional contenders such as revolutionary Iran and Turkey.

Ironically, the troubles facing the Egyptian state, by far the largest Arab state (twice the population of any other) and strategically situated, means the comeback of Iran and Turkey at its expense and at the expense of the Arabs in general. These are just the descendents of forebears who ruled over the Arabs for many centuries.

Judging from the reactions of Iran and Turkey's leaders to events in Egypt, they sense keenly this historic juncture and the possibilities the fall of Egypt represents. Iran, which only last year brutally suppressed domestic demonstrations in Teheran, came out in warm support of the demonstrators and the rise of political Islam it claims will be the final outcome of the demonstrations. Nasrallah, the leader of Hizballah, Iran's proxy in Lebanon, whose troops in May 2008 brutally attacked the incumbent democratic government's supporters and forced at gunpoint the government to give in to its political demands, has towed the same line.

Turkish Prime-Minister, Erdogan, has been no less aware of the possibility of regaining imperial glory for Turkey from Egypt's troubles. He was the only other Middle Eastern leader, except for the Iranians and Hizballah, to directly call on Mubarak to remove himself from power. His stance has rightly aroused the ire of the Egyptian foreign ministry.

Egypt's accelerated regional decline as the largest Arab Sunni state also means a rapid

decline in the standing and influence of all Arab states. Coming soon after the fall of the second strongest Sunni dominated state of Iraq as a regional power in 2003, and the potential disintegration of the Arab state order in Bahrain, Yemen and Libya, we might be witnessing a watershed measured over centuries of history rather than over one or even several decades. With Egypt, the largest Arabic-speaking state facing an uncertain future characterized by almost certain decline, the return of the Arabs into history that occurred sixty years ago might be coming to an end.

Few outside the Arab-speaking world realize that when Gamal Abdul Nasser and fellow military officers took over the reins of power in Egypt in 1952, they represented the reemergence of the Arabs into history for the first time since they emerged into history with the birth of Islam. Since the fall of the Abbasid empire in the 13th century, most of the Arab-speaking people in most of the Middle East were ruled over by Turkish-speaking Ottomans, Persians, political elites of Turkic-origins and more briefly, the French, the British, the Italians (in Libya) and Spain. The likely "fall of Egypt" into civil war might not only be the fall to the West but even more crucially the fall of the Arabs who reentered history with Abdul Nasser and are now likely to be relegated once again to its margins.

Ironically, Egypt and the Arabs have one potential ally to balance against these former imperial powers which imposed their imperialism on the Arabs for centuries – the Jewish state of Israel. Israel has the virtue for the Arabs of being a strong state but which being only seven-million-strong poses no intrinsic threat to Arab political preeminence in the area. Israel has no imperial past it could wish to restore over the Arabs, no revolutionary fanatic religious order it wishes to impose on the Arab-speaking people and unlike Shiite revolutionary Iran, it has no desire to change the balance of power between Sunnis and Shiites.

The leaders of the moderate Arab states long ago have wisely realized the virtues of tacit cooperation with Israel in the face of a menacing Iran. Will the demonstrators in Mайдan Tahrir like the Arab moderate state elites who might be removed, realize the virtues of an alliance with Israel? More farfetched, is there any likelihood that the Muslim Brotherhood, which has long sought to restore the Arabs' historic role in Islam, be open to reconsidering the Jewish state in its midst in the face of the imminent decline of the Arabs posed by the potential slide of Egypt into chaos?

What the United States and the European States Should Do

Egypt's future is critical to the interests in the United States. However reluctant and overextended the United States may be, it will not be able to weather the crisis in Egypt, a large strategically located state, with indifference. The same can be said of the key members of the European community.

The key interest of the United States and its democratic allies is to avert civil war by backing the military, which they will naturally do, in pursuing a measured and controlled democratization. The question is can the United States or any other external power influence the course of events?

Not pushing for elections early on in the process is certainly in the interests of the United States and the European community. The United States and the European community can also try influencing the liberal elements to coalesce into one or two parties to prevent fragmentation. The European community should identify the new leaders amongst the demonstrators and invite them to crash courses in political party building techniques and effective techniques of campaigning taught by top party organization leaders and experts. Organizing demonstrations does not necessarily mean that these demonstrators know how to create a

strong political party. Nor should European community member states balk from getting their security services involved in teaching these potential candidates techniques in coping with the likely intimidation the Islamists will employ in the election campaign.

