



Adult Ed April 29, 2012

The Arab Spring

What is it, why is happening and what does it mean for Israel?

On July 5th, 2009, President Barach Hussein Obama, as he identified himself, emphasizing his commonality with his audience, with his stood at the podium at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and addressed the crowd. His speech would touch on many things including:

“The fourth issue that I will address is democracy.

I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other.

That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election. But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere.

There is no straight line to realize this promise. But this much is clear: governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected, peaceful governments - provided they govern with respect for all their people.

This last point is important because there are some who advocate for democracy only when they are out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. No matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who hold power: you must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy.”

To my mind that speech was as important as President Reagan's 1987 challenge to Mikhail Gorbachev to “Tear down this wall.” Though it would take a bit over a year, I believe that the seeds planted by this speech would come to fruition in the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring is the name given to the wave of protests and demonstrations that swept the Arab world, beginning in Tunisia, then sweeping out to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. The protests were largely about human rights and dignity, values that the Western press usually

did not associate with the Arab world and were almost always led by secular rather than religious leaders, which was different than the 1970s.

The next thing that you need to know is that the Arab Spring would begin in the winter.

The Arab Spring Comes to Tunisia

On December 17th, 2010, a twenty-six year old Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire. A tragic event to be sure, but one that, at the time, seemed unlikely to have international repercussions. But this one small act would be the spark that would kindle a firestorm that would begin revolutions, topple governments and change the politics of a large portion of the world.

There are many stories about the events that would lead Mohamed Bouazizi to take his own life. The most common one, one that is most often retold and that has passed into modern mythology, is that he had been targeted and victimized by the local police in the Sidi Bouzid area of Tunisia all his life. Most often they would confiscate his small wheelbarrow of produce, which he sold as a street vendor. He would have to beg and wheedle to get it back, but he had no other occupation. In this subsistence life-style, he was like millions of other young men and women in the Third World. Bouazizi was supposedly working toward the goal of buying or at least renting a truck. This may be apocryphal, but he would later be described as being "a very well-known and popular man [who] would give free fruit and vegetables to very poor families." This came from a friend and would be reprinted in Al Jazeera in January.¹

Like many others, he had been born into disappointment. His father had taken a construction job in Libya to improve the family's position in the world; instead he would die of a heart attack when Mohamed was three. His mother would marry his uncle, as was the custom. However, instead of being able to support the family, the uncle's health deteriorated. Mohamed began working odd jobs when he was 10 and in his late teens, quit school in order to work full-time. The stories that portray him as a university student represent what he would have wanted if only things had gone differently.

On December 16th, Bouazizi had gone approximately \$200 in debt to buy the produce that he was going to sell the next day. On the morning of the 17th, at approximately 10:30 AM, Bouazizi got into a confrontation with the police. The story is that a policewoman, 45-year old Faïda Hamdi, told Bouazizi that he lacked the proper permit to sell his wares. (According to the head of the state office of employment and independent work, no permit was required to sell from a cart.) Although she would later be cleared of all charges, the story is that Hamdi tried to shake Bouazizi down for a bribe, one that he could not afford, and when he could not pay, she slapped him, spat at him, confiscated his electric weighing scales and then tossed his cart over. The gender of the officer in question only made matters worse. To literally add insult to injury, Hamdi insulted Bouazizi's deceased father. Bouazizi's mother says that Hamdi and her aides beat Bouazizi. A brother of Hamdi would deny that there had been any mistreatment, beyond the confiscation of

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi

his wares. A witness would testify that Hamdi never slapped Bouazizi, but that her aides did beat him. At any rate, he was impoverished and felt demeaned.

Bouazizi ran to the governor's office to complain and demand his scales back. When the governor refused to even see him, Bouazizi is quoted as saying "If you don't see me, I'll burn myself." He then went to a local gas station and bought a can of gasoline. He returned to the area around the governor's office. Standing in the middle of traffic, his last words were not a political or religious manifesto, but rather a complaint that would resonate with anyone who has been denied opportunity, saying "How do you expect me to earn a living?" He then made good on his threat.



Spectators tried to help him by throwing water on him, which only spread the gasoline. Severely burned on over 90% of his body, he would be taken to a local medical facility and then to a larger hospital. There was an immediate and powerful reaction to his self-immolation, a type of protest that is unusual in the Muslim world. The President of Tunisia at the time, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, would come and visit Bouazizi in the hospital; he may have promised to have the young man flown to France for treatment. Whether that promise was made or not, on January 4th, 2011, Bouazizi died of his burns.

