

OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 28: 25 January 2013

**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

1. **Herb Keinon** **US watchdog ranks Israel as the region's only "free state".**
Jerusalem Post, 21 January 2013

The annual Freedom House report says that while in recent years controversies have surrounded proposed laws threatening Israeli freedom of expression, in most cases they have been quashed by government, the Knesset or the Supreme Court. Both the West Bank and Gaza are classified as "not free", while Saudi Arabia, Syria and Sudan fall into the category of the "worst of the worst."

2. **Efraim Inbar,** **Abbas needs to be replaced**
Jerusalem Post, 16 January 2013

While promoting non-violence, Abbas is inciting to violence, in the apparent hope that a third intifada will bring better results.

3. **Egypt's climate of intimidation**
The Washington Post, 14 January 2013

The most important measure of Egypt's Islamist government will not be how it manages the economy or even whether it maintains friendly relations with the United States and Israel; it will be whether it preserves the democratic norms that allowed its own rise to power.

4. **Will Fulton,** **Iran's IRGC shows its hand in Syria**
AEI Iran Tracker, 14 January 2013

The deep involvement of the IRGC-GF in Syria is noteworthy. Most Iranian covert military and terrorist operations abroad are conducted by the IRGC Quds Force commanded by Major General Qassem Suleimani. The Quds Force can be supplemented even in operations beyond Iran's borders by elements of regular IRGC military units. That fact is important when we consider how much force Iran can potentially put into such clandestine military operations abroad.

5. **Col. (ret) Dr Jacques Neriah,** **Two years of the Arab Spring –
Reflections about Democracy in the Arab World**
JCPA, 13 January 2013

Two years after the outburst of what was naively called the “Arab Spring” by romanticists and wishful thinkers who thought the Arab world was about to witness a new era of liberty and democracy, one can only be disappointed by the realities on the ground. The Arab world is more divided than ever. Most of the regimes that witnessed this blossoming “spring” have imploded or are on the verge of implosion

6. Yoaz Hendel Foolish annexation idea
YNet News, 5 January 2013

The idea of annexing the territories has been living among us for 45 years. No rightist government has ever implemented it, and no leftist government has ever rejected it.

7. The Al-Jazeera Liberals
Jonathan Tobin, Commentary Magazine, 4 January 2013

Are those who have expressed outrage about the spectacle of a former US vice-president becoming not merely a business partner but an advocate for a network well known for its anti-American and anti-Israel bias either narrow-minded or somehow prejudiced against Arabs and Muslims?

8. Yoram Ettinger Jewish-Arab demography defies conventional wisdom
Israel Hayom, 19 October 2013

The suggestion that Jews are doomed to become a minority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean is either dramatically mistaken or outrageously misleading

US watchdog ranks Israel as the region’s only “free state”

Herb Keinson, Jerusalem Post, 21 January 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=300287>

Israel is the Middle East’s only “free” state, the US-based Freedom House wrote in its annual report last week, a ranking in stark contrast to claims by the country’s critics – both domestic and international – who argue that the Jewish state’s democratic values are steadily eroding “Israel remains the region’s only free country,” read the report, called Freedom in the World 2013, released just days before Israel goes to the polls.

“In recent years, controversies have surrounded proposed laws that threatened freedom of expression and the rights of civil society organizations,” the report read.

“In most cases, however, these measures have either been quashed by the government or parliament, or struck down by the Supreme Court. Israeli politics have also been roiled by an escalating controversy over the role of ultra-Orthodox Jews and their positions on issues such as military service and gender equality.”

Israel's ranking is completely dissimilar to that given the West Bank and Gaza – one under Palestinian Authority control and the other under Hamas rule – which are both classified as “not free.”

Likewise, the report found, Israel is surrounded by countries where freedom is not exactly the watchword.

The report, which ranks the world's countries by political rights and civil liberties, characterized Jordan and Syria as “not free,” and Egypt and Lebanon as “partly free.”

Of the “worst of the worst” countries, the nine countries given the absolute worst ratings in the world, two were in the region: Saudi Arabia and Syria. Sudan was also rated in the bottom nine.

Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen all also received the “not free” ranking, and Tunisia, Kuwait, Libya and Morocco were defined as “partly free.”

Interestingly, while Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan consistently slams Israel for alleged human rights violations, his country earned only a “partly free” ranking from Freedom House.

According to the report, during his early years in power Erdogan pushed through important reforms that enshrined civilian rule, enhanced fairness at the polls, and made halting steps toward greater minority rights.

“More recently, however, his government has jailed hundreds of journalists, academics, opposition party officials, and military officers in a series of prosecutions aimed at alleged conspiracies against the state and Kurdish organizations,” the report read.

