

Israel and the Arab Spring

Abstract

The present book addresses the mutual impacts between Israel and the Arab Spring from different perspectives. Chapter One looks into the concept of the Arab Spring and its stand on the Palestinian issue and Israel. Chapter Two examines the Israeli reactions. Chapter Three discusses its impact on the political scene in Israel. Chapter Four investigates the military establishment attitude. Chapter Five addresses the impacts of the uprisings on the socio-economic situation in the Hebrew State. The conclusion attempts to foresee the influence on the peace process.

The scope of the book is limited, in terms of time, to the period from the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2010 to the end of 2013. In spatial terms, on the other hand, it is limited to the Arab Spring region and Israel, ignoring regional and international factors. The objective is to uncover the Israeli stand on the rise of these revolutions, along with their influence on the peace process in the region. The Arab Spring is supposed to have given room for Israel to broaden its aggression on the Palestinians, making the Israeli society more radical in facing the potential threats publicized by the rightists.

In this book, scientific objectivity and comprehensive consideration are committed to, along with reviewing previous studies dealing with the issue wholly or partly - though most of them do not care of such principles.

The Arab Spring is defined as a movement bigger than public uprisings and less than revolutions, due to its oscillation - sometimes - and its limited scope to specific demands - in other times. Light is shed on a number of its characteristics to distinguish it from other public activities in order to understand its dimensions. Then, the motives are explored, on top of which are the political freeze and lack of democracy. A table shows for how many years some leaders and families had led the region by the rise of the Arab Spring.

Another motive is associated with socio-economic problems, the openness to the atmospheres of freedom and development in other countries and the failure of successive governments in managing foreign policy as well as countering aggressions, taming and exploitation.

There are four forms of movement within the Arab Spring. The first is peaceful demonstrations in squares. The second is the use of arms, as in Libya and Syria. The third is reform uprisings forcing the regimes to make concessions, as in Morocco and Jordan. The fourth is the incessant tensions since before this stage, accompanied by a high level of violence and social divisions, as in Iraq and the Sudan, which did not manage to change the status quo.

After that, the book moves to the Arab Spring stand on the Palestinian issue and Israel as well as the Arab attitude during this stage. It can be noticed that the Arab-Israeli conflict witnessed a state of calm, in contrast with previous periods, whereas the Israeli isolation grew at the regional and international levels. On the other hand, the freedom of expression rose in some countries in showing the wrath and condemnation of the Israeli practices. In other words, while it did not lead the scene, the issue was not absent. Opinion polls indicated that an overwhelming majority of the Arabs still considered Israel and the US the greatest threats to the pan-Arab security and Palestine an Arab matter. While demanded to leave, the Arab rulers were repeatedly accused of cooperation with the Hebrew State.

In the context of the results, the Arab regimes, though managed to get away at the time, will have later to meet the desires of the public more than any time before. However, the fiasco in achieving democratic change, the risk of moving to a failure state phase and the growing extremism due to frustration among the youth and lack of change prospects represent the serious problems.

At the regional level, the role of the Arab League and states saw a decline in favour of other regional powers, like Turkey and Iran. On the other hand, some small and stable Arab countries had the chance to lead the scene on behalf of the Arabs. Thus, some issues - such as that of Palestine - witnessed confusion, attributed to the absence of the roles of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, which are more significant and closer to the conflict. At the international level, the above decline gave way to global powers to boost their interests in the region and, perhaps, re-divide its map. The Americans, in particular, did not show any interest in solving these problems which they partly created.

Chapter Two starts with the Israeli and Western failure to anticipate the rise of Arab uprisings, in spite of the dozens of centres specialized in studying the developments and future of the region. Even after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, some of them underestimated the public movement which began in several countries, while others managed to understand it well in a bid to address it at the very least.

However, along with the unexpected and dramatic fall of some regimes, alarm bells were rung in Tel Aviv. On the one hand, it was seen as the Arabs' restoration of the capability to exert pressure on decision-makers. On the other hand, it could be a dark tunnel of regional chaos, which may give the chance to groups or individuals to threaten Israel's security, other than the potential rise of Islamist political powers aiming at overturning the entire game in the whole region.