It is estimated that over 5000 people joined in the funeral procession that would begin in the Sidi Bouzid neighborhood where Bouazizi lived and continued to the village where he had been born 26 years before. The anger that they felt was clear and directed. They chanted "Farewell, Mohammed, we will avenge you. We weep for you today. We will make those who caused your death weep." Mohamed was buried in what Al Jazeera would call a simple ceremony. His grave is surrounded by cactuses, olive and almond trees. A Tunisian flag flies next to it.

In an interview with Reuters, one of Mohamed's sisters would say "What kind of repression do you imagine it takes for a young man to do this? A man who has to feed his family by buying goods on credit when they fine him ... and take his goods. In Sidi Bouzid, those with no connections and no money for bribes are humiliated and insulted and not allowed to live." Mohamed's mother was insistent that it was not the poverty, it was the humiliation that led to her son's death, "It got to him deep inside, it hurt his pride."

The initial focus for the rage was at Faida Hamdi, the police official. She would be suspended, along with the governor of Sidi Bouzid. Later, she would be arrested, supposedly for her own safety or to appease the crowds, depending on who is telling the story. But the protestors were not satisfied. Each day the protests intensified. President Ben Ali tried the carrot, offering 50 thousand new jobs, which would only have been enough for one third of the unemployed students. He went even further, pledging parliamentary elections and an end to internet censorship, and by vowing that he would keep the constitutionally mandated age limit for president at seventy-five years, making him ineligible to run for another term.² He even offered to meet with the protestors.

² *The Arab Uprisings : What Everyone Needs to Know*

When the promises did not work, he closed the schools and universities, which of course only gave the students more time for the protests. He ordered in the police and at a town called Thala, five students were shot. The protests continued to escalate. He then sent in security forces and then the army to deal with the protests. When ordered to fire on crowds, the soldiers refused. This refusal was not universal; in the town of Kasserine, government snipers killed twenty-one protestors. The protests, which initially were about reform and jobs, turned against the government responsible for these deaths. As the uprising spread through the country, they began calling for the removal of Ben Ali. It would be the army, ultimately, that would decide things. When the protestors reached the capital of Tunis, the chief of staff ordered the soldiers to stand down. On January 14th, 2011, Ben Ali would flee to Saudi Arabia. This would be the first time in the modern era that a popular uprising forced an Arab ruler out of power, but it would not be the last.

Timeline

December 17, 2010 – Bouazizi suicide, protests begin in Tunisia

January 14, 2011- President Ben Ali is forced to flee.

January 25, 2011- Protests begin in Egypt.

January 28, 2011- In Egypt, President Mubarak orders troops and tanks to quell the demonstrations.

January 29, 2011- Protests begin in Yemen, in sympathy with Egypt.

February 3, 2011- More than 20,000 people protest in the streets of Yemen.

February 11, 2011- Mubarak is forced to step down.

February 14th, 2011- “Day of Rage” in Bahrain.

February 15 & 16, 2011- The arrest of human rights activist Fethi Tarbel starts a riot in the Libyan city of Benghazi.

February 24th, 2011- Rebels seize control of the city of Misrata in Libya, the civil war is in full swing.

March 15th, 2011- Bahrain declares martial law.

March 16th, 2011- Security forces in Damascus, Syria, break up a protest of 150 men and women holding pictures of imprisoned relatives.

March 19, 2011- First UN air strikes against Gaddafi’s forces.

June 20, 2011- A bomb explodes in Saleh’s palace in Yemen, wounding the president, the prime minister and the speaker of parliament. Saleh goes to Saudi Arabia for treatment.

July 31, 2011- Syrian tanks enter the city of Hama after a month long siege.

August 21, 2011- Rebels enter the Libyan capital.

October 20, 2011- Gaddafi is killed.

November 23, 2011- Saleh agrees to hand over power.

November 28, 2011- Elections in Egypt.

January 10, 2012- Syria's President Bashar al-Assad vows to strike down the terrorists with an iron fist. More than 9000 have been killed according to the lowest estimates. Activists put the toll at over 11,000.

February 27, 2012- Saleh hands over power in Yemen.