“Turkey currently leads the world in the number of journalists behind bars, and democracy advocates are expressing deep concern for the state of press freedom and the rule of law,” the report read.

According to the report, “the past year has provided more evidence that Middle Eastern countries long subject to the dictator's heel are quickly developing resilient and informed civil societies willing to push back against attempts to curb freedom of expression and thought, distort the electoral process, or concentrate power in the hands of military or religious authorities.

“In this context, factions or governments that seek to reduce freedom could find it increasingly difficult to do so.”

At the same time, “while the Middle East experienced some of the most significant improvements, it also registered major declines, with a list of worsening countries that includes Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates.”

In the Freedom House ratings, a “free” country is one where there is open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media.

A “partly free” country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties, and a “not free” country is one where basic political rights are absent and civil liberties widely and systematically denied.

Abbas needs to be replaced

Efraim Inbar, Jerusalem Post, 16 January 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=299695>

A little-noticed Reuters item published January 10 reported that Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, has rejected a conditional Israeli offer to let Palestinian refugees in war-torn Syria resettle in the West Bank and Gaza, because it would compromise their "right of return" to homes in Israel lost during the 1948 War.

According to this report, Israel agreed to allow refugees' descendants to resettle in Gaza and the West Bank on the condition they sign a statement waiving the right of return to Israel. Abbas rejected this condition and reportedly said: "It's better they die in Syria than give up their right of return."

This is nothing new; in the past, Palestinians have rejected attempts to alleviate the conditions of their refugees by resettling. They kept the refugees, and millions of their descendants, as a political card. Moreover, the refugees constitute an important element in their self-propagated image of victimhood and martyrdom.

Instead of helping his people in distress, Abbas, in the best Palestinian tradition, prefers to cling to the right of return – a demand that no Israeli government is ever going to accept. Moreover, most of the international community rejects this Palestinian demand, understanding that there is broad consensus in Israel against a mass influx of Palestinians that could destroy its Jewish character.

The Palestinians just missed another opportunity to demonstrate that they can behave in a constructive fashion and be of help to its people. Instead of pragmatic politics we see once again Palestinian adherence to radical goals that continues Palestinian suffering and that produces obstacles to peace.

ANOTHER RECENT display of such typical Palestinian preference was provided by Abbas, the "moderate," when he addressed his countrymen on January 4. He avoided mentioning the land-for-peace formula, or the establishment of a Palestinian state beside Israel that could bring an end to the conflict and the suffering of his people.

He did not prepare his people for the need to make concessions for the sake of peace. Instead, Abbas stressed the perennial need to adhere to the path of struggle in order to realize "the dream of return" of the Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

The only explanation for this behavior is that the Palestinian national movement is very serious about the right of return, despite the attempts by pundits to propose that goodwill and Israeli territorial concessions can bring about a Palestinian flexibility on this issue. Dismissing Palestinian behavior and rhetoric, or belittling its importance in regard to the refugees amounts to putting your head in the sand. Unfortunately, the DNA of the Palestinian national movement contains the unrealistic demand for the right of return. Genetic engineering might be possible to induce some pragmatism, but it may take generations.

People do not give up easily upon their dreams.

THIS IS why Abbas met Khaled Mashaal, the Hamas leader, in Cairo on January 10. Despite their fundamental ideological differences, they share the same dream – the destruction of the Jewish state. They may find a way to cooperate in an attempt to attain this objective, even if this could doom prospects for Palestinian statehood.

This explains why Abbas insists on not acknowledging that Israel is a Jewish state and on denying any links of the Jews to their ancestral homeland.

Abbas also takes measures to encourage armed struggle against Israel, even if they undermine the state-building efforts of the PA. He condoned at the end of December 2012 several parades of armed members of the Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the militia of Fatah, in honor of the anniversary of the founding of the Fatah movement.

Tolerant attitudes toward Palestinian terrorists run counter to the main litmus test of a state – the monopoly over the use of force. Turning a blind eye to the reemergence of armed groups in Palestinian society erodes the main achievement of the PA in recent years – the restoration of law and order following the formal dismantlement of militias.

The Palestinian armed groups may be tempted to engage in violent clashes with Israel that will turn out to be disastrous for the Palestinian selfdetermination and peaceful existence.

While promoting non-violence, Abbas is inciting to violence, in the apparent hope that a third intifada will bring better results than the second.

Abbas promised negotiations and moderation after the upgrading of the PLO to observer state status by the UN General Assembly in November 2012.

Instead, we get inflammatory rhetoric and irresponsible, self-defeating policies.

The Palestinians, like much of the Arab world, continue to be in urgent need of better political leadership to extricate them from pathological selfdestructive behavior.

