City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Aran, A. (2012). Israel and the Arab Uprisings: A Provisional Analsysis. RUSI Journal, 157(5), pp. 56-61. doi: 10.1080/03071847.2012.733113

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/6710/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2012.733113

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Israel and the Arab Uprisings: A Provisional Analysis

The Arab uprisings engulfing the Middle East since January 2011 have already made a significant mark. The former rulers of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen have been ousted, Syria has been plunged into bloody civil war, whilst Bahrain has witnessed unprecedented clashes between the government and opposition groups. However, if history tells us anything it is that it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the longer term effects of the Arab uprisings in the Middle East. The future trajectory of Egypt under the rule of President Morsi is far from clear. Whether or not the Assad regime will fall is uncertain. And will the Arab monarchies face the popular challenges endured by Arab republics? Notwithstanding these uncertainties, in my view, a *provisional* analysis, following almost two years of the Arab uprisings, is warranted - not least to try better to understand the significance of contemporary events and what might be the response from the international community and individual countries in the region. One of these countries is Israel, which, despite the significant implications of the Arab uprisings for its foreign and security policies, has been uncharacteristically quiet amid these momentous events. What follows is an attempt to offer a preliminary assessment of the significance and implications of the Arab uprisings for Israeli foreign policy and security.

Israel's security environment amid the Arab uprisings

When assessing the implications of the Arab uprisings for Israel's security environment it is useful to make a distinction between basic security and day-to-day security in Israel. The former refers to the possibility of a full scale attack by a hostile state or coalition of states that might imperil Israel's existence. The latter refers to 'provocations, hostile acts along the brooders, and minor incursions into Israel by civilians and irregular forces'.[1] At the time of writing the most significant impacts on Israeli basic security emanate not from the Arab uprisings, but from the potential rise of Iran as a nuclear power. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has voiced its concerns about 'undisclosed nuclear related activities involving military

[1] On the terms 'basic security' and 'day-to-day security' see Avi Shlaim, The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 81.

related organizations' in Iran's nuclear programme.[2] The unease expressed by the IAEA prompted the US (which has been imposing sanctions on Iran since 1979) and the European Union (EU) to impose a ban on the import of Iranian crude oil and to freeze the assets of Iran's central bank.[3] These measures, which constitute broader and stricter sanctions than in the past, suggest that the US and the EU have aligned with the assessment that Iran's nuclear programme has reached threatening military dimensions.

The response of Israel and the international community to the development of Iran's nuclear programme is the key factor currently shaping Israel's basic security. At the time of writing it is difficult to say how Israel eventually will respond to the Iranian challenge; views in Israeli foreign policy-making circles vary significantly. At one end extreme are Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defence Minister Barak, who have argued consistently that 'all options to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons should remain on the table'.[4] However, their opinion is opposed by the former heads of Mossad and the Israeli Internal Security Services, who argue that Israel should not go it alone, and by Israeli President, Shimon Peres, who contends that Israel should not attack Iran without the approval and support of the US.[5]

Another trend that affects Israel's basic security is the relative decline in the global power of the US. Following the end of the Cold War the US emerged as the sole world superpower. Its ability to assemble an international coalition to oust Iraqi forces following their invasion of Kuwait strongly reflected the unipolar moment enjoyed by the US. By dint of its being Israel's closest ally, the undisputed position of the US

[2] For a recent report see 'Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *International Atomic Energy Agency,* May 2012, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2012/gov2012-23.pdf., accessed 29 August, 2012.

[3] On US sanctions http://www.state.gov/e/eb/esc/iransanctions/index.htm On EU sanctions see http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2012/230112_iran_en.htm, both links accessed 3 September 2012.

[4] Harriet Sherwood, 'Ehud Barak restates case for military strike on Iran's nuclear programme', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/30/ehud-barak-iran-nuclear-programme. See also more recently, 'Netanyahu, Barak mulling fall strike on Iran', Ynet, 8 August 2012, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4266973,00.html, both links accessed 7 September 2012.