Among the concerns of the Israelis highlighted by the book is the loss of its "sole democracy" feature in the Middle East, which they always used when addressing the West, as well as the transfer of the uprising to

its Arab towns and villages, let alone the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

After that, Israel's attitude is discussed with regard to the shift in the Arab Spring countries' regimes, whose presence - according to the book - was comfortable to the Hebrew State. For instance, it could not help hiding its fear of the Muslim Brotherhood's rise upon the uprising against Husni Mubarak's regime of Egypt and even of the coup against Mursi later on June 30, 2013.

However, there were different stands on the Syrian revolution. Some Israelis called for supporting it in a bid to have better neighbours, according to the book. Others preferred Assad to guarantee the stability of the region and avoid what could be worse. That would fail the Arab Spring by creating a bloody example of the change attempts ending in the collapse and division of the country. Tel Aviv had also calculations which took Tehran and Ankara into consideration.

Furthermore, Israel viewed the changes in the rest of the Arab states, in general, heading to sharp polarization on ideological, sectarian and racial bases, or to the control of the army at the expense of democracy, as in Egypt.

Chapter Three follows the impact of the Arab Spring on the political scene in Israel. A state of concern and confusion enhanced division, polarization and extremism among political powers.

During the 2013 Israeli elections, it was noticed that foreign policy was absent from the programmes of most parties, in spite of the tensions all over the region. They focused on economic pledges and social welfare. The division made it difficult to form a homogenous government, leading to general instability in the Israeli political scene.

Chapter Four sheds light on the Israeli military establishment's attitude to the Arab Spring. It was concerned of some Arab countries' cancelation of the mutual peace agreements, or at least calling for amendments. It differentiated between Arab uprisings, and paid much attention to that of Egypt. It was also worried of Israel's enemies' possession of unconventional military equipment, mainly in Syria and Libya. It feared the possibility of some parties' exploitation of the state of chaos and insecurity by setting camps and forming weapons smuggling lines, as in Lebanon and Sina'i. Finally, it was worried that the map of interests as well as the rules of the regional and international game would change in a negative or rather threatening manner to the very existence of Israel.

The book lists the steps taken by the Israeli Army to face the potential threats of the Arab Spring. It demanded increasing its budget, extending the reserves' period and revising a number of strategies. It also started developing the techniques of military intelligence, in addition to establishing new units. Furthermore, it began to pay further attention to its activities on the cyberspace, due to the significant role played by social

networks in mobilizing the Arab citizens.

In terms of the socio-economic impacts of the Arab Spring on Israel, the expenditure on social welfare went down in favour of military and security fields. Religious extremism, psychological stress and lack of comfort increased in the society. Moreover, high rates were witnessed of counter-migration and capitals out of Israel, leading some Israelis to demand normalization with the Arab milieu. The protests infection moved to Tel Aviv, calling for better standards of living as well as eliminating casteism, poverty and social dilemmas.

Chapter Five looks into the impact of the Arab Spring on the peace process. Prior to this stage, Israel had been keen on consolidating its hegemony, rejecting any concessions and enhancing the normalization of ties with the Arab regimes.

In strategic terms, on the one hand, the chaos of the region constituted an opportunity for Israel to boost its position in the Middle East. On the other hand, there became less chances for a conventional war between Israel and the Arabs in the near future. Iran's role declined after the collapse of its ally regime in Syria. Turkey was troubled by supporting the stumbling Arab Spring, which would draw its attention from countering the Israeli project.

In conclusion, there are three basic Israeli approaches in anticipating the future of the Arab Spring. The first is pessimistic, viewing the success of the democratic shift or the rise of the Islamists a threat to the peace with the Hebrew State, thus securing the Israeli interests. The second is optimistic, seeing the Palestinian issue not a priority for the uprisings but a real chance to normalize the presence of Israel in its milieu. That would take place along with democratic shifts, efforts for social development and further openness to the international community in the Arab countries. The third called for keeping silence while watching the scene, so that no mistakes would be made in reading the developments and, then, lead Israel to genuine dangers.