Egypt's climate of intimidation

Editorial, The Washington Post, 14 January 2013

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/egypts-climate-of-intimidation/2013/01/13/3221daa4-5b6b-11e2-9fa9-5fbdc9530eb9_story.html

The most important measure of Egypt's Islamist government will not be how it manages the economy or even whether it maintains friendly relations with the United States and Israel; it will be whether it preserves the democratic norms that allowed its own rise to power. If Egyptians are able to freely criticize the government's performance and can eventually vote it out of office if they are dissatisfied, the inevitable mistakes and occasional abuses of President Mohamed Morsi will be correctable.

Mr. Morsi and his Freedom and Justice party, backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, insist that they are committed to the democratic system. They say that they will protect press freedom and allow all opposition parties to operate freely. After only a few months in office, however, there are disturbing signs that they may not stick to those promises.

Foremost among them is the increasing pressure being brought to bear on critical journalists. In recent months at least half a dozen prominent editors, writers and cartoonists have been the targets of criminal investigations, many of them launched by a prosecutor appointed by Mr. Morsi following complaints from the president's office. The charges range from reporting false news to blasphemy; a cartoonist for the independent Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper was accused of the latter after she published a cartoon depicting Adam and Eve.

One of Egypt's most popular television personalities, Bassem Yousef, became the target of a criminal investigation last month after he displayed a pillow with Mr. Morsi's image on it. Mr. Yousef, who models himself after American comedian Jon Stewart, was accused of denigrating the head of state.

Mr. Morsi's office protests that it is not responsible for these investigations; it points out that the charges against Mr. Yousef, as well as some other journalists, were initiated by private lawyers, who are allowed to lodge complaints with prosecutors. But several of the cases originated with complaints from the president's office. And the government has not hesitated to impose its agenda on state-run media, installing its own editors and yanking unsympathetic news hosts off the air.

It has also tolerated — at least — a climate of intimidation. The offices of several independent television channels were besieged for weeks by supporters of a popular cleric. During demonstrations against Mr. Morsi's government, his Muslim Brotherhood supporters took to the streets and were accused of targeting journalists; one was killed by a rubber bullet.

While calling for preservation of democratic freedoms in Egypt, the Obama administration has been slow to take note of or respond to the attacks on journalists. Officials say they are feeling their way with Mr. Morsi's government, trying to preserve cooperation on matters such as counterterrorism. Yet the United States retains considerable leverage over Egypt, including its influence over a pending International Monetary Fund loan the government badly needs. That sway should be aimed at preserving space for free media and a democratic opposition — which, in Cairo, is not just a liberal good but a vital U.S. interest.

Iran's IRGC shows its hand in Syria

Will Fulton, AEI Iran Tracker, 14 January 2013

<http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-irgc-shows-its-true-hand-syria-january-14-2013>

Forty-eight Iranians held captive by Syrian rebels since August 2012 arrived in Tehran on January 9, 2013, after a prisoner exchange between rebels and Bashar al Assad's government led to their release. Iran has consistently claimed that these hostages were "pilgrims" en route to the Sayyida Zeinab shrine in Damascus. Their captors, in contrast, have insisted that they are Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) personnel. The Syrian rebels' claims were vindicated when Iranian media revealed the names of some of the hostages who hold active positions within the IRGC Ground Forces (IRGC-GF). We can now confirm that Iran has been deploying training teams to Syria, drawn from some of its elite regular combat formations, similar in some respects to the advisory units the U.S. has sent to help train Iraqi and Afghan forces. Tehran is actively assisting and mentoring Bashar al Assad's military in the suppression of its people.

The nature and significance of the hostages were apparent from the official party that met them on their return to Iran. Its members included Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Expatriate Affairs Hassan Qashqavi and National Security and Foreign Policy Parliamentary Commission Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi. Also on hand were several key commanders from the IRGC-GF, including its commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, its deputy commander, Brigadier General Abdollah Eraghi, and the commander of its Artillery and Missiles formations, Brigadier General 2nd Class Mahmoud Chaharbaqi. Brigadier General Esmail Kowsari, a member of Iran's parliament and a former commander of the strategically-vital IRGC unit stationed in Tehran, the Mohammad Rasoul-Allah unit, was also there. The hostages were apparently important senior leaders in the IRGC-GF.

Indeed they were: Brigadier General 2nd Class Abbedin Khorram commands the IRGC Shohada unit in West Azerbaijan province. Colonel Mohammad Taghi Saffari commands the 14th Imam Sadegh Operational Brigade in Bushehr. Hojjat al-Eslam Karim Hossein Khani is the Supreme Leader's Representative to the IRGC Orumiyyeh unit. Ali Javadian is an official with the 33rd al Mahdi Brigade in Fars province. Imagery analysis of the hostages' reception at Mehrabad Airport supports an assessment with moderate confidence that a former Shohada unit commander, Brigadier General 2nd Class Mehdi Moini, was also in this group.