[5] See, Hugh Sykes, 'War talk fails to dampen spirits in Tel-Aviv, *BBC*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19411536, accessed 7 September 2012.

also had an empowering effect on Israel, particularly given the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, during the Cold War, had backed a number of Israel's foes. However, in light of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the continuing global financial crisis, US global power seems in decline. This is evidenced strongly in the relatively minor role of the US since the Arab uprisings erupted.

Hence, the coincidence of decline in US power (even if temporary), and the rise of Iran as a potential nuclear power, are the key trends affecting current Israeli basic security. In contrast, the aftermath of the Arab uprisings seems not to be threatening Israeli basic security, particularly since repeated statements from the recently elected Egyptian President, Mohammed Morsi, that Egypt will respect its international agreements, including the Camp David peace agreement with Israel.[6] These would seem not to be empty declarations since Egypt's economic solvency is largely dependent on continued peace with Israel. The essential income from tourism, levies from the Suez canal, $1.3 billion annual military aid from the US, loans from organizations dominated by the US (such as the International Monetary Fund) would all be severely interrupted, should Egypt revoke the Camp David agreements or engage in conflict with Israel. Given this compelling economic vested interest in maintaining the peace agreement with Israel, it is unlikely that, in the short term, Egypt would emerge as a threat to Israel's basic security by engaging in conflict.

Similarly, there has been unease that the new Egyptian administration under President Morsi will adopt what he (Morsi) has referred to as a more 'balanced' foreign policy, which would entail becoming a closer ally of Iran.[7] However, so far these concerns have not materialized. Although Morsi is the first Egyptian President in three decades to visit Iran - to attend the summit of non-alignment countries - his conference speech highlighted some of the disagreements between the two

[6] Egyptian President Morsi reassures Israel that the peace treaty is safe, *Haaretz*, 28 August 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/egyptian-president-morsi-reassures-israel-that-peace-treaty-is-safe-1.461123, accessed 1 September 2012.
[7] See Morsi interview to Reuters, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/08/27/uk-egypt-president-idUKBRE87Q18Y20120827, accessed 7 September, 2012.

countries. For example, whilst Iran supports the current regime in Syria, President Morsi depicted Assad's administration as 'an oppressive regime which has lost legitimacy', continuing that, 'supporting the Syrian uprising, was not only an ethical duty but also a political and strategic necessity'. Morsi also did not offer support for Iran's nuclear programme, but rather restated the traditional Egyptian position that the Middle East should be a nuclear-free zone.[8]

However, this does not mean that the Arab uprisings are having no effect on Israeli security. In particular, the change of guard in Egypt has significant implications for Israel's *day-to-day security*. To understand the nature of this shift it is worth reflecting briefly on the relations forged by the Mubarak regime prior to its ousting, and by Israeli governments - especially since 2003-4. Elucidating the nature of past relations will help ascertain the significance of the change of guard in Egypt and its impact on Israeli day-to-day security.

In some respects the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement was always a 'cold peace'. For example, in terms of 'normalization' of the relations between the two countries, the peace agreement never 'warmed up'. Also, Israel from time to time accused Egypt of 'not doing enough' to stop weapons being smuggled by Hamas through the networks of tunnels running beneath the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, there was a noticeable rise in the level of security and foreign policy cooperation between Israel and Egypt during the last six or seven years of the Mubarak regime. For instance, Israel tightly coordinated its 2005 unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip with the Egyptians,[9] and during the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war, Egypt expressed its support for Israel not Hezbollah.[10] Likewise, the cooperation between Israel and Egypt against Hezbollah was manifested when, in 2008, a Hezbollah ring, which supposedly tried to overthrow President Mubarak, was