In just over a year³, the leaders of three countries (Tunisia, Libya and Egypt) have been deposed, one killed, one on trial and the other convicted in absentia. A fourth is allowed to peacefully turn over the reins of power. It seems both miraculous and yet somehow inevitable.

Why Now?

Every Arab nation has a history of being a part of the Ottoman Empire (until the end of World War I) or of being a European colony and usually both. Having been occupied by foreign powers for their recent history gives these countries a cultural tolerance toward corruption. So why did the events around the death of Mohamed Bouazizi strike such a powerful note within Tunisia and why did what started with a Tunisian vegetable seller spread so far? There are multiple reasons, including demographics, economics, and the adaptation of disruptive technologies and international events that would come together. But let's start off with some definitions.



When we refer to the Arab states, we are really referring to that collection of countries whose inhabitants are primarily, and let me emphasize primarily, Arabic-speaking Muslims. These countries are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia,

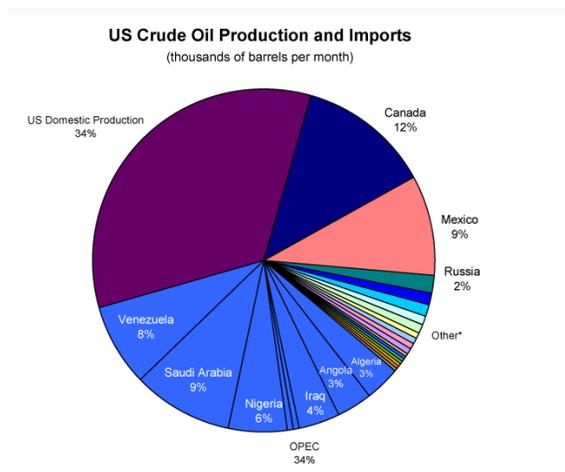
Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. We should also include the Palestinian territories.

³ <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/01/13/tunisia-revolution-anniversary-idINDEE80C0IT20120113>

The Arab world should not be thought of as being homogenous. There are variations in terms of race, culture, wealth. There are religious minorities, such as the more than 10 million Coptic Christians of Egypt. There are ethnic minorities such as the Kurds and the Berbers. Within the Sudan, the population is divided along both racial and religious lines. Even within Islam, there are Shiites and Sunnis and we know the potential for conflict there. The Alawites of Syria are the ruling class and are a major reason why Assad maintains power. Then we have deep economic divides. The average per capita income of Qatar is over \$88,000 per year, while that of Yemen is only around \$1,000.

While it is important to bear in mind that there are significant differences between these countries, there are also similarities and trends that define the region. The revolution in Tunisia, and as we will see, the revolt in Egypt as well, were revolts by the youth of those countries. Approximately 30 percent of the population of the Arab world is under the age of thirty. Twenty nine percent of the population of Tunisia is under thirty, 30 percent in Egypt, 32 percent in Algeria and a whopping 34 percent in Libya. The only other area in the world with a similar skew in the age of the population is sub-Saharan Africa. Demographers refer to this as a “youth bulge.” Typically this occurs during and after times of transition from a lower standard of living with high mortality/high fertility, to a higher standard of living, characterized by low mortality/low fertility rates. Before a balance is reached, there is often a large generation that is the first to have a low mortality rate. This preponderance of young people can put a strain on a society’s resources and disrupt the norms. Think of how disruptive the coming of age of the baby boom generation was to American culture in the 1960s and 1970s. And that was during a time of prosperity.

Times are far from prosperous for the Arab world. Almost every country in that area is economically dependent on the exportation of oil and, popular misconceptions to the contrary; America is not the largest client nation. We don’t get most of our oil from the Arab world, we get



it from more local sources. For example, we get as much oil from Mexico as we do from Saudi Arabia and Canada provides more. At least part of the reason for this is that the easiest way to transport oil from where it is plentiful to where it is needed is via a pipeline. That, of course, requires that there is a land route possible between those two points. That is why the European Union is the largest client for Middle Eastern oil. Sixty percent of all exports from the Middle East go to Europe. Forty-five percent of the oil imported by Europe comes from the Middle East and it is estimated that by 2030 Europe will need to import 90% of its oil. The North Sea oil and natural gas fields have

already been over exploited. This creates a relationship of mutual dependence. Europe needs the Middle East’s oil and the Arab world needs Europe’s money. And the European economy is not doing so well. Even before the revolution, unemployment in Libya, for example, was reportedly around 55%.