The United States has good relations with both the Egyptian business community and the military. This is important, given the considerable tensions between the majority of the business class who compete in the capitalist market and who chafe under the advantages and the scope of Egyptian military involvement in business. These tensions, which were publicized even under Mubarak in the late 1990 in the official media are likely to come into prominence once again, weakening a coalition that could be a counterweight to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Should Egypt degenerate into civil war, the protagonists will readily find foreign actors to fund them. Iran has already announced that it will support the demonstrators, that is to say, the Muslim Brotherhood. Such a policy dovetails with their support of Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza with the same destabilizing effects on the Arab state order. The United States will back the military and the liberals.

The most important possible ramification of such a slide into chaos, which would be the greatest boon for Shiite Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic itself, is the possibility that the Arab oil-rich states might bandwagon with Iran. The Iranians could then coerce the Gulf States into financing the remilitarization of Egypt against Israel, an expense Iran cannot possibly bear on its own. Coping with the Egyptian crisis then means a stronger more assertive United States against Iran's nuclear plans and a stronger military presence in the area.

Jerusalem and the Egyptian Crisis

Israeli concerns over the Egyptian crisis cluster over at least three issues each more menacing than the former. The most immediate has to do

with the concern that the terrorist capabilities of Hamas government in Gaza and its allies will greatly benefit from the chaos in northern Sinai. During the demonstrations, the Bedouin in El-Arish and elsewhere overwhelmed the police and razed most of the police stations to the ground. In their attacks, they used rocket propelled guns and other weapons. One can assume that in the absence of a pro-Western government in Cairo that the Sinai will become a super highway for ammunition and weapons and provide training bases in which Izz al-Din al-Qassam members will train with counterparts from Hizballah with the possible participation of Iranian military trainers. To cope with the situation, Israel has already permitted two battalions of the Egyptian military to enter the Sinai. Even if a pro-Western military maintains control of the area, this means that Israel must commit major standing forces to the southern flank. Were an Islamist government to take over, hundreds of Hamas fighters will be able to fly to Teheran for training directly from Cairo international airport.

Further down the line is the fear that a hostile Egyptian government will seek to substantially modify the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The southern flank will then become the major strategic front facing Israel with tremendous economic and social implications as reserve duty reaches the onerous levels that characterized Israel in the first thirty years of its existence.

No less worrisome is the spread of instability. Jordan, with which Israel has long enjoyed excellent security cooperation, is critical in this regard. The fall of the Hashemite regime coupled with a Muslim Brotherhood takeover in Egypt would take back Israel in time to a situation it faced before the Six-Day War. Israel would once again be a fortress alone, until at least, democracy eventually takes root in the area. Will Israel be able hold on until those good tidings? Probably yes. Israel has always been a state that flourished under adversity and so is it likely to meet these major challenges this time round as well.

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Good Morning, New Egypt

by Prof. Yoram Meital

The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak does not constitute a new page in the history of Egypt. Rather, it is the beginning of an entire chapter, which is likely to bring about significant changes in government and policy. This, in turn, may well affect other societies and regimes in the Middle East, in light of Egypt's central status in the area. The balance of opportunities (successful transition to a pluralistic regime based on democratic values) and risks (a military or theocratic regime) should be examined in the context of developments in the Egyptian political arena, and should not be based on fears and horror scenarios. Such an examination leads me to a conclusion that can be defined as "guarded optimism". The January 25 revolution places Egyptian society in a better starting position on the road to establishing a civil state based on democratic values, although the new regime and society will face many challenges and difficulties during and primarily after the transition period.

Characteristics and challenges of the transition period

Following Mubarak's overthrow, Egypt entered into a transition period, which is supposed to end within a few months, with the election of a civilian leadership through free, fair presidential and parliamentary elections. The overall responsibility for managing the affairs of the State during this period rests with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which is composed of the top military command of the Egyptian Army, and which played a critical role throughout the uprising and Mubarak's resigna-

tion. The Army will continue to constitute a highly influential factor in Egyptian developments and policy, even following the transition period.

