

Israel News from David Dolan

Week of February 21, 2011

Shalom,

Below is my monthly news and analysis report covering the most important recent news from Israel and the very troubled Middle East. As you will expect, this month's report focuses on the political upheaval now gripping many Arab countries and Iran. The situation is quite volatile, with the possibility that Bahrain might fall to anti-Western Shiite forces linked to Iran, which would be a major game changer in the region. Saudi Arabia might be next—with all that implies for world oil markets and the struggling economy.

My planned tour to Israel in May has now been cancelled. Although quite a few expressed interest in it, not enough people signed up by the deadline to make it viable. When I saw television reports last month featuring American tourists and others stranded and quite desperate in Cairo, I assumed the tour would probably not come together. Although it is still very safe in Israel itself, it is true that upheaval is breaking out all around the country, in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere. This could easily directly involve Israel at some stage, especially if Iran keeps pushing the envelope. I may possibly attempt to host a tour in 2012, and if so I will give due notice of that. In the meantime, keep Israel's leaders in special prayer—they have momentous decisions to make in the near future.

TURMOIL SPREADS IN TENSE MIDDLE EAST

By David Dolan

As with people everywhere on earth, Israelis watched the dramatic ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11 with rapt attention. This came as anti-government street protests intensified in several other Muslim countries including Jordan, Bahrain, Libya, Algeria, Yemen and Iran. Despite the regional upheaval, Israeli officials were heartened that the interim military government which is now ruling Egypt has pledged to uphold the country's controversial peace treaty with Israel, at least until promised national elections bring a new government to power later this year.

Trying to forestall unrest on his own streets, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister dissolved his cabinet during the month and pledged to hold fresh parliamentary and presidential elections. The opposition Hamas movement that violently seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 denounced the move, saying it would boycott the upcoming vote. This came after Hamas hailed the "popular revolution" in Egypt, apparently hoping it will ultimately lead to the radical Muslim Brotherhood movement taking over the troubled neighboring country. Meanwhile Israeli leaders expressed concern that Hamas might now gain an even greater ability to smuggle in weapons from the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula due to the instability in Cairo and elsewhere.

Israeli officials were also keeping a close watch on developments in Iran, where anti-government protestors took to the streets after being brutally repressed by the regime's security forces two years ago. They also expressed alarm over reports that two Iranian warships were sailing through the Suez Canal on their way to Syria. Some analysts said the ship transits were another indication that the radical Shiite government based in Tehran is stepping up efforts to use the regional turmoil to strengthen Iran's allies and agents operating in the Arab world. Officials expressed particular concern that violent clashes in Bahrain—home base of America's strategic Fifth Fleet—are being egged on by Iran, with evidence suggesting that its surrogate Lebanese Hizbullah force is also involved.

Amid the regional turmoil, Israel's new military chief of staff was sworn in during February as speculation grew that the outgoing chief will enter the political realm. In Europe, politicians in both Greece and Holland expressed solidarity with the Jewish state, as did legislators in the United States, Britain and elsewhere. Meanwhile Israeli officials were gearing up for widespread labor strikes being organized by the Histadrut national workers federation. The potential labor union disruptions are mainly designed to protest

the continuing rise in food and fuel costs—one of the core issues that brought demonstrators to the streets of Egypt and elsewhere.

BYE BYE MUBARAK

Israeli officials were not exactly thrilled that beleaguered Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was forced out of office in February by huge numbers of street protestors demanding he leave Cairo. Although his relations with the Jewish state were strained at times, Mubarak's overall record of keeping his large nation fairly stable over the past three decades while adhering to the Camp David peace accords was deeply appreciated in Jerusalem. After all, the previous two Egyptian leaders, Gamal Nasser and Anwar Sadat, had gone to war against Israel, although Sadat subsequently signed the American-mediated peace agreement and was assassinated for that major move (Sadat's Egyptian assassin has a street named after him in Tehran). Likewise Palestinian Authority officials viewed Mubarak's steady administration as beneficial to both the PA and to most of the Egyptian people. Hamas on the other hand had always espoused the anti-Mubarak stand that was the bedrock of its parent Islamic Sunni Arab organization, the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.