[8] For quotes see 'Morsi criticises Syria at Tehran meeting, *Al-Jazeera,* http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/08/20128308579560767.html, accessed 7 September 2012.
[9] See memoirs of former Israeli Chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon, *The Longer Shorter Way* (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Achronot, 2008), p. 172.
[10] Egypt: Hezbollah Provoked War, Al-Jazeera, http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2006/10/20084109292161291.html, accessed 30 August, 2012.

exposed by the Egyptian security services.[11] Most remarkable, however, has been Egyptian and Israeli cooperation in imposing the siege on the Gaza Strip, particularly after Hamas took control of the Strip militarily in July 2007. Even during Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip during operation Cast Lead (December-January 2008-2009), Egypt refrained from lifting the siege.[12]

The ousting of President Mubarak, his close advisors, and the recent dismissal of the top guard of the Egyptian military, which was intrinsic to the Israeli-Egyptian political and security cooperation in the past, suggests that the foreign policy-making circle in Egypt is undergoing change. Even if the new policy-makers adhere to the peace agreement, it is unlikely that the Israeli government can maintain the type of cooperation it had with Egypt during the last years of the Mubarak regime. Crucially, Israel would find it difficult to count on (tacit) Egyptian support of its policy towards Hamas, which is an off-shoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. It is more likely that the current Egyptian regime's policy and actions towards the Palestinians will reflect more strongly than the Mubarak regime the deep antagonism expressed by the Egyptian public towards Israel and its policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians. Under these circumstances, the foreign policy options available to Israel to respond to the political and military challenge posed by Hamas might become more limited. For example, it is unlikely that Israel could launch an onslaught similar to operation Cast Lead and expect the current Egyptian regime to remain on the sidelines or even lend tacit support to Israel.

The change of guard in Egypt, however, does not only affect the ability of Israel to respond to the challenges posed to its day-to-day security from the Gaza Strip, which is under the control of Hamas. Israeli-Egyptian relations in the post Mubarak era have a direct bearing also on the security threats emanating from the Sinai Peninsula such as weapons smuggling, mortar attacks, the launch of Grad missiles,

[11] See Zvi Barel, 'Another Front between Iran and Egypt, Haaretz, 10 April, 2009.
[12] See Abigail Hauslohner, In the Siege of Gaza, Egypt Walks a Delicate Line, *Time*, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1953015,00.html, accessed 7 September 2007.

and cross border terrorist attacks by armed groups.[13] As shown by recent attacks launched from Sinai, Israel's ability to react is conditioned by the complex relations between Israel and Egypt in the post Mubarak era.

The rise of political Islam: Challenge or opportunity?

The aftermath of the Arab uprisings is important not only in terms of the implications for Israeli day-to-day security but also for its crystallization of the rise of political Islamists to achieve positions of power in a number of countries in the Arab Middle East. This trend is most visible in Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists won a majority in the Egyptian Parliament[14] and Mohammed Morsi, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, won the Presidential elections. The rise of political Islamists to power in Egypt is likely to reinforce the positions held by political Islamists in Tunisia, and Palestine (since 2006), and provide a tail wind for Islamists vying for positions of power elsewhere, e.g. in Syria.

Conventional wisdom in Israel since the end of the Cold War is that the rise of political Islamic groups to positions of power is detrimental to Israeli security and foreign policy.[15] It is against this backdrop that Prime Minister Netanyahu, in a public speech to the Israeli Parliament, commented that the Arab Spring is an 'Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli and anti-democratic wave.'[16] The fusion of politics and religion, it is reasoned, has produced an ideological standpoint that indisposes political Islamists to enter into a political dialogue with Israel, let alone end the Arab-

[13] See, e.g., cross border attack on 18 August 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/18/israeli-bus-attacked-border-egypt and thwarted attempt to attack Israeli targets on 5 August 2012, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/IDF_thwarts_terror_infiltration_Sinai_5-Aug-2012.htm?WBCMODE=PresentationUnpHidden+TreasuresAliyah, both links accessed 30 August 2012.