Moreover there is a difference in the economics of countries whose wealth is dependent on what they **make** versus countries whose wealth is dependent on what they **have**. Manufacturing requires a skilled work force. Exportation does not, only employing the workers (often foreign)

needed to transport the resources from point to point. The vast majority of the wealth produced by the sale of oil (and even the wealth related to the transportation of oil, for example the fees that Egypt collected from the Suez Canal, their second greatest source of revenue) stayed in the hands of the few.

Another issue that is often overlooked is that the Arab world is almost entirely dependent on foreign imports of wheat. As global consumption patterns have changed, including the use of government subsidized bio-fuels in America, prices have soared. In America, we spend about 7 percent of household income on food, and that includes eating out, food as “entertainment” a concept that is unheard of for most of the world. In the Arab world a Lebanese household spends an average of 34 percent of their income on food. In Morocco the percentage spent on food climbs to 63 percent.

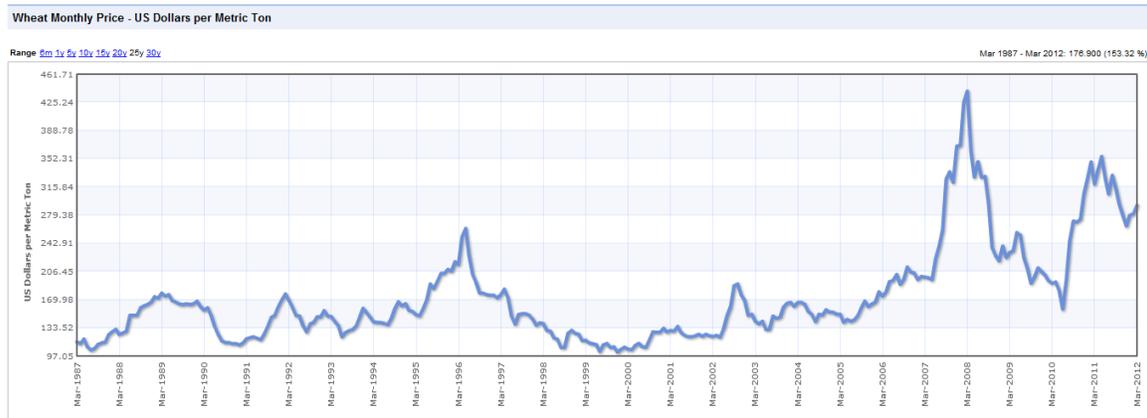


Figure 1 <http://www.indexmundi.com/commodities/?commodity=wheat&months=300>

The combination of low wages and high food costs meant that large portions of the populations of Arab states were dependent on their governments for subsistence. Egypt was spending as much as \$3 billion per year on subsidies for food and at that was only managing to feed the poorest. After the worldwide economic downturn of 2008, governments had to cut back. For the Arab world, that meant cutting back on food.

Revolutions don't always come about as the result of poverty, no matter how severe. One of the causes that have been offered for why revolutions happen is that a revolution will occur when, after a period of improvement, expectations aren't met. In the case of the Arab world, explicit promises were no longer being met.

Gamal Abdel Nasser became President of Egypt in 1956. He was part of the military junta that overthrew the monarchy in 1952. Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and was looked upon as the most important Arab leader in the post-colonial era, was a champion of the pan-Arab movement and became a symbol of dignity and freedom for the Arab world. Of course outside the Arab world he is looked upon differently. By opposing Israel and America as the ally of Israel, he was able to garner both financial and military aid from the Soviet Union. But he also was able to play the USSR off against the US to continue receiving aid from America. He was going to use this money to pull Egypt into the modern era. In 1961, the Egyptian government passed the Employment Guarantee Scheme, which guaranteed every university graduate a job in the public

sector. Within a decade the Egyptian bureaucracy had grown from 350,000 employees to 1.2 million. By 1964, Nasser was able to push through a new constitution and a National Charter in 1964 that guaranteed universal health care, housing, building vocational schools, women’s rights and a program of family planning.

By taking all power unto the state, Nasser and the other Middle Eastern strongmen created a sense of entitlement and also assumed responsibility. When the state is the largest, almost exclusive employer, then when you don’t have a job, it is the fault of the state. We saw this when Ben Ali tried to placate the mob by offering to hire 50,000 graduates. Unfortunately that meant that he would not hire 100,000 more.