Israeli government and security officials enjoyed close working relations with Mubarak and other Egyptian government leaders. While obviously aware that the regime was basically autocratic and hardly resembled the vibrant democratic system thriving in Israel, they pointed out that Mubarak's rule was nevertheless relatively benign, at least in regional Arab-Muslim terms. Certainly his government showed nowhere near the levels of oppression displayed by the Syrian Assad dictatorship, which has slaughtered thousands of its own citizens over the decades, or the demented Iranian clerical regime that likewise uses disproportionate force to quell anti-government demonstrations. Nor was Mubarak considered anywhere nearly as corrupt as the late PA leader Yasser Arafat, Libya's exotic strongman Muammar Gaddafi or Tunisia's exiled President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

On top of this, Israeli politicians and pundits pointed out that the people Mubarak was suppressing in his teeming country were mostly Muslim extremists of the Hamas variety. It was army personnel linked to the Muslim Brotherhood that shot dead his predecessor Anwar Sadat in October 1981, meaning these opposition forces had previously demonstrated that they were both capable of, and willing to use murderous violence to promote their extremist goals. Knowing the movement would break all military ties with the United States if it came to power—which would in turn undoubtedly lead to a cutoff of vital military and economic assistance from Washington—Mubarak was actually acting in the best interests of most of his citizens by suppressing the Muslim Brothers, said many commentators. They noted that Palestinians living in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip have seen unemployment increase and personal religious and political freedoms reduced under radical Islamic rule, with all women once again consigned to the veil. The same would have probably been the case in Egypt if Hosni Mubarak had not run his impoverished country with a bit of an iron fist.

UNHAPPY WITH OBAMA

Some Israeli officials and many regional analysts were quite open in their criticism of how the Obama Administration handled the crisis in Egypt. Similar concerns were more quietly expressed by American-backed Arab governments in several Gulf countries, and in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Israeli analysts opined that while the mass anti-Mubarak street protest were mainly initiated by young people seeking jobs and expanded personal freedoms, including many Coptic Christians who make up nearly 10% of Egypt's mushrooming population, it was quickly dominated by observant Muslims who poured out in droves from thousands of mosques on Friday, January 28 to massively bolster the previous street protests. Most of the Muslims were hardly advocating better access to the internet and the liberalization of society, as portrayed

in many sympathetic international media reports. While they did demand more jobs and less police brutality, most have also long wanted to see Western influence over Egypt either reduced or eliminated altogether, not to mention the abrogation of the Camp David accords with Israel, even if this further harmed their struggling economy.

Given the fact that he was one of America's staunchest allies in the Arab world, where anti-Western sentiments are usually a core feature of most Islamic mosques, commentators said the Obama administration's relatively quick abandonment of Mubarak was sure to give sleepless nights to other allies. Many Israeli Middle East analysts noted that the conditions for significant democratic reforms taking hold in most regional countries simply do not exist. Extremists will always cynically use such reforms to further their radical agendas, just as Hamas rode the Palestinian electoral process created by the Oslo peace accords to come to power in 2006. They recalled that US President Jimmy Carter initially encouraged the popular overthrow of another pro-American Muslim ally, the Shah of Iran, only to be met with the fiercely anti-American regime that still rules the Shiite country thirty years later. If the same thing were to happen in heavily-armed Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would be much closer to fulfilling their publicly-stated goals of removing Western influence from the region after destroying Israel.