The deep involvement of the IRGC-GF in Syria is noteworthy. Most Iranian covert military and terrorist operations abroad are conducted by the IRGC Quds Force commanded by Major General Qassem Suleimani. This incident demonstrates, however, that the Quds Force can be supplemented even in operations beyond Iran's borders by elements of regular IRGC military units. That fact is important when we consider how much force Iran can potentially put into such clandestine military operations abroad, since the Ground Forces is the IRGC's largest combat service and includes thirty-one provincial units, ten major operational bases, and several combat divisions and brigades. The IRGC-GF is responsible for defending Iran in the event of a ground invasion as well as for internal security operations. The latter has seemingly become the IRGC's most important mandate since the post-election unrest in 2009 threatened to topple the regime.

The Ground Forces commanders present at the hostages' return play key operational roles in the IRGC. Mohammad Pakpour is the current IRGC-GF Commander and Abdollah Eraghi is the Deputy Commander. Both have long and distinguished careers commanding regular units of the IRGC. Pakpour held a series of key command positions within the IRGC-GF before taking over as head of the force in April 2009, including: commander of the 31st Ashoura and 8th Najaf-e Ashraf divisions; commander of the Qadir and Nosrat operational bases, and; IRGC-GF Operations Deputy. Eraghi's career is similarly illustrious. During the Iran-Iraq War, he commanded several different combat units and participated in key IRGC operations. Following the war, he commanded the 17th Ali ibn-e Abi Taleb, 14th Imam Hossein and 10th Seyyed al Shohada divisions, and the Mohammad Rasoul-Allah (Greater Tehran) unit. Indeed, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Eraghi in 2011 for his role during the 2009 post-election crisis as commander of the Greater Tehran IRGC forces. Less is known of Chahrbaqi, although it is clear that as the IRGC-GF Artillery and Missile Commander he plays an important operational role in the force. Their presence at Mehrabad Airport was likely both a show of support for their comrades returning from combat and a message to an internal and external audience that the IRGC-GF leadership stands firmly behind its mission in Syria.

Email Kowsari is no longer an active commander in the IRGC; however, he still maintains strong ties to senior IRGC leadership. Kowsari commanded the 27th Mohammad Rasoul-Allah Division for three years during the Iran-Iraq War and, like Eraghi, participated in several major operations. Kowsari commanded the 27th Division for another ten years after the war, and was later appointed deputy commander of the Sarallah Operational Base, a headquarters responsible for commanding the IRGC units of Tehran province and Tehran's greater metropolitan area, and Armed Forces General Staff Deputy for Security Affairs. Kowsari was elected to parliament in 2008 and reelected in 2012.

Equally important to Kowsari's career trajectory is his role within the IRGC Command Network (IRGC-CN). The IRGC-CN is an informal influence network of key commanders with ties dating back to the Iran-Iraq War, and relationships that have persisted through several points of potential conflict or crisis. Kowsari has expressed his affiliation with this network by signing two key open letters: the first, published in 1997, praised outgoing IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaei, who many speculated had been dismissed for his harsh criticism of reformist presidential candidate Mohammad Khatami; the second, published in 1999, warned then-President Khatami to reign in reformist elements after violent clashes between security forces and student protestors at Tehran University prompted calls for significant political reform. The list of IRGC commanders who signed both of these letters is an elite group, and includes: IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari;

IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Suleimani; IRGC Navy Commander Ali Fadavi, and; Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff Gholam Ali Rashid, among other key commanders.

Kowsari's move to politics in 2008 does not seem to have weakened his ties to the IRGC-CN. In 2012 Kowsari signed two letters addressed to former IRGC Navy Commander Hossein Alaei, who had implicitly criticized the Supreme Leader in an editorial. The signatories of this letter likewise comprise an elite group of IRGC commanders, including five who signed both the 1997 and 1999 letters: IRGC Quds Force Deputy Commander Esmail Ghaani; IRGC Quds Force Lebanon unit Commander Mohammad Reza Zahedi; Basij Forces Deputy Commander Ali Fazli; Passive Defense Organization chief Gholam Reza Jalali, and; Armed Forces General Staff Inspection Deputy Mohammad Jafar Assadi. Kowsari's presence at Mehrabad Airport last week may have been simple political opportunism, but the notable absence of most other government officials and MPs suggests otherwise. It is more likely that, as with Pakpour, Eraghi and Chaharbaqi, Kowsari was present to support his comrades, and to erase any doubt about the IRGC's role in Syria. His presence also indicates that IRGC operations in Syria are conducted with the full knowledge and support of the IRGC Command Network.