Not long after this, Egypt would lose the Six Day War of 1967, and lose the Sinai Peninsula; in 1973, Egypt would lose in the Yom Kippur War; in 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat would sign the Camp David accords with Israel, a move that cut Egypt off from the rest of the Arab world; in 1981, President Sadat, along with the Cuban ambassador to Egypt, a general from the nation of Oman, a Coptic bishop and eight others were murdered at the annual victory parade held to celebrate Egypt’s crossing of the Suez Canal. Twenty eight others were wounded, including Hosni Mubarak, who would succeed Sadat.

Within one generation, Egypt had gone from being the progressive light of the Arab world to being a state barely able to feed its own people, and where leaders face assassination.

To recap, the states of the Arab world were almost universally poor until the second half of the twentieth century, when oil became a valuable resource. Through the end of World War I, much of this area was part of the Ottoman Empire; until the end of World War II, Europe maintained colonies in this region. In the post-colonial era, leaders with the backing of the country’s military took over under some variation of “President for life.” With no manufacturing or technology base, the economy was generally based on the exportation of oil and the importation of everything else, but most especially food. Having nationalized the only resource of real value, oil, the government was the only real employer. Beginning in the 1960s, government programs enhanced the quality of life, lowering infant mortality and creating a youth bulge. Combined with an unsustainable economic system, this has resulted in a mass of unemployed youth, with little or no prospects for the future, at the mercy of an all-powerful government bureaucracy. That is why Mohamad Bouazizi was such a perfect symbol for a generation.

The Arab Leaders

Eight of the countries in the Arab World are still ruled by monarchs, to one degree or another. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Oman are all monarchies. Jordan, Morocco, Qatar are constitutional monarchies. Six others have been ruled by strongmen:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Leader(s)</u>	<u>Time in Power</u>
Tunisia	Habib Bourguiba	1956 - 1987 (31 years)
	Zine El Abidine Ben Ali	1987- 2011 (24 years)
Egypt	Gamal Abdel Nasser	1954 – 1970 (16 years)
	Anwar El Sadat	1970 – 1981 (11 years)
	Hosni Mubarek	1981 – 2011 (30 years)
Libya	King Idris (Constitutional	1951 – 1969 (18 years)

	Monarchy)	
	Muammar Gaddafi	1969 – 2011 (42 years)
Syria (UAR)	Gamal Abdel Nasser	1958 – 1961 (3 years)
Syria	Ba'ath Party (Various)	1964 – 1970 (6 years)
	Hafez al-Assad	1970 – 2000 (30 years)
	Bashar al-Assad	2000 – current (11 years)
Yemen	Ali Abdullah Saleh	1978 – 2012 (34 years)
Iraq	Saddam Hussein	1979 – 2003 (24 years)

Each of these leaders might argue, and with some justification, that the country was better off during their tenure than before they took office. (Saddam Hussein didn't look to have the US invade Iraq.) Each made attempts, with some degree of success, to raise the standard of living for the majority of the people in their countries. At the same time, they ruthlessly suppressed, killed and tortured their opposition. One can argue that some were worse than others, but all were bad and not too long ago, it seemed that they would never lose power. Yet now, five have been deposed, one by a foreign power, and one is dealing with a revolution. Of the monarchies, Bahrain looks shaky, and all of the others have recently instituted some degree of reform. What happened to change things?

The Revolution Will Be Televised – The Role of Technology In the Arab Spring

Facebook and Twitter and the internet get a lot of credit in explaining the revolutions that took place. The Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” was a focal point for the anti-Mubarak movement, for example⁴. Khaled Said was a young Egyptian man, allegedly tortured to death by Egyptian Security forces. The page was established to honor his memory and was moderated by Wael Ghonim, an internet entrepreneur and, at the time, Head of Marketing for Google Middle East. Hundreds of thousands of people, inside and outside of Egypt, followed the page.

That page did not cause the revolution. What it did do was to provide a focal point for concerned people, inside Egypt and in the outside world, to learn about what was happening and to express their outrage. It is this connection that is important. Every dictatorship restricts the flow of information. Dictators always impose censorship within a country and filter the information that comes in from the outside world. Mubarak shut down the Egyptian internet both to limit the world's outrage over how he was murdering his own people, to conceal how widespread the protests were, to prevent his people from learning how the world supported their protests and also to take away a tool to coordinate protests. The protests would have happened without the internet and, in fact, took place after the firewalls came down.