Suspensions in Jerusalem that the despotic Iranian regime and Al Qaida were playing separate, but influential roles in promoting the so-called "democratic reform revolution" in the region intensified when widespread unrest broke out in both Yemen and Bahrain in the wake of Mubarak's dramatic ouster. Neither country's autocratic leaders are considered terribly repressive of their citizen-opponents, unlike in Egypt, Iran and Syria. Yemen is a known Al Qaida stronghold, with its pro-American Sunni Arab government doing its best to help the United States and its allies suppress the violent Sunni terrorist movement that has declared a war of annihilation against America and Israel. Located further north on the Arabian Peninsula, the small island country of Bahrain is Sunni-ruled, yet a majority of its citizens are Shiite Muslims. They are bolstered by thousands of Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese Shiite foreign workers. Many would probably not mind if Iran's militant brand of Islam ended up dominating the region.

Bahrain is also the home of America's Fifth Fleet and other US and British military forces, meaning its strategic value to the West is arguably greater than Egypt's. Israeli officials are therefore hoping that American military leaders will put much stronger pressure on President Obama and his deputies to support the government there while continuing to call for needed reforms. Israeli leaders assess that the loss of US port rights in Bahrain would greatly embolden Iran and increase the chances of a full-scale war erupting with the rogue Muslim country and its anti-Israel allies in Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip.

SOME RELIEF

Despite their justifiably deep anxieties, Israeli leaders said they were fairly certain the US-funded and trained Egyptian military would retain substantial power and influence in a post Mubarak Egypt, which would hopefully help keep the Camp David peace accords intact. Officials in Jerusalem were relieved when Egypt's ambassador to Washington, Sameh Shoukry, told the American ABC television network that the peace treaty with Israel would be honored by the interim military government which has taken temporary control of the country.

Addressing the annual meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in Jerusalem on February 16, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said it was too early to tell where the street revolt in Egypt would lead to. However he warned that "popular uprisings" against sitting dictators often end up paving the way for even more oppressive regimes to rise to power, such as happened in Russia in 1917, Iran in 1979 and Lebanon in 2006, where the ouster of Syrian occupation forces eventually acted to

strengthen the militant Hizbullah movement. The Premier said Israel "shares the world's hopes that Egypt will succeed in its quest for genuine reform, but unlike other democracies, we cannot just hope for the best, but must prepare for the worst."

The Likud party leader indirectly admitted that he has been warning President Obama and other allied leaders of the possible dangerous outcome ahead in Egypt and the region, saying he has "a responsibility to do whatever I can to increase the chances that the negative possibilities don't materialize." He added that "Israel cannot profess neutrality about the outcome, because above all, we want the future Egyptian government to remain committed to peace with Israel."

PM Netanyahu's speech came as youthful leaders of the so-called "April 6th" movement that played a seminal role in the massive street revolt demanded that the next Egyptian government halt all natural gas sales to Israel. Political analysts said this was a worrisome indication that the "reform" group is basically hostile to the Jewish state. Ironically, the productive gas fields in the Sinai Peninsula were first discovered and developed by Israel when it controlled the territory between 1967 and 1981. A pipeline transporting natural gas to Israel and Jordan was ambushed during the massive street demonstrations, temporarily cutting off supplies to both countries.

During his Jerusalem address, PM Netanyahu also commented on a recent speech delivered in Beirut by Hizbullah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah. It was the radical cleric's first televised address since his movement managed to topple the pro-Western Hariri government in January and bring in a Hizbullah-backed cabinet headed by prime minister-designate Nagib Mikati. The Hizbullah leader maintained that Lebanese forces would "conquer" Israel's northern Galilee region in any future war. Alluding to the fact that Nasrallah has stayed away from public events since the end of the 2006 conflict, Netanyahu said that "whoever hides in a bunker should stay in the bunker." In a message that was undoubtedly meant for a wider audience as well, the Premier added that "No one should doubt Israel's strength, or its ability to defend itself. Nasrallah said he would capture the Galilee. I have news for you—you won't. We seek peace with all of our neighbors, but the IDF is prepared to defend Israel from any of its enemies."

WHAT WILL THE BROTHERS DO NEXT?