It is a surprise to no one that the IRGC is active in Syria. The U.S. Treasury Department has sanctioned a number of Iranian entities for their support of the Assad regime, including the Quds Force and its commander, Qassem Suleimani. Senior IRGC personnel have, themselves, admitted to the organization's role in Syria. Quds Force Deputy Commander Esmail Ghaani said in May 2012 that the IRGC's "physical and non-physical presence" had prevented massacres in Syria. IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari confirmed the Quds Force's presence in Syria in remarks made September 2012, but suggested that the role was merely advisory

By learning the positions of IRGC personnel operating in Syria, however, we can draw at least three important conclusions: first, the IRGC is deploying active duty combat commanders to Syria; second, the Quds Force is drawing from IRGC-GF personnel, indicating that they seek to draw on the Ground Forces' training and experience conducting internal security and conventional or counter-insurgent operations; finally, several of the IRGC-GF personnel deployed to Syria hail from provincial units that face tribal and ethnic unrest (West Azerbaijan and Fars), further indicating that the Quds Force has tapped specific elements of the IRGC-GF for their unique experience in combating internal uprisings. The presence of three of the IRGC Ground Forces' senior-most commanders at the highly symbolic homecoming of the forty-eight, further signifies the IRGC-GF's support for Iran's efforts in Syria. At a minimum, after this event Iran will find it much more difficult to deny the IRGC's active role in supporting Assad in a conflict that, to date, has claimed the lives of more than 60,000.

Two years of the Arab Spring – Reflections about Democracy in the Arab World *Col. (ret) Dr Jacques Neriah, JCPA, 13 January 2013*

<http://jcpa.org/two-years-of-the-arab-spring-reflections-about-democracy-in-the-arab-world/>

During a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and several American senators, Rabin was asked how he could envisage signing a peace agreement with Arab regimes that did not profess democracy, but rather acted as oppressors of their own people. Rabin responded: "If we have to wait till democracy prevails in the Arab countries, then Israel will have to wait for a hundred years at least."

Since its very first days, Israel has been surrounded by authoritarian regimes where there is no freedom of speech, no personal freedom, or freedom of any kind. The citizens of the surrounding

countries live in a world where many things are forbidden, where they must guess what is acceptable and suitable in order to survive. Instead of speaking their mind, they let their rulers hear what they want to hear and kept the truth to themselves, deep inside.

In the years following the end of Western colonialism, the Arab world was divided into monarchies and dictatorial regimes based on sectarian divisions, with the sole exception of Lebanon as a sectarian republic. In a later phase, the Arab world lost some of its monarchies to military juntas and dictatorships that further deepened the sense of lack of individual freedoms. This process did not spare other Arab regimes where military rebellions alternated with civilian regimes.

In any case, the result was the same: the core of the Arab world was ruled by the military, whereas the rest were ruled by hereditary monarchies supposedly chosen by Allah. In either option, the concept of Western democracy was never implemented since it could never be accepted by Arab rulers and was a concept foreign to Islamic tradition. The closest concept to Western democracy in Islam is the Shura institution, which is a sort of advisory board with no real powers, since authority is vested in the ruler himself. The adoption of Western institutions such as parliaments only mimicked the West, while in fact the authority and power to decide remained in the hands of the ruling junta.

In this reality, where opponents find themselves jailed for years without trial; where opposition groups are persecuted, tortured to death, and eliminated with no trace by the ruling authorities; where minorities suffer from blatant discrimination and their political rights are ignored, denied, or put aside and their leaders imprisoned with no reason; where the press is the mere reflection of the deeds of the ruling class and serves mainly to magnify its role; where human rights are insignificant; where citizens are punished by flogging if caught not worshiping Allah during the times of prayer; where more than 10 percent of the population is part of the internal security apparatus; where Shari'a rule calls for amputations, beheading, or throwing the accused from the highest tower in town; where adultery or being gay is condemned by capital punishment either by hanging or stoning; and where women have to undergo a "virginity test" performed by male military doctors just because they took part in a popular demonstration – there is no room for democracy. The only option for the opposition is to rebel and to take over the reins of power from the ruling junta and continue the same political language as before, because it has been so for years, decades, centuries.