For years, dictators were successful in imposing censorship. Newspapers are easier to control than blog posts, which are distributed among many posters. When Wael Ghonim was imprisoned, the “We are all Khaled Said” page didn't miss a beat. In addition to the spread of Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media, there are other forms of media that were important. Videos, taken by cell phone, and instantly uploaded to YouTube made it impossible to conceal the atrocities. The dictators couldn't effectively deny what we could all see. It was as if millions of reporters were roaming the streets. Telephones are much harder to restrict than without computers without disabling critical services.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Khaled_Mohamed_Saeed#We_are_all_Khaled_Said

The role of al Jazeera, which in Arabic means “The Island”, a reference to the Arabian Peninsula is credited by some as providing the best coverage of the events in Egypt and Hillary Clinton is on record as saying that the network’s coverage was more informative and less-opinion driven than American coverage. Working outside the control of the Mubarak government, but broadcasting in a language that Egyptians could understand, al Jazeera covered the protests. If the war in Iraq brought CNN to prominence in America, the protests in Egypt (and previously in Bahrain and Tunisia, subsequently the civil war in Libya) did the same for al Jazeera.⁵ In all fairness, al Jazeera receives much of its funding from the government of Qatar and has been accused of political bias. Still if one wants to hear the voice of the Arab world, al Jazeera is probably the best place to start.

Why was it so important to get the information, undeniable videos in particular, out to the world? The reason is that dictatorships don’t survive very long cut off from the rest of the world. These countries were all receiving funding, funding that was crucial to their survival on a day-to-day basis, from important allies.

The Battle for Hearts, Minds and Dollars

Since 1979, the signing of the Camp David accord between Israel and Egypt and coincidentally Hosni Mubarak’s ascension to power, the United States had been giving Egypt \$2 billion a year. Of this amount, approximately \$1.3 billion was military funding, mostly to pay Egypt for its peace with Israel. Quoting for a WikiLeaks revealed cable:

“President Mubarak and military leaders view our military assistance program as the cornerstone of our mil-mil relationship and consider the USD 1.3 billion in annual FMF as “untouchable compensation” for making and maintaining peace with Israel. The tangible benefits to our mil-mil relationship are clear: Egypt remains at peace with Israel, and the U.S. military enjoys priority access to the Suez Canal and Egyptian airspace.”⁶

This aid is given without any strings, so that it can be used to, for example, suppress protests. At one point, the Bush administration had looked to tie funding to human rights, but never carried through. The Obama administration, having retained Robert Gates as Defense Secretary, waived all pre-conditions.

The United States supported Middle Eastern dictators as a bulwark against Communism in the 1960s and 1970s. A leaked (again from WikiLeaks) 1963 Congressional report published by al Jazeera reads, “Tunisia has been known for its internal political stability and unity... This fact, unique in a ME country, can be explained by the existence of an unopposed single-party rule... Under the vigorous leadership of President Bourguiba, Tunisia offers a favorable and stable political climate, progressive in its outlook, in which to bring about economic development. US aid should be continued at the same or higher level.” Stable because Bourguiba was President for 31 years.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jazeera#Egypt

⁶ <http://www.propublica.org/blog/item/f.a.q.-on-u.s.-aid-to-egypt-where-does-the-money-go-who-decides-how-spent>

The United States adopted a policy of supporting military officers who seized power in the Middle East with six goals in mind:

1. Prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the region.
2. Ensure continued access to oil.
3. Maintain the balance of power in the region, preventing for example a Pan-Arab state.
4. Promote a pro-Western agenda.
5. Preserve the independence and territorial integrity of Israel.
6. Protect the sea lanes and lines of communication.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the first point was no longer relevant. It was replaced by limiting the spread of Islamic terrorism. After September 11th, 2001, our focus naturally turned to stopping al Qaeda. Muammar Gaddafi would receive funding from the US by agreeing to renounce weapons of mass destruction; Saleh of Yemen allowed the US hunt down terrorists operating out of Yemen; and Hosni Mubarak was paid for providing torture or “extraordinary rendition” services as part of the interrogation process for the US government. According to testimony by former CIA agent, Michael Scheuer, this was a program begun in 1995 under the Clinton administration and approved by the President under a special directive.⁷

One can debate in hindsight if supporting military dictators, was the best way to accomplish these goals and certainly there have been many ironies. One month before the United States began participating in the NATO bombing campaign in Libya, President Obama asked Congress to increase US military aid to Libya to \$1.7 million. The reason for this increase is that Libya permitted the flights of US drones over Libya, an action that President Obama was criticized for authorizing without Congressional approval. The money was intended to train Libyan officers, improve the country’s air force and to counter-terrorism. One month later, we were shooting the Libyan air force out of the sky.