The January 25 revolution shuffled the deck in the public sphere in general and the political arena in particular. A new wind is blowing through the public sphere, and Egypt's citizens are once again displaying interest in the political arena. The vacuum which was created with the ruling party losing its dominant role in the political arena is being filled by both old and especially new political organizations. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continues to represent a significant political and social factor and a rallying point for the supporters of a religious and conservative agenda. Nonetheless, it has lost its status as the sole alternative to the regime. In the parliamentary elections, it will be competing for the first time as a political party; its opponents, however, will not be members of a corrupt and unpopular party in power, but rather, representatives of parties which led the uprising. Especially worthy of notice are new political organizations identified with the stratum of the "young generation", which composes more than half of the population, and supporting the establishment of a civil, democratic welfare state. In this political reality, the presidential elections will require the candidates to gain the support of a number of parties and organizations. At this stage, the most prominent candidates are Mohamed al-Baradei, who announced his willingness to run about a year ago, and Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa.

The Egyptian uprising has significant achievements to its credit; nonetheless, it still has a long way to go before reaching its principal objective: the establishment of a civil state founded on democratic principles. The groups which flew the banner of the uprising made use of two principal slogans: "The people wants the ouster of the President" and "The people wants the fall of the regime". After 18 days of intense struggle, the President was ousted. The fall of

the regime – that is, the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime – constitutes a long journey, fraught with obstacles; amending the constitution and free elections are a significant stop along the way, but not the only one.

The dialogue between SCAF and the forces of civilian society is characterized by a positive view of the Army and suspicion of the senior command stratum, based on a lack of knowledge of the "road map" by which the senior commanders are steering Egypt during the critical transition period. This suspicion did not fade even after the announcements by Army spokesmen which stated that the reins of power would be transferred to a civilian leadership, which would be elected in free, fair presidential and parliamentary elections. The huge demonstrations, with masses of participants, which are being held by various groups (especially on Fridays) are intended to transmit one principal message to SCAF: the forces of civilian society, which brought about the January 25 revolution, are determined to promote their objectives, and they are quite familiar with the way to Tahrir Square. At this time, it appears that the heads of the Army are aware of this message and are acting in accordance with their undertaking. Under their sponsorship, a committee has been established and within two weeks suggested a significant amendment of sections of the Constitution in such a way as to enable the holding of free, fair elections and to determine the powers of the President and of the Parliament. In addition, Ahmed Shafik's government (which was appointed by Mubarak) was forced to resign (March 3, 2011). Many members of the Egyptian public are still demanding that SCAF take additional measures, primarily the cancellation of the emergency law, which has been in force in Egypt for 30 years and is one of the most prominent characteristics of the authoritarian regime.

Possible impacts on Egyptian-Israeli relations

The ouster of Mubarak was received in Israel with astonishment and grave fears, which manifested in the positions adopted by the decision-makers as well as in public discourse. At the beginning of the crisis Israel took a cautious position; its spokespersons made few public references to the developments in Egypt. Behind the scenes, profound concern prevailed. This was expressed in a message sent by Israel to the United States and a number of European countries on January 29, 2011, in which it asked them to restrain their public criticism of Mubarak, for fear of undermining the stability of his regime. The way in which the Obama administration navigated the crisis was perceived in Israel as the abandonment of an important ally and an expression of irresponsible policy.

The political and security establishments held fevered discussions toward the evaluation of the developments in Egypt and their impact on Israel, primarily at the security and diplomatic levels. On the instructions of the Government, the construction of the border fence with Egypt – which had begun a few months previously and was intended to prevent crossing by refugees, work migrants and drug dealers – was sped up. Israel Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak, declared that the developments in Egypt had no immediate operational significance, but that Israel would continue to monitor them on a constant basis. In the midst of the uprising in Egypt, the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was replaced, and the declarations voiced at the replacement ceremony indicated that the IDF would now have to re-examine Israel's national security concept. Military commentators estimated that the IDF would consider expanding the regular army and its deployment significantly and would seek a considerable expansion of the security budget.