[14] See, 'Egyptian Islamist parties win elections to Parliament', BBC, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16665748, accessed August 30, 2012.

[15] Interestingly, during the Cold War Israel supported Islamic elements in the hope of counterbalancing the power of the PLO. This practice stopped in the early 1980s when it became clear that political Islamists were joining the Palestinian 'armed struggle', which at the time was still spearheaded by secular groups.

[16] Barak Ravid, 'Arab Spring pushing the MidEast backward not forward, *Haaretz*, 24 November 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/news/netanyahu-arab-spring-pushing-mideast-backward-not-forward-1.397353, accessed 7 September 2012. Since giving the speech the Prime Minister has not retracted his remarks.

Israeli conflict, on a basis of a land-for-peace compromise. In this context, Israeli policy-makers usually refer to the Hamas covenant, which, besides calling for Israel's destruction, forbids 'Palestine's' use as collateral in the context of a peace deal:

> The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up. Neither a single Arab country nor all Arab countries, neither any king or president, nor all the kings and presidents, neither any organization nor all of them, be they Palestinian or Arab, possess the right to do that. Palestine is an Islamic Waqf land consecrated for Moslem generations until Judgement Day.[17]

In addition to being staunch political rivals political Islamic groups have proven formidable military opponents. The resistance campaign of Hezbollah resulted in Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and, a few years later, during the 2006 Second Lebanon War, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) was unable to defeat Hezbollah. Hamas has also emerged as a tough adversary, using kidnappings, suicide bombings and mortar and rocket attacks, in its confrontations with Israel. The record of political Islamic non-state actors raises the concern that should the Arab uprisings produce *states* that were controlled by political Islamists, movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah would receive greater support. Worse still from an Israeli perspective, an anti-Israeli pan-Islamic coalition of states could emerge. Such a scenario would certainly pose a grave political and military challenge to Israel.

However, the aftermath of the Arab uprisings suggest that this troubling scenario is not a foregone conclusion. In fact, the rise of political Islamists to power might be a unique opportunity. In this context, the key state would be Egypt. If Israel and Egypt were to succeed in maintaining the peace agreement, it would provide to the Camp David accords a stamp of legitimacy that would have been impossible under the dictatorial rule of Hosni Mubarak. Consequently, it would be politically more feasible than in the past for a movement such as Hamas, should it wish to do so, to change its current stance of opposing the Quartet's demands – to renounce violence, recognize Israel, and respect previously signed agreements between Israel and the

[17] Hamas Covenant, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp, accessed 31 August, 2012.

Palestinian Authority. Likewise, maintaining the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement would demonstrate to Israelis that it is possible to conduct relationships based on peaceful co-existence with political Islamists. From this vantage point, safeguarding the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement would be of paramount importance not only for improving Israeli day-to-day security and avoiding confrontation with Egypt but also for creating the conditions for fruitful political dialogue between Israel and the new elites that have risen to power since the onset of the Arab uprisings.

The uncertainty effect

A historical process of the magnitude of the Arab uprisings inevitably involves a huge degree of uncertainty. Judged by the previous wave of Arab uprisings that began with the 1952 Egyptian revolution, it could take more than a decade for the political and military trends prompted by the event to become clear. For instance, in 1956 the then Egyptian President, Gammal Abdel Nasser, and the notion of pan-Arabism, emerged politically victorious following the ousting of the British from Egypt after the Suez War. However, just over ten years later the Dream Palace of the Arabs, to paraphrase Fouad Ajami, came tumbling down following Israel's victory in the 1967 War.