We give about \$120 million to Yemen, including \$20 million for military aid, and \$51 million to Bahrain. Of course, these are nothing compared to the \$1.2 billion that we give Pakistan each year, or what we have spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But over the last thirty years, Egypt trails only Israel in the amount of foreign aid received from the US.

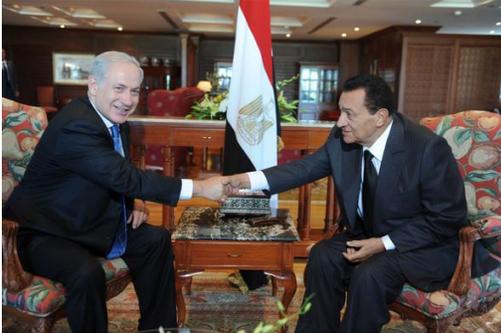
What did the US receive for this aid? Egypt partially controls the Suez Canal and the US needs access for both commercial and military ships. And the US was also paying Egypt as part of the peace settlement. The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt and at that point, Egypt became the only Arab neighbor of the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Israel controls the southern and eastern sides of Gaza, the Mediterranean Sea is the north and west. Egypt controls the south western border. Egypt maintains and has expanded the concrete and steel wall separating Gaza from Sinai. More than 20 feet tall, the wall is equipped with electronic sensors, topped with barbed wire in sections and underground concrete barriers that were designed to prevent smuggling. This has proven largely ineffective stopping the smuggling of weapons, but it does cut Gaza off from the rest of the world. There are



⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraordinary_rendition

enormous implications for Israel. Obviously, if the border with Egypt was open, Israeli embargoes of Gaza would lose their effectiveness. The entire relationship would change.⁸

Israel, Islamists and the Arab Spring



In January of 2011, as the situation in Egypt was becoming more unsettled, Eli Shaked, the former Israeli ambassador to Egypt, termed the looming overthrow of the Hosni Mubarak "a disaster for Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Europe and the U.S. I don't see among our friends someone who will benefit from this horrible scenario." It was widely assumed that were the government to fall, there would be a bloodbath on the streets of Cairo and a violent civil war throughout the nation. And yes, we saw hoodlums, loyal to old regime, beating

people and shooting into crowds. But we also saw crowds of Egyptians, facing lines of soldiers, chanting "peaceful, peaceful." And surprisingly, we saw the soldiers respect the non-violence. In Egypt, as in Tunisia before, it was ultimately the refusal of the military to fire on crowds that would force the regime change.

The problem with the predictions was that, to a large degree, they were based on misassumptions about the Arab character, based on broad generalizations that did not allow for individual heroics. Let me offer this example about one of the heroes of Tahrir Square, actually a heroine. Asmaa Mahfouz is one of the founders of the April 6th Youth Movement in Egypt. Born in 1985, she is a graduate of Cairo University, where she received a degree in business administration. She posted a video urging people to go to Tahrir Square, with these words: "If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever says women shouldn't go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th. Whoever says it is not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him, 'You are the reason behind this, and you are a traitor, just like the president or any security cop who beats us in the streets.'" The video went viral and the protest was a success. Asmaa would later be arrested for calling the Egyptian military rulers "a council of dogs" but she would be released on bail. Sometime after that, she came to the United States to hold a teach-in at Liberty Plaza on behalf of Occupy Wall Street. When asked to explain, Asmaa would offer "Many of U.S. residents were in solidarity with us. So, we have to keep going all over the world, because another world is possible for all of us." Asmaa is not in keeping with the stereotype of Muslim women.⁹



⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_and_Egypt%E2%80%93Gaza_Strip_barrier

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asmaa_Mahfouz

The pundits were also wrong, to this point, about the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the events in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was started in Egypt in 1928. Its stated role is to teach that the Qur'an and the Sunnah (way of life) is the "sole reference point for ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community and state." Its slogan is simply "Islam is the solution." With over two million members world-wide, the Brotherhood or MB is the most powerful and largest Islamist organization in the world.

