



ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Sholom
1809 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517-1401



Issue Number 45
March 2011

What Israel Fears in Egypt

By Sallai Meridor, Israeli Ambassador to the United States, 2005 to 2009

[Washington Post, Feb. 9] One might expect that Israelis, who live in the only democracy in the Middle East, would turn out in the squares of Jerusalem and the gardens of Tel Aviv to show solidarity with the demonstrators in



Egypt. The protesters, after all, are seeking to overthrow an authoritarian regime. Israelis, however, have stayed at home, warily following events on TV and the Internet.

It is not a democratic Egypt that Israelis fear but the prospect of Egypt being hijacked by enemies of democracy, of Israel and of the United States. Within every revolution are some who hope to use democratic processes to establish oppressive regimes. This was, to a large extent, what triumphed in Iran in 1979 and what happened in Gaza only five years ago. Many Israelis wonder why it would be any different in Egypt, which is home to the world's most powerful and popular Islamist movement.

Should the government of Hosni Mubarak be replaced by one not truly committed to freedom and peace, the consequences for Israel could be de-

vastating. As Egypt struggles toward an internal balance that appeases all forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood, peace with Israel could be the price of an Egyptian compromise. And the risks are worse if the Brotherhood, an organization deeply hostile to Israel, America and the West, gets to call the shots.

Consider what an Egyptian official once told me: "There is no war without Egypt." From 1948 to 1973, Israel had to fight four wars against coalitions of Arab armies. Since the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, however, there has not been even one war between Israel and Arab states. The lives of many Israelis and Arabs have been saved over the past four decades, and the security burden on Israel's economy has become more bearable. Yet if the peace with Egypt dissolves, the risks to the Jewish state and its citizens cannot be overstated.

The implications for the region could be massive. If Israel's western neighbor turns hostile, where would that leave our eastern neighbor, Jordan? Would it remain at peace with us? What would be the impact on other pro-American regimes? How many weeks, or days, would the new alignment of interests between Israel and most Arab regimes last against an aggressive and nuclear-armed Iran? If there is a negative outcome to the events unfolding in Egypt, the world will be living with a new Middle East, but it will be very different from the one we all aspire to.

Meanwhile, Israelis are uncertain about some positions of the U.S. administration. They remember how, after the 2009 presidential election, the Obama administration refused to support courageous Iranians who demonstrated against the oppressive "hate to America" regime in Tehran. People are understandably puzzled when news reports show an ally of America - even an authoritarian one - abandoned while U.S. rivals are honored with state dinners in Washington, despite their gross violations of human rights. In this highly charged region, Washington's actions are carefully watched. Israelis are looking at the results of U.S. policy in Iraq, the recent loss of Lebanon to Iran and how American pressure on Israel led to a "democratic" takeover of the Palestinian Authority by Hamas terrorists. Israelis live every day with the results of the U.S. administration's blunder that made already-difficult negotiations with the Palestinians impossible.

Israelis have learned the hard way that Israel cannot shape internal developments in our neighboring Arab states. While they wish America could responsibly engage in this process and ensure a positive outcome, they also doubt whether even America can prevent events from proceeding toward, and down, a slippery slope.

It is said, and is possibly true, that worry may be in the Jewish genes. With our history, having paved so

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many roads with good intentions only to see them lead to destruction, and having experienced how democratic slogans and processes have been abused again and again by murderous dictators, it is hard not to be concerned.

The future of Egypt is uncertain: Is it a hostile Islamist tyranny, using democracy as a fake ladder, or a compromise at Israel's expense that may be about to occur? The fear of war and death is on Israelis' hearts and minds.

But if a real democracy, committed to the values of freedom and peace, were to emerge in Egypt, Israelis would overwhelmingly support it.

Editor's note - Ambassador Meridor's comments appeared shortly before President Mubarak left office.

Greek PM Promises Israel Closer Ties with European Union



Greece's prime minister recently promised to help Israel forge closer ties with the European Union, as part of a drive to promote investment in his crisis-hit country. George

Papandreou [at right in photo with Benjamin Netanyahu during his July 2010 visit to Israel] said Athens could help Israel gain access to European markets, in a speech to Jewish American leaders visiting Athens. "We see the (European) market expanding to the Mediterranean and certainly we would like to integrate Israel into this European market," he said. "I think this is vital for Israel's economy but also for its strategic security.

Crisis-hit Greece and Israel — anxious to build regional alliances with Egypt in turmoil and following a public spat with Turkey — have launched a series of negotiations in recent months for potential cooperation deals. Papandreou said Greece was seeking cooperation in tourism, agriculture, defense and hi-tech innovation, and said the two countries would hold a joint cabinet meeting in Israel in April.

Officials in Israel and Greece say also the two countries are holding preliminary talks on potential energy deals involving newly-discovered Israeli offshore natural gas deposits. Papandreou's ministers of foreign affairs, investment, public order, tourism and defense also held meetings with a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations but their presentations at a downtown Athens hotel were closed to the media.

Greece has had traditionally close ties with the Palestinians and Arab countries and only established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1990. [JPost]

Huckabee: Israel Can Build in West Bank, Jerusalem



While in Israel recently, potential 2012 U.S. presidential candidate Mike Huckabee said that attempts to prevent Israel from building in East Jerusalem are as outrageous as housing discrimination in the United States. "I cannot imagine, as an American, being told I could not live in certain places in America because I was Christian, or because I was white, or because I spoke English," he said. Huckabee dismissed the notion that Jewish settlements on land the Palestinians want for a future state are obstacles to peace and that Israelis have the right to build anywhere in "the place that God gave them."

Huckabee, a former governor of Arkansas and a serious contender for president in 2008, is expected to seek the Republican nomination to run against Obama in 2012. An evangelical minister and Fox News host, Huckabee makes frequent trips to Israel to voice support for Jewish development throughout the biblical land of Israel.

Huckabee visited the Shepherd Hotel, the former residence of the mufti of Jerusalem, that was destroyed in early January to make way for Jewish homes. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had rebuked Israel for knocking down the hotel — a position Huckabee brushed off. "I think we ought to be more concerned about Iran building bombs than Israelis building bedrooms," Huckabee said. [AP]

Two Israelis Win Sundance Film Awards



The Sundance Film Festival, recently held in Park City, Utah, followed the Oscars and Golden Globes in recognizing the Jewish and Israeli contribution to world cinema by handing out awards to two Israeli

filmmakers. The world cinema dramatic screenwriting award went to Erez Kav-El for his film, *Restoration*, (photo) which depicts the rich texture of modern Israeli society by telling the story of Yakov Fidelman, forced to deal with his estranged son when he discovers his antique furniture-restoration shop is in grave financial difficulty.

Talya Lavie received an Inaugural Sundance Institute Mahindra Global Film-making award which recognizes and supports emerging independent filmmakers from around the world. Her film, *Zero Motivation*, is a sometimes comic, often dramatic look at the power struggles of three female clerks over one year in an administrative office at a remote army base in the Israeli desert. [JPost]