Two years after the outburst of what was naively called the "Arab Spring" by romantics and wishful thinkers who thought the Arab world was about to witness a new era of liberty and democracy, one can only be disappointed by the realities on the ground:

- Tunisia is ruled by a coalition led by an Islamist who, if he could, would apply Islamic law in the country. His main opposition is the Salafists who seek an even stricter approach to Islam.
- Libya was not the scene of a revolution. Rather this was a rebellion of the eastern provinces against the authority of Gaddafi. A year later, Libya has almost disintegrated as a state, is ruled by Islamic militias, and is far from being a democracy.
- Egypt has replaced the dictatorship of President Mubarak with the dictatorship of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi who, unlike his predecessor who inherited a military regime established in 1952, appropriated most of the executive powers less than six months after his election. Almost 50 percent of Egyptians voted against him, but lost to the Islamic majority. The losing Egyptians are fighting today to preserve some of their rights, while democracy is not around the corner.

- In Syria, the Alawite dictatorship is fighting for survival and is likely to fade away in the near future. Still, one can assess with some degree of certainty that its successors will not be advocates of democracy, since most of the fighting is carried out by fundamentalists pushed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Most probably, as in the Egyptian case, the Islamists, being better organized, will succeed in hijacking the rebellion and install themselves as the next rulers of Syria.
- Iraq, after the withdrawal of American forces, has not turned into a flamboyant democracy. The ruling Shiites are being harassed by al-Qaeda, whose main aim is to re-establish Sunni supremacy in Iraq, as it was during the days of Saddam Hussein. None of the combatants are raising the flag of democracy.
- In Yemen, the departed Ali Saleh was not succeeded by a democrat. In fact, his deputy is maintaining the same tribal policy as his predecessor, with the slight difference that he is now succeeding in quelling the rebellion of the Shiite tribes in the north and the other rebellious tribes in Sanaa.
- Being far from the limelight, Bahrain enjoys the fact that the international press is not focused on its politics. Still, the ruling Sunni minority has trespassed every limit of democracy. Its brutal treatment of the opposition and its questionable behavior while quelling the manifestations of the Shiite opposition cannot be accepted in any measure as a legitimate means to protect democracy, since it is nonexistent in the kingdom. The Bahraini monarch asked his Saudi and Emirates neighbors to send troops in order to preserve his regime. Fortunately for the king, Bahrain is the home of the American Fifth Fleet and, as such, has enjoyed a softer approach from the Obama administration, which quite rightly is not interested in alienating an ally facing Iran, the most bitter enemy of the U.S.
- Saudi Arabia has always been ruled according to Islamic law. Democracy is foreign to its institutions and its political thinking and is not on the agenda of the Wahhabi king. His brutal behavior against the Shiites in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia facing Iran is only a reminder of what sort of democracy the Saudis have in mind when they deal with opposition. Amazingly, it is Saudi as well as Qatari money that fuels some of the revolts in the Arab world. Specifically, this money serves to finance the Salafists and other Islamic groups around the Arab world in their quest to topple "heretic" regimes.

Almost two years after the beginning of the "Arab Spring," the Arab world is more divided than ever. Most of the regimes that witnessed this blossoming "spring" have imploded or are on the verge of implosion. The disintegration of Libya, instead of creating a democracy, has created a situation where weapons from the Libyan arsenal have enabled the Tuaregs and their allies to cut Mali in two. Libyan weapons have also reached Hamas in Gaza and the rebels in Syria. North Mali (or Azawad as it is called today) under the Islamists has become a haven for Islamic terrorism led by al-Qaeda and a regional threat to the integrity of the countries of the Sahel. The forthcoming disintegration of Syria, far from bringing democracy, carries with it a potential existential threat to Israel (if Syria's huge stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons fall into the hands of Islamists) and to its neighbors, specifically Lebanon and Jordan.

The "Arab Spring" has proven beyond any doubt that the Arab world is far from ready to accept the concept of democracy. The effort spent to marry democracy and Islam has not borne fruit at all and it is still an open question whether such a scenario can be envisaged in the future.

Professing democracy in the Arab world is a futile exercise in today's reality. Too many crimes have been committed under the banner of democracy, while respecting human rights has proved to be a formidable challenge.

Foolish annexation idea

Yoaz Hendel, YNet News, 5 January 2013

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4328593,00.html>

The idea of annexing the territories has been living among us for 45 years. No rightist government has ever implemented it, and no leftist government has ever rejected it. In December 1981, six months after the withdrawal from Sinai, Menachem Begin tried to define the border. He annexed the Golan Heights and drew harsh criticism from the world. Reagan's America created a crisis, but it is in the nature of crises to end. The Golan Heights, however, remained annexed with a clear border.

Since then some prime ministers discussed a compromise on the Golan Heights despite the sovereignty. Netanyahu, for instance, did it twice. When the area in question has a small population, annexation is mainly a declaration. The current situation in Syria proves that despite Washington's ire, Begin was right. It was better to annex the Golan than to achieve a temporary peace.