At various times, the MB has been political and for a long time maintained a paramilitary wing that carried out massacres, bombings and assassinations, including an Egyptian prime minister in 1948 and the murder of the organization's own founder. The MB opposed British rule in Egypt, and many of the killings in which the group was suspected of participating took place at this time. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Egyptian government banned the group and arrested known members. The MB is believed to have participated in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, which was led by Nasser, but after an assassination attempt on the Egyptian president, the group was banned again.

Despite being banned, the group has continued to grow and prosper and operates in almost every country in the Arab world. Since the 1970s, the group has disavowed violence and supported a peaceful agenda. In 2005, running as independents since the MB was still banned, the group won 88 seats in Parliament. The legal opposition won 14. In 2006, a campus demonstration by the MB's student wing, wearing uniforms and demonstrating martial arts, seemed to indicate a return to militancy. In 2007, the MB published a political platform that called for the creation of a board of Islamic clerics to supervise and limit the presidential terms. Then President Mubarak did not accept it. The Brotherhood also takes the position that, while embracing "equality between men and women in terms of their human dignity" cautions against "burdening women with duties against their nature or role in the family" such as becoming president.

The Brotherhood, surprisingly to some, has supported the Arab Spring and was instrumental in preventing the army from acting against the rebellion. Since 2011, the group is again legal, runs for office at the Freedom and Justice Party and is arguably the most powerful political group in Egypt. Some of the group's positions are surprisingly moderate. For example, the Brotherhood rejects the candidacy of women or Copts for the presidency, but not for parliamentary positions or cabinet seats. Regarding Israel, while it was long part of the Brotherhood's core philosophy that the 32 year old treaty with Israel must be dissolved. Now that they have acquired power, however, they are willing to support the treaty as long as "Israel shows real progress on improving the lot of the Palestinians."

On September 9th, 2011, hundreds of protestors leaving Tahrir Square turned and stormed the Israeli embassy in Giza. They demolished the wall that had been built to protect the embassy, scaled the walls and replaced the Israeli flag with an Egyptian and Palestinian flag and scattered documents obtained from upper floor offices all around the compound. The Israeli ambassador, Yitzhak Levinson, and his family fled to the airport and returned to Israel. Before leaving, Levinson had a last meeting with one of the ruling generals. Security forces dispersed the crowd with tear gas and rubber bullets.

The crowds in Egypt blamed Israel for their alliance with Mubarak. In Syria, the ruling party blames the revolution there on Israeli agitators.

Mubarak was in fact a strong ally of Israel. And the al-Assad administration has been at peace with Israel (with the exception of the occasional exchange of small arms fire) for decades. Concern about the loss of stability is only natural. Yet I would hate to think that Israel's security is dependent on tyrants. That not only seems unwise, it seems un-Jewish.

Israel's opposition to the wave of change known as the Arab Spring has been, in my opinion harmful to their political position. On March, 3, 2012, King Abdullah of Jordan was interviewed for a Turkish magazine:

"A few years back, President Clinton told me that the Israelis will only negotiate from a position of strength. And a position of strength is not where they are today, reportedly breaking ranks with the US on Iran, having damaged their relations with Turkey, and facing growing popular resentment and increasing isolation from their Arab neighbors, including the very moderate ones."

The King noted that Israel has a choice in the matter: "It can see, in a changing, region a compelling reason to seriously engage in meaningful peace negotiations to solve all final status issues and realize a two-state solution, or it can continue to dig its heels in on the false pretext that regional change precludes peace negotiations, which could entail serious implications for Israel and its future place in a post-Arab Spring region."

Nothing stays the same, change and adaptability is a necessity. The question is can you find the opportunity in the challenge. Because whether you want it to or not, the winds of change blow and after the long winter, the spring comes.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4197853,00.html>

Bibliography and references

Gelvin, James L. (2012-02-01). The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know Oxford University Press.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/01/13/tunisia-revolution-anniversary-idINDEE80C0IT20120113>

<http://www.indexmundi.com/commodities/?commodity=wheat&months=300>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Khaled_Mohamed_Saeed#We_are_all_Khaled_Said

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jazeera#Egypt

<http://www.propublica.org/blog/item/f.a.q.-on-u.s.-aid-to-egypt-where-does-the-money-go-who-decides-how-spent>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraordinary_rendition

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_and_Egypt%E2%80%93Gaza_Strip_barrier

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asmaa_Mahfouz

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4197853,00.html>