As they keep a wary eye on spreading instability in the wider Middle East and North Africa, Israeli leaders are closely following street protests in nearby Jordan, which shares a border with Israel that is nearly twice as long as the one with Egypt. Although the Jordanian government is considered to be in much better control of its streets than the Mubarak regime was—mainly due to the relative strength and popularity of the Hashemite monarchy led by King Abdullah—it nevertheless has a majority Palestinian population comprised mostly of young descendants of Arabs who fled their homes during the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. The Moslem Brotherhood movement is quite active in the country, mainly via its Hamas branch. It has been stepping up demands for the severing of the peace treaty with Israel, signed by the late King Hussein and Yitzhak Rabin in 1994.

In an attempt to forestall trouble in Palestinian Authority zones of control, PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad dissolved his cabinet on February 13 and announced that municipal elections would be held in July, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections in September—the month when the PA says it will declare unilateral statehood in all areas captured by IDF forces from Jordan in 1967, including the eastern half of Jerusalem. Hamas immediately denounced the move, saying it would not allow the twin ballots to take place in the Gaza Strip. This promoted PA President Mahmoud Abbas to declare he will not go forward with the planned elections if Hamas boycotts the vote. Earlier, the 75 year old leader announced that he will not seek reelection to the presidential post.

Widespread criticism of the PA increased last month after the controversial *Al Jazeera* Arab satellite news network published PA documents that were stolen from PA peace negotiator Saeb Erekat's office in Ramallah. The so-called "Palestine Papers" detailed several significant concessions being considered by PA officials, including allowing contested Israeli settlement blocks to remain in place after a final peace accord is signed. Erekat resigned his position in February, taking full responsibility for the embarrassing theft. At the same time, he again blasted the Arab satellite channel, charging that its agents had engaged in "forgery and distortion." Many other regional Arab officials have echoed the PA criticism, saying *Al Jazeera* has become an advocate for the radical Islamic agenda fomented by the Muslim Brothers and Al Qaida. Both Sunni fundamentalist groups want an Islamic caliphate to be established that would enforce strict *sharia* law in all Arab countries, and eventually throughout the world.

The United Nations Security Council voted on a draft resolution on February 19 that termed all Israeli settlement communities illegal, implying they must all be abandoned as part of a final peace accord. Calling for an immediate halt to all Jewish construction in the disputed territories, the initiative was sponsored by 120 countries. The United States vetoed the resolution despite its frequent demand that Israel freeze home building in all portions of Jordan's former West Bank, including in eastern Jerusalem.

Meanwhile PA President Abbas said the Palestinians will not renounce their demand for control over the Old City's Armenian Christian Quarter as part of any final peace deal. Meeting with local Arab Christian leaders in Ramallah, he said "The Palestinian leadership sticks to its position that regards the Armenian Quarter as an integral part of east Jerusalem, the capital of the independent Palestinian state." The small Jerusalem Armenian Christian community is known to be unhappy with the prospect of returning to Arab-Muslim control after over four decades of moderate Israeli rule.

IRAN TESTS THE WATERS

Israeli leaders were not surprised when Iran tested the new interim Egyptian government by sending two naval warships through the Suez Canal for the first time in over thirty years. The ships were reportedly on their way to the Syrian port of Latakia, which is also used by Russian navy vessels. Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed grave concern over the Suez transit, which was approved by the new interim Egyptian government. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman called the action "a provocation which demonstrates that the overconfidence of the Iranians is increasing from day to day." He added that international leaders need to "put the Iranians in their place."

Thousands of Iranians took to the streets mid-month to call for regime change in their oppressive country. As occurred two years ago after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was fraudulently returned to power in rigged elections, the rouge regime used its Revolutionary Guard forces to violently suppress the protests. Claiming the demonstrations were "heading nowhere," the fanatic Shiite leader poked fun at the assaulted Iranian protestors on national television, saying they "threw some dust towards the sun, but the dust will return to their eyes." Unlike in 2009, President Obama publicly applauded the protesters while denouncing the cruel government crackdown. "I find it ironic that you've got the Iranian regime pretending to celebrate what happened in Egypt, when in fact they have acted in direct contrast to what happened in Egypt by gunning down and beating people who were trying to express themselves peacefully."