Israeli public discourse on the uprising in Egypt was characterized by a fear that the Muslim Brotherhood would seize the reins of govern-

ment and that the peace agreement would be jeopardized. On February 5, 2011, the military commentator of Israel's Channel 2 definitively stated: "The threatening scenario, as Israelis see it, is that of the Muslim Brotherhood. [...] This is the focal point of Israeli concern." Sever Plocker, one of Israel's most senior journalists, clarified: "Our fear is of a democracy which is merely a transitory stage on the way to a new dictatorship, based on fanatic Islam" (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 30, 2011). Shaul Mofaz, Chair of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, expressed concern at the possible formation of an alliance between Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Only a few people analyzed the developments in Egypt other than through the lenses of this security-oriented discourse. In this way, the citizens of "the only democracy in the Middle East" missed the chance of appreciating the positive side of the heroic struggle undertaken by Egypt's civilian society toward the toppling of an authoritarian regime.

The question of how the changes in Egypt will affect its policy on major subjects, including peace with Israel, should be analyzed with reference to two stages. The transition stage is characterized by rapid changes in the political and public arena, on one hand, and continuity in foreign, defense and economic policy, on the other. The strategic partnership between Cairo and Washington and the commitment to the peace agreement with Israel will continue. In this context, the extremely generous American aid to both Israel and Egypt will also continue. Since the signing of the peace agreement with Israel, Egypt has received American aid at the scope of some \$70 billion (of which some \$40 billion represents military aid, and the remainder of civilian aid).

The heads of the Army have repeatedly announced that Egypt will honor its international commitments, thereby sending an important, unequivocal message with regard to the peace agreement with Israel, the strategic partnership with the United States and the many agree-

ments between Egypt and many other countries. Furthermore, the spokespersons of groups and parties which brought about the January 25 revolution have published similar statements. It should be noted that fears for the fate of the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement were voiced in the past, following dramatic events, including the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, the First and Second Lebanon Wars, the collapse of the Oslo peace process, and innumerable clashes between Israel and the Palestinians.

In the permanent stage, when the reins of government are handed over to an elected civilian leadership, there may be significant changes in Egypt's policy toward Israel and toward the Palestinian arena. Along with maintaining its commitment to the peace agreement, and primarily to the military appendix to the agreement and the passage of Israeli vessels through the Suez Canal, the elected leadership will express the trenchant criticism which is prevalent in Egypt with regard to Israel and its policy toward the Palestinians. This may have an effect on the relationship between the two countries. Egypt under Mubarak frustrated any possibility of cooperation with Israel, with the exception of sales of crude oil and, recently, gas. Egypt led an international campaign to expose Israel's nuclear capacity and force it to sign the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. An elected government in Cairo will continue this trend, and, in my estimation, will even demand changes in the terms – or perhaps the cancellation – of the transaction for the sale of gas to Israel. Egyptian diplomacy will invest considerable efforts in the international arena, and primarily the United States and Europe, in the condemnation of the settlement project in Israel and will impose upon Israel the responsibility for the non-renewal of the diplomatic process.

The developments in the Gaza Strip and Egypt's policy toward Hamas are potentially capable of bringing about an acute crisis in Israeli-Egyptian relations. Like Israel, the Mu-

barak regime objected to the reinforcement of Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip. Egypt took measures aimed at frustrating the smuggling of arms from Sinai, objected to the opening of the Rafah border crossing under the present conditions, and gave diplomatic support to the leadership of the Palestinian Authority in its struggle against Hamas. This policy was in line with the heavy siege imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip. A few days after Mubarak's ouster, the first sign of change in this Egyptian position became evident. Egypt announced a limited opening of the Rafah crossing point, and it may be reasonably assumed that an elected Egyptian government will favor its opening on the regular basis, thereby disrupting the blockade which Israel is enforcing on approximately 1.5 million residents of the Gaza Strip. In acute armed conflict between Israel and Hamas, such as Operation "Cast Lead", is likely to drive Israeli-Egyptian relations into an unprecedented crisis.

Egypt's role in the Middle East

It is becoming ever more apparent that the year 2011 will constitute a significant turning point in the modern history of the Arab peoples. The spark was lit in Tunisia; nonetheless, a broader and deeper influence has been exerted by the developments in Egypt, in light of its centrality in the Middle Eastern system. Already, the Egyptian uprising is shaping the new political language, and it is not by chance that the principal slogan of the January 25 revolution ("The people wants the fall of the regime") and the techniques developed during that revolution has become a role model throughout the Middle East.