Two years into the current Arab uprisings similar uncertainty prevails. From an Israeli point of view some uncertainties loom larger than others. One is over the situation in Syria, which under the Assads has been Iran's key Arab ally, supported Hezbollah and Hamas and, following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, continued to be the key Arab promoter of the notion of a pan-Arab struggle against Israel, albeit with very limited success. Thus, the outcome of the current civil war in Syria will have significant implications for Israeli foreign policy and security: from the ability to control the arsenal of Syria's Weapons of Mass Destruction, through the future prospects of the alliance with Iran (which is supporting the Assad regime), to a potential peace agreement between Israel and a post-conflict Syria. Another unknown is Jordan, which is significant for Israeli foreign policy and security in a number of ways. To begin with, Israel's longest territorial border is with Jordan. In

addition, since the establishment of the State of Israel it has engaged in covert political and security cooperation with Jordan, which, after Egypt, was the second Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel in 1994. The overt and covert cooperation between Israel and Jordan emanated from the common perception among the Israelis and the Hashemite Monarchy that rules Jordan, of the Palestinians being a potential threat.[18] At the time of writing Jordan has not experienced the kind of uprisings that neighbouring Arab republics have witnessed. However, does this mean that Jordan and the ruling Hashemite Monarchy are immune from a similar fate?

The profound uncertainties entailed by the Arab uprisings have resulted in the Israeli government's adopting a 'wait and see' policy. In an important speech to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, Prime Minister Netanyahu explained the logic behind this position:

> Israel is facing a period of instability and uncertainty in the region. This is certainly not the time to listen to those who say follow your heart … I remember many of you urged me to seize the opportunity to make hasty concessions, to rush to an agreement.
>
> We can't know who will end up with any piece of territory we give up. Reality is changing all the time, and if you don't see it, your head is buried in the sand.[19]

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which was stalled with the rise of Binyamin Netanyahu to power in May 2009, has now come to a complete halt as a result of the 'wait and see policy'. Ostensibly, this stance might seem prudent. However, deeper reflection suggests it is extremely risky. To understand the risks it is useful to reflect on the September 1993 Israeli decision to officially launch the Oslo Process following several months of behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

---

[18] For a documented history of these relationships see Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008).

[19] Excerpts from Harriet Sherwood, 'Binyamin Netanyahu attacks the Arab Uprisings', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/24/israel-netanyahu-attacks-arab-spring, accessed September 7 2012.

The initiation of Oslo involved recognizing the PLO, and placing political dialogue with the organization at the centre of Israeli policy towards it. Thus, it marked a departure from Israel's previous foreign policy stance of non-recognition, and attempts to defeat the PLO - militarily and politically. The Israeli decision to pursue this dramatic foreign policy shift was informed by the perceptions of the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, that Israel was in an unprecedentedly strong strategic position.[20] The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had backed several of Israel's foes, such as Syria and to a lesser extent the PLO, and the emergence of the US, Israel's closest ally, as the world's super power. The expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait by a US-led coalition in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, and the ensuing imposition of dual containment on Iran and Iraq, also significantly diminished the possibility of an invasion of Israel from the east, by a coalition of Arab armies. The positive effects of these international and regional trends, argued Rabin and Peres, were compounded by Israel's increasing state capacity. The successful process of economic restructuring in the mid 1980s, followed by an influx of Jews emigrating from the former USSR, buttressed the political, economic, social and military foundations of Israeli power.

However, Rabin and Peres pointed to three counter-trends which were rendering Israel's strategic position rather tenuous. One was the emergence of political Islam as the most powerful stream in Arab politics, which was giving rise to political elites less disposed than their Arab secular counterpart to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict through political dialogue. Another was the prospect of the Middle East entering a nuclear race, ending the Israeli Defence Force's military supremacy in the region and potentially posing an existential threat to Israel—a country small enough to be wiped out by one nuclear device. The third trend was the potential long-term weakening of Israeli state capacity due to the increasingly adverse demographic imbalance