Israeli officials are expressing concerns over an upcoming UN Atomic Energy Agency report that is expected to say that Iran's nuclear uranium enrichment program has recovered quicker than expected from a computer virus bug that destroyed some of its centrifuges. Iranian officials charged that the virus, known as Stuxnet, was introduced by "foreign Zionist agents," thought to be a reference to the United States, Israel, the UK and possibly several other European countries.

NEW CHIEF OF STAFF

As turbulent street protests spread like wildfire to many parts of the region, a new Israeli Armed Forces Chief was sworn in during February. Lieutenant General Benny Gantz becomes the IDF's twentieth military commander. In a ceremony in Tel Aviv, Gantz proclaimed that he was taking charge of a "strong, disciplined and persistent army. Having served as deputy chief of staff under retiring IDF Chief Gabi Ashkenazi, Gantz is expected to carry on with most of his predecessors programs and reforms. Prime Minister Netanyahu commended the new leader for his "unique manner that combines calm, persistence and pleasantness, ensuring stability and continuity."

Under Israeli law, a retiring military commander must wait three years before entering the political world. Many of Israel's top leaders have come from IDF ranks, including current Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon and the late Yitzhak Rabin. Speculation about Ashkenazi's future abounded during February, with most predicting he will join a major political party when his time-out expires.

With defense spending cuts being recommended in the United States and many other countries due to the worldwide economic slowdown, Israeli leaders are confident that they can maintain or even increase their current budget because of the country's strong economic recovery. Statistics released by the government during the month showed that Israel's Gross Domestic Product rose by 5.4% during the second half of 2010, up from 5% during the first half of the year. The performance was among the best among industrialized countries, with only a few places like Chile and South Korea growing faster than Israel. Part of Israel's economic strength was attributed to a record year in overseas tourism, which brought nearly three and a half million visitors to the land during 2010. However officials admitted that the tourism sector will probably not perform as well this year, given that widespread unrest is currently rippling through the region, if not actually occurring inside of Israel.

Realizing the scriptures tell us that everything which can be shaken will be shaken in the biblical last days, it is comforting to know the prophets also foretold that the time of Jacob's troubles will come to an end when the Jewish Messiah transforms the world, bringing in peaceful tranquility under His beneficent rule. *"The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat...They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6 and 9).*

DAVID DOLAN is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived and worked in Israel since 1980.

- **[HOLY WAR FOR THE PROMISED LAND](#)** (Broadman & Holman), his latest book, is an overview of the history of the Israel and of the bitter Arab-Israeli conflict that rages there, plus some autobiographical details about the author's experiences living in the land since 1980. It especially examines the important role that militant Islam plays in the conflict.
- **[ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD?](#)** (Baker/Revell), which examines the political and biblical prospects for a regional attack upon Israel, settlement in the disputed territories, and related topics, is also available for purchase, along with an updated edition of his popular end-time novel, **[THE END OF DAYS](#)** (21st Century Press).
- **David Dolan is currently working on his new novel with the probable title [THE LORD REIGNS](#).** You may order these books at a special discount price by visiting his web site at www.ddolan.com, or by phoning toll free 888-890-6938 in North America, or by e mail at: resources@yourisraelconnection.org. To schedule David Dolan for a speaking engagement, e mail alohashalom@gmail.com
DOLAN'S NATIONALLY TELEVISED DVD, "FOR ZION'S SAKE" is also available for purchase. Click the title under "BOOKSTORE" for more details.

TO RECEIVE THESE FREE ISRAEL UPDATES DIRECTLY, FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS BELOW. YOU WILL ONLY RECEIVE DAVID DOLAN'S UPDATE AND ANALYSIS INFORMATION FROM THIS ADDRESS. THE LIST WILL NOT BE TRADED OR SOLD.

TO SUBSCRIBE or to unsubscribe, go to: <http://www.ddolan.com/subscribe.asp>