In Judea and Samaria, on the other hand, annexation is linked to the question of Palestinian civil rights, Israel's policy's Achilles' heel. Some of those who favor annexation ignore the problem; others deal with it. But most people just talk. You cannot annex without granting blue (Israeli) identification cards to the Arabs who reside there. Under Naftali Bennett's plan some 50,000 Palestinians are annexed. This would obviously cause a great deal of damage, even without taking the world's response and the economic difficulty into consideration. Logic tells us that we can't annex everything without risking a bi-national state – or at least a state that includes millions of Arabs. Those who don't like the fact that Hanin Zoabi is a member of Knesset should try to imagine 30 more MKs just like her.

This week it was the turn of four senior Likud members to annex in theory. The electoral threat from Habayit Hayehudi is forcing the Likud to get creative during the election campaign. One of the most absurd ideas presented was to annex only the Israeli communities. Personally I am in favor of appropriating those areas where there is a Jewish majority – to narrow the dispute. There is enough to fight and negotiate about without the large settlement blocs. On the other hand, the idea to annex selectively according to religion and not according to territory is bad. The map of Israel would look like a fat ladybug with black spots on it.

The problem with the annexation weapon against Bennet is that it is a fabrication. Israelis who live in Judea and Samaria already have blue ID cards and are obligated to obey the State of Israel's laws. Construction in the region is dependent solely on the approval of the government, which is represented by the aforementioned Likud members. So where's the annexation? Whose ears is such a declaration supposed to reach? The world will not be convinced, and neither will the Israeli government.

This is how you lose on all fronts. When the ideas are ludicrous, all that remains is the stalemate. Sometimes it is the construction in the communities that is frozen, and other times it is the idea that the national camp is worthy of presenting a diplomatic alternative rather than sing "Ata Totach" at a campaign rally.

The Al-Jazeera Liberals

Jonathan Tobin, Commentary Magazine, 4 January 2013

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/01/04/the-al-jazeera-liberals-al-gore/>

The sale of Al Gore's Current TV to Al Jazeera is apparently more than just a business deal in which the world's most prominent critic of fossil fuels made a fortune with an oil-rich emirate. According to the *New York Times* editorial page, the creation of a new Al Jazeera America is a blow struck for diversity in journalism. The *Times* feels Time Warner Cable is wrong to drop the new channel from its broadcast lineup. The implication is that those who have expressed shock or outrage about the spectacle of a former vice president of the United States becoming not merely a business partner but an advocate for a network that is well known for its anti-American and anti-Israel bias are either narrow-minded or in some way prejudiced against Arabs and Muslims.

The idea that the general disgust about Gore's \$100 million Arab oil windfall is more evidence of American parochialism or prejudice is absurd. No one is trying to censor Al Jazeera. If there are enough American viewers who want to watch news broadcast from the perspective of the channel's Qatari government owners, then cable providers will give it to them and they are welcome to it. But that doesn't obligate Time Warner or any other distributor to give it valuable space on a list of available channels if there aren't enough viewers to justify such a decision. After all, those who want to look at the world from the point of view of those who promote 9/11 truther myths and who sympathize with those who fought the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan can always watch Al Jazeera on the Internet or find other outlier niches to hold their attention.

The real issue here is not a false argument about diversity. It is instead one about what it means to be a liberal in today's media environment. As Alana noted yesterday, Gore refused to sell his channel to conservative Glenn Beck saying that he didn't wish to see his vanity project fall into the hands of those who disagreed with his politics. Fair enough. But the fact that Gore sees Al Jazeera as a good match for his brand of American liberalism speaks volumes about the nature of that set of beliefs.

Most Americans still think of Al Jazeera as the network that was Osama bin Laden's outlet to the world in the years after 9/11. Since then, it has earned a reputation in some quarters as the best source of news about the Arab and Muslim world, especially during the Arab Spring protests. But its perspective remains one in which the United States and Israel are routinely pilloried and where terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah are depicted as freedom fighters.

I don't worry about Al Jazeera being able to persuade most Americans to buy into this skewed view of the world. What is worrisome is that Gore and other liberals such as the editorial writers at the *Times* seem to think there is a connection between this perspective and contemporary American liberalism.

Though the overwhelming majority of Americans reject this point of view and are strong supporters of Israel, polls have consistently shown us that liberals and Democrats are less likely to back the Jewish state than conservatives and Republicans. At the beginning of his career Gore was seen as the leader of the next generation of Scoop Jackson Democrats. That Al Gore would never have gotten into bed with Al Jazeera. But in his current incarnation as hypocritical environmental huckster and profiteer he seems to reflect the way the left has abandoned the principles that once united Democrats and Republicans on foreign policy. While conservatives and liberals have plenty to argue about, one would have hoped that they would be united in their revulsion against the kind of bias that Al Jazeera exemplifies. If indeed there is a connection between Al Jazeera's views and contemporary liberalism, there is a sickness on the left that ought to trouble all Americans.