The revolution in Egypt has ignited a pan-Arab public discourse with regard to Egypt's status as the leading Arab state. Whereas many public figures do not foresee dramatic changes in Egypt's regional policy, we cannot ignore the calls voiced by spokespersons of various groups for detachment from the policy guidelines which characterized the Mubarak era, and

primarily the special relationship with the United States and the commitment to the agreements with Israel. The spokespersons in question believe that such a move will restore Egypt to its leading position within the Arab world and will transform the January 25 revolution into a model showing other Arab peoples how to shake off authoritarian regimes favored by the Western powers. These calls ignore the fact that this revolution, from beginning to end, bore the colors of Egyptian nationalism and not those of Arabism – and certainly not those of radical Islam. An elected Egyptian leadership is likely to support the strengthening of relations with the Arab states; nonetheless, it will give top priority to domestic subjects, primarily economic distress, the struggle against corruption, and reducing the dimensions of unemployment.

The continued Egyptian commitment to the strategic partnership with the United States and the peace agreement with Israel will affect Cairo's relationship with Iran and Hezbollah. Egypt will continue to oppose the Iranian nuclear project and Teheran's involvement in Lebanon through Hezbollah. Egypt will demonstrate more intense objection to any manifestation of Iranian or Hezbollah involvement in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process

The resumption of a serious diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinians does not appear forthcoming. The Netanyahu government has taken various measures in order to torpedo the possibility of a dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, even at the price of clashing with the Obama administration. The Prime Minister and most of Israel's Cabinet believe that, in light of the dramatic transformations in Arab countries, a period of instability in the Middle East has begun, and will go on for years. Under these circumstances, it is not appropriate to hold any diplomatic negotiations which involve the taking of risks. An echo of this concept may be found in a recent speech by Netanyahu before the Knesset (February 2, 2011). A month later on, under growing criticism

that has been coming in his direction from home and abroad, he started talking about the need for a new peace initiative to break the stalemate in the peace process at the Palestinian front. Netanyahu seems to have recognized that the sit-and-do-nothing approach will ultimately hurt his government, but in practical terms he has very little to offer. Efforts to buy time and defuse criticism are no substitute for a meaningful policy change in Israel. In the Palestinian Authority, more and more voices are calling for the adoption of new playing rules in the discourse with Israel and the United States. Under these circumstances, Egypt is likely to take measures toward resolving the intra-Palestinian crisis, supporting the Palestinians' claims with regard to the diplomatic process, and imposing upon Israel the responsibility for the non-resumption thereof.

The United States and its Middle East policy following the fall of the Mubarak regime

The United States established itself as first among the nations which congratulated the Egyptian civil society for its achievements and heaped praises upon its military. The Obama administration and the SCAF in Egypt are conducting an intensive dialogue. It is possible that the parties have already begun to examine possibilities for the provision of special aid, for the rehabilitation of the damage caused to Egypt's economy during the uprising, and perhaps even for the increase of the American civilian aid, which was dramatically cut back from \$850 million in 1988 to \$250 million in 2010. The scope of the military aid has remained at \$1.3 billion per year.

At the same time, one of the most complex challenges which the United States must now take on is its negative image in Arab public opinion, including that of Egypt. The vast sections of the Arab public hold the United States responsible for the chaos and disunion which followed its conquest of Iraq and its involvement in Iraqi political processes, in the guise of support for the establishment of a democratic re-

gime. Various American administrations and Western governments support authoritarian Arab regimes, including the Mubarak regime which fiercely oppressed its domestic rivals and frustrated any possibility of significant political reform. The George Bush administration came close to a crisis with Mubarak immediately before the parliamentary elections of 2005; its simplistic attitude, however, was exposed when its position changed in light of the achievements attained by the Muslim Brotherhood in the first two rounds of those elections. President Obama has frequently emphasized his administration's commitment to promoting political reform in Arab countries; in his Cairo speech of June 2009, he called for the democratization of Egypt. Nonetheless, when the results of the most recent elections to the Egyptian parliament were forged (November 2010), spokespersons on behalf of the administration merely expressed their sorrow.

The significant changes which are now emerging in Arab states require international organizations and other countries to re-examine their Middle Eastern policy. The policy makers in question would do well to think "out of the box", because 21st-century Egypt will be quite different from the Egypt we knew in the previous century.

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