[20] Rabin's views on these matters are summarized succinctly by Efraim Inbar, *Rabin and Israel's National Security* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1999), pp. 159-164. See also, David Makovski, *Making Peace with the PLO* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). For Peres's ideas see Shimon Shimon, *The New Middle East: A Framework and Processes Towards an Era of Peace* (Bnei-Brak: Steimatzky, 1993) (Hebrew edition).

between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Were the Israeli occupation to remain in place, Palestinians eventually would outnumber Israeli Jews, ending the ability of Israel to exist as a Jewish *and* a democratic state. Rabin and Peres believed that the way to deal with these multiple challenges effectively was to end the Arab-Israeli conflict through a peace settlement with the PLO. The alternative would mean dealing with conflict with the Arabs and a potentially nuclear Middle East, from a weakened position.

The immediate aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the advances in Iran's nuclear programme, and the waning (even if temporary) of US power seem to be vindication of Rabin's and Peres's predictions. Recent data[21] obtained by leading experts suggest that Rabin and Peres were also correct in their assessment of the negative implications of the demographic trends between Israeli Jews and Palestinians for the ability to maintain Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state. Currently, Israeli Jews constitute a minority in the area between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, settlement expansions, which are a key obstacle to an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, increased in 2011, further weakening the already tenuous prospects of a two-state solution.[22] Thus, whilst the wait and see policy might appear prudent in the short term, it runs the risk in the long run of exacerbating the existing threats to Israel's security environment and putting it in a weaker position to deal with future challenges.[23]

[21] The figures include the Gaza Strip, which was evacuated by Israel in 2005, foreign workers, illegal immigrants, and non-Halachically Jewish immigrants to Israel. See interview with Professor Sergio Dellla Pergola, 'Jews now a minority between the river and the sea, http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=196877, Arnon Sopher, Jewish population in Israel declining, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/jewish-population-in-israel-is-declining-1.317042, both links accessed 29 August 2012.

[22] For an updated report see 'Torpedoing the two state solution: Summary of 2011 in the Settlements', *Peace Now*, http://peacenow.org.il/eng/2011Summary, accessed 7 September 2012.

[23] These figures include the Gaza Strip, which was evacuated by Israel in 2005, foreign workers, illegal immigrants, and non-Halachically Jewish immigrants to Israel. See interview with Professor Sergio Dellla Pergola, 'Jews now a minority between the river and the sea, http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=196877, Arnon Sopher, Jewish population in Israel declining, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/jewish-population-in-israel-is-declining-1.317042, both links accessed 29 August 2012.

Conclusion

The Arab uprisings are part of a dramatic historical process that is still in motion. However, their impact on Israel is linked to broader trends in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War, e.g. the waning (if temporary) of US power, the rise of political Islam, the potential nuclearization of the Middle East, demographic trends affecting the balance between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians in the area once considered Mandatory Palestine. In this context, the repercussions of the Arab uprisings seem to be having two clear effects. One concerns the ability of Israel to respond to challenges to its day-to-day security, which seems to have been reduced by the change of guard in Egypt since the ousting of President Mubarak. Even if the current Egyptian administration keeps intact the Camp David agreement, Israel cannot count on the same level of political and security cooperation with Egypt as in the last years of the Mubarak regime.

The second effect is the rise to power of political Islamists, which for Israel poses a challenge and an opportunity. Should Israel and political Islamists stick to their current political positions and continue their armed conflict, this would impact negatively on the ability of both sides to achieve peace. However, were Israel and Egypt in particular to succeed in maintaining the peace agreement between them, this might make it more feasible for Israel and other political Islamists (e.g. Hamas) to engage in dialogue. However, for this to happen the Israeli government would have to abandon its 'wait and see' policy adopted amid the profound uncertainties generated by the Arab uprisings, e.g. in Syria and Jordan. This would entail a risk but also provide an opportunity to break the mould with Israel's erstwhile enemies and, hence, make a significant contribution to the shaping of a peaceful international order in the Middle East affording freedom, justice and dignity to Israelis and Palestinians alike.