Jewish-Arab demography defies conventional wisdom

Yoram Ettinger, Israel Hayom, 19 October 2013

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=2721

In 2012, Israel's Jewish demography continued its the robust surge, typical of the last 17 years, while Muslim demography, west of the Jordan River and throughout the Middle East, increasingly embraces Western standards.

According to a June 2012 study by the Washington-based Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 72 percent of 15-49 year old Palestinian married women prefer to avoid pregnancy, as do 78% in Morocco, 71% in Jordan, 69% in Egypt and Libya, 68% in Syria, 63% in Iraq and 61% in Yemen. The PRB study states that "a growing number of women are using contraception, as family planning services have expanded in the Arab region."

The unprecedented fertility decline in the Muslim world was documented in June 2012 by Dr. Nicholas Eberstadt, a leading demographer at the American Enterprise Institute, and Apoorva Shah of the Hoover Institute. According to Eberstadt and Shah, "Throughout the worldwide Muslim community, fertility levels are falling dramatically ... According to the U.N. Population Division estimates and projections, all 48 Muslim-majority countries and territories witnessed fertility decline over the last three decades ... The proportional decline in fertility for Muslim-majority areas was greater than for the world as a whole over that same period, or for the less-developed regions as a whole ... Six of the ten largest absolute declines in fertility for a two-decade period yet recorded in the postwar era (and by extension, we may suppose, ever to take place under orderly conditions in human history) have occurred in Muslim-majority countries ... Four of the ten greatest fertility declines ever recorded in a 20-year period took place in the Arab world ... No other region of the world — not highly dynamic Southeast Asia, or even rapidly modernizing East Asia — comes close to this showing ... The remarkable fertility declines now unfolding throughout the Muslim world is one of the most important demographic developments in our era."

The key developments yielding a drastic decline in Arab fertility, in the Middle East including west of the Jordan River, have been modernity and its derivatives. For instance, urbanization (the Arab population of Judea and Samaria was 70% rural in 1967, and 75% urban in 2012), expanded women's education and employment, a record-high divorce rate and wedding age, all-time-high family planning, rapidly declining teen-pregnancy, youthful male net-emigration, etc.

The Palestinian Authority has inflated the actual number of Arabs in Judea and Samaria (1.65 million) by one million, to counter the arrival of one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel. Thus, contrary to internationally accepted demographic standards, the PA counts some 400,000 overseas residents, who have been overseas for over a year, as de-facto residents. Some 300,000 Israeli I.D. card-holding Jerusalem Arabs are counted twice, both as Israelis (by Israel) and as Palestinians (by the PA). The number of births is over-reported, the number of deaths is under-reported, emigration is ignored, etc.

In 2012, Israel's Jewish fertility rate (three births per woman) is trending upward, boding well for Israel's economy and national security, exceeding any Middle Eastern Muslim country, other than Yemen, Iraq and Jordan, all of which are trending downward. Iran's fertility rate is 1.8 births per woman, in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States the rate is 2.5, in Syria and Egypt 2.9 and in North Africa 1.8. The average fertility rate of an Israeli-born Jewish mother has already surpassed three births. In 2012, the Israeli Arab-Jewish fertility gap is half a birth per woman, compared with a six birth gap in 1969. Moreover, young Jewish and Arab-Israeli women have converged at three births, with Arab women trending below — and Jewish women trending above — three births.

In 2012, Jewish births have expanded to 77% of total Israeli births, compared with 69% in 1969. While the ultra-Orthodox Jewish fertility rate has declined, due to growing integration into the workforce and the military, the secular Jewish fertility rate has risen significantly.

Since 2001, the number of Jewish emigrants has decreased and the number of returning Jewish expatriates has increased. Aliyah (Jewish immigration) has been sustained annually since 1882, while Arab net-emigration — especially from Judea and Samaria — has been fixed, at least, since 1950.

The current 66% Jewish majority in the combined area of pre-1967 Israel, Judea and Samaria could catapult to an 80% majority in 2035, if Israel seizes the clear and present dramatic aliyah window of opportunity. At least 500,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union, France, Britain, Argentina and the U.S. could reach Israel during the next five years, in light of Israel's economic indicators, the intensification of European anti-Semitism, the Islamic penetration of Europe and the expansion of Jewish-Zionist education.

The suggestion that Jews are doomed to become a minority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean is either dramatically mistaken or outrageously misleading.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF