

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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1. **Anne Bayefsky** **UN Hypocrisy on full display**
The UN has no intention of really cleaning house, since there would be no baby left with the bath water.
2. **Hussein Solomon** **Bridging the gulf between reality and scholarship in the Middle East**
We scholars were so concerned with the Israel-Palestinian question; we lost sight of the political disenfranchisement and economic impoverishment of ordinary Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans.
3. **David Breakstone** **Israel Apartheid Week**
I have no illusions of being able to convince the organizers of this global travesty that they are spewing outright lies, but I would like to think that a small dosage of the truth might prevent others from lending their support to a campaign perpetrating values antithetical to their own.
4. **Joel Brinkley** **In Arab world, it's not just about Israel anymore**
Over time, ordinary Arabs have begun to realize that Israel had nothing to do with their own circumscribed lives. All of it was the fault of their corrupt, implacable dictators.
5. **Bits and Pieces** **Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

UN Hypocrisy on Full Display

By Anne Bayefsky, FoxNews.com, 4 March 2011

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/03/04/hypocrisy-display/>

Today, (last week) Iran officially (became) a member of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women. Only three days ago, the UN General Assembly voted to suspend Libya's membership on the UN Human Rights Council in a desperate bid to save the Council's tattered reputation and itself.

But not a single state, including the United States, has indicated anything but smooth sailing for (the) membership of Iran on the UN's top women's rights body.

The double-talk surrounding the Libyan manoeuvre was breathtaking. It was only nine months ago, after getting to know Qaddafi over four decades, that the General Assembly had elected Libya to serve on the UN's top human rights body. And Libya still serves on the U.N. Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the UN Commission on Information, and the Executive Board of UN Women.

The UN has no intention of really cleaning house, since there would be no baby left with the bath water. Here is just a glimpse of the authority figures that the UN system currently has in place to run its global operations on human rights, women's equality, protection of children and refugees, free flow of information, social and democratic development and crime prevention.

UN Human Rights Council Mission: "...responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all...."

Members: Saudi Arabia, China, Vice-Presidents: Cuba, Angola

UN Commission on the Status of Women

Mission: "...set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide."

Members: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran

UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Mission: "...set...out global strategy to prevent crime and promote stable criminal justice systems...and improving the efficiency and fairness of criminal justice administration systems."

Members: Libya, Russia, Sudan, Iran, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan

U.N. Women

Mission: "...support, address and contribute to gender equality and the empowerment and the advancement of women..."

Members: Executive Board: Libya, Saudi Arabia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, China

UN Economic and Social Council

Mission: "...responsible for: promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress...encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms..."

Members: Saudi Arabia

UN Commission on Sustainable Development

Mission: "...to promote dialogue and build partnerships for sustainable development with major groups include[ing] women, youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific community, and farmers..."

Members: Angola, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia

UN Commission on Social Development

Mission: "...promoting full employment and decent work for all...Improving public sector effectiveness....National and international cooperation for social development..."

Members: Cuba, Egypt, Zimbabwe

UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations

Mission: "...The consideration of applications for consultative status [with the UN]...submitted by NGOs..."

Members: Sudan, Cuba, Pakistan, China

UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

Mission: "...promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all...security of tenure and equal access to economic resources for all, with a specific focus on gender equality."

Members: Governing Council: Iran

UN Committee on Information

Mission: "To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order...based on the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information..."

Members: China, Libya, Kazakhstan, Iran

UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Mission: "...advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential..."

Members: Executive Board: Sudan, China

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Mission: "...safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees."

Members: Executive Committee: Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan

UN World Food Programme

Mission: "advocate policies, strategies and operations that directly benefit the poor and hungry."

Members: Executive Board: Sudan

Bridging the Gulf between Reality and Scholarship in the Middle East

By Hussein Solomon

It was Ken Booth who eloquently noted, "*Our work is words, but our words do not work anymore,*" when discussing the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 on academic scholarship. I believe that with the Jasmine Revolution we have arrived at a similar Berlin moment. Which Middle East expert predicted the advent of people power just four months ago? The answer is none.

Towards the end of last year I contributed to an edited volume on democratization in the Middle East. Not one of us predicted the tsunami of popular resistance which was to follow a few months later. Indeed, the common theme running through the book was one of evolutionary change. The revolutionary rise of the Arab Street has demonstrated serious deficiencies in our scholarship on the region. This is especially true in South Africa. Despite the varied and intense contacts we have had with the Middle East since 1994, there is not a single academic Middle East Studies Centre in the country. To be

frank, Area Studies has largely been ignored by South African universities, resulting in the proliferation of generalists with little area expertise.

We scholars were so concerned with the Israel-Palestinian question; we lost sight of the political disenfranchisement and economic impoverishment of ordinary Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans. We were so concerned with the Islamist bogey we missed the technological revolution sweeping throughout the Middle East with an increasingly alienated, educated, unemployed and secular Arab youth who were creating cyber communities of dissent through Facebook, Twitter and the general 'blogosphere'. As autocrats across the region belatedly woke up to the threat posed by these new technologies and tried to curb their penetration in their societies; they found it impossible to do in a globalizing world.

Attempts to shut down Al Jazeera resulted in the Doha-based satellite television station simply switching to other frequencies and continuing their broadcasts. Similarly an attempt to shut down Twitter resulted in this social networking site partnering with Google and resulting in people in Tahrir Square, Green Square and Pearl Square using mobile phones landlines to phone in their “Twits”. Recognizing the hopelessness of attempting to shut down these sites, the Egyptian military has now chosen to launch their own Facebook and Twitter accounts to engage with citizens. Despite the hugely significant impact of these new technologies on the polity, there is not a single module in South Africa taught in political science on Technology and Politics! To put it differently then, scholarship, lagged behind the unfolding realities on the ground.

As we watched Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak make their ungraceful exits from centre stage in their respective countries, we are currently witnessing the spectacle of a defiant Gaddafi vowing that he will fight to the end and will die a martyr on Libyan soil. In a rambling interview with the media Gaddafi insisted that his people loved him and that the popular revolution taking place was the work of youth on drugs – narcotics supplied by Al Qaeda! What makes someone adopt such an attitude? This goes to the heart of political psychology – the fastest growing sub-discipline of political science in the United States. Yet in South Africa, there is no dedicated module in political psychology. At best, passing mention is made of this within existing modules.

The Jasmine Revolution has also challenged scholarship in other ways too. Scholars who study international organizations focus a great deal on the formal structures and functioning of these bodies. Yet an interesting article in the *Sunday Times*^[1] pointed out that one reason for the much delayed and weak response from the African Union to the unfolding crisis in the Arab world, could be the money received by top officials in this body from the Brother Leader in Tripoli. For scholars studying international organizations, then, the challenge must be to understand the informal networks contributing to an organization's functioning or not.

For those studying democratization, we need to reconsider what we view as civil society as families, clans, tribes, and cyber-communities inter-connected in their fight against authoritarian rule. The Jasmine Revolution also raises deeper theoretical questions as to whether the much maligned Francis Fukuyama would have the last laugh after all. At the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama penned his *End of History and the Last Man*. This proposed that we had entered an era which has witnessed the triumph of liberal

democracy where no other ideology would be able to challenge it for supremacy. Despite the persistence of Neo-Nazi and fascist fringe groups in Europe and the existence of radical leftists in parts of South America and Asia, recent developments would suggest that these too are weakening organizationally as well as losing their ideological appeal. Maoists in Nepal are increasingly part of formal political structures as opposed to challenging those structures from without. Similarly in the Middle East, the Green Movement challenges the Islamism of the ayatollahs on the streets of Tehran, whilst the Arab youth, through these popular uprisings, are challenging both authoritarian discourses of the incumbents and the totalitarian discourses of the Islamists. In the process, the people of the Middle East are proving that liberal democracy is a universal value, not a Western one. Fukuyama, might well be proven right!

If we are to bridge the divide between scholarship and empirical reality, what is needed are dedicated area studies programmes on the Middle East as well as the introduction of new modules like Technology and Politics and Political Psychology within existing degree programmes. There is also a pressing need for a greater emphasis on informal power structures as opposed to the focus only being on formal, visible structures and processes. Crucially the issue of language competence – Arabic, Hebrew and Farsi – would also be needed to be included if we are to understand an already complex region.

Israel Apartheid Week: A guide for the perplexed

David Breakstone, Vice Chairman of the World Zionist Organization and a member of The Jewish Agency Executive

(The article will appear in the Jerusalem Post this coming weekend)

Feeling confused and disoriented? Suffering from a sense of anxiety and bewilderment that you just don't know how to handle? Don't be alarmed. It's March, and the seasonal outbreak of Israel Apartheid Week (which, by popular demand, has now been extended to a full month) is manifesting itself in college towns everywhere. Eventually it will subside of its own accord, but in the meantime, to alleviate symptoms, keep reading.

I'm not worried about us diehard Zionists. We've long ago been immunized to the contagious falsehoods disgorged by the extremists behind this annual hate-fest. But what makes their disease of detestation so insidious is that it infects thousands upon thousands of others who are far more moderate in their politics and genuinely well-meaning in their intentions. Including many who have traditionally been inclined to support Israel, Jews among them. It is they who concern me, all those brought up on the vision of a Jewish state that could do no wrong, a morally superior David fighting valiantly against a belligerent Goliath, who now find themselves experiencing a considerable degree of discomfort during this intense campaign of misinformation that has reversed the image, portraying Israel as an apartheid-like South Africa, treating Palestinians as the Nazis treated the Jews.

I have no illusions of being able to convince the organizers of this global travesty that they are spewing outright lies, constructing flawed contentions, and arriving at erroneous conclusions, but I would like to think that a small dosage of the truth just might prevent others, those not afraid of being confused by the facts, from unsuspectingly lending their support to regimes whose values are utterly antithetical to their own.

To begin with, a word of caution: I consider myself to be rather sympathetic to the plight of the innocent Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza who for so long have been deprived of statehood. And I don't exonerate our own government from some degree of culpability in their plight continuing to be what it is. But I do hold the Palestinians to be far more accountable for the prolongation of the conflict than us, and, in resolute opposition to the sponsors of Israel Apartheid Week (IAW), I emphatically deny that there is any Israeli policy of racial subjugation and charge both Hamas and Fatah with repressing their own people in ways that are far worse than anything of which Israel might be fairly accused.

Suspension of civil liberties, suppression of women, intolerance of homosexuality, religious fundamentalism and perpetuation of ignorance continue to be the official rule – not the exception – in Hamas-dominated Gaza, and are characteristic of the climate even under the more moderate Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The long history of Palestinian rejection of the legitimate aspirations of the Jewish people to a state of their own, while simultaneously and systematically perpetuating hatred of Jews has created one generation after the next totally unprepared to live along side us in peace.

A recent case in point is the story reported just last week in this paper by Khaled Abu Toameh that *"Palestinians vow to prevent Holocaust education in UNRWA-run schools"*

(March 2), as doing so would be a “provocative act” and a “challenge to the feelings of the Palestinians.” The intention to include the topic in UNRWA textbooks as a way of sensitizing Arab children in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the issue of human rights was further rebuffed by the Hamas government “because it would pave the way for normalization with Israel” and by a Fatah official in the West Bank who continued to insist that the Holocaust was a “big lie.”

Meanwhile, the complete rejection by the Hamas government of democratic principles was once again evidenced when early in March it forcibly dispersed demonstrations of young Palestinians in Gaza City whose gathering was inspired by the popular uprisings sweeping the Arab world.

While these actions, happening now and not in some deniable past, undermine the credibility of those reproaching Israel for practices of apartheid, the accusations themselves are in any case entirely without basis. According to the “*International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*” ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nation, the practice involves “establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group... over any other racial group... and systematically oppressing them” through the following means: “Denial to... the right to life and liberty; Deliberate imposition on a racial group . . . of living conditions calculated to cause its... physical destruction in whole or in part; Measures calculated to prevent a racial group... from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the country and the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such a group... by denying... basic human rights and freedoms...; Any measures... designed to divide the population along racial lines; Exploitation of the labour of the members of a racial group or groups, in particular by submitting them to forced labour.”

The situation in Israel is so diametrically distant from this that it is hard to understand how confronting IAW supporters with reality could have any effect other than embarrassing them into total silence.

First of all, there is Israel’s Declaration of Independence that unequivocally calls for “the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants,” and explicitly ensures “complete equality of social and political rights... irrespective of religion, race or sex.” These are not mere words. Despite a history of six decades punctuated by as many wars, in addition to protracted campaigns of terror, we have held tenaciously to the sacred pursuit of “freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel” to which the state was committed at its founding, never resorting either to the repression or expulsion of our Arab population. On every level, the facts belie any possible characterization of Israel as practicing state-sanctioned racism:

- Arab citizens of Israel enjoy full and equal voting rights (women, of course, as well as men, something still denied them in other Middle Eastern countries).
- Arabs have been elected to every single Israeli Knesset, and currently hold 14 of the 120 seats, several representing parties ideologically opposed to the very idea of a Jewish state.
- Arabs have routinely filled positions at the highest echelon of Israel’s civil, legislative, and judicial authorities as well as its foreign service, including government minister, deputy speaker of the Knesset, ambassador, and supreme court justice.

- Laws of compulsory education apply to Arabs as well as Jews and Israel's universities are open equally to all its citizens.
- Arabs can be found in every sector of Israel's economy, working alongside their Jewish colleagues as doctors, professors, filmmakers, actors, hi-tech executives, and lawyers, with their membership in Israel's labour unions taken as a matter of course.
- There are no legal restrictions as to where Arabs may live, and neither religion nor ethnicity may be applied as a basis for denying sale of lands.

As to the Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank, some 98% now live under the autonomous civil administrations of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority that they themselves elected. Indeed, they do not have the privilege of voting in Israeli elections, nor the automatic right to live, work or travel in Israel proper, for they are not Israeli citizens, a status that could be conveyed upon them only if the territories in which they live were to be annexed by Israel. As the publicly declared intention of one Israeli government after the next has been to negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the State of Israel, this is obviously out of the question. In the meantime, meeting the needs of the Palestinian people in such fields as health, education, welfare and employment, as well as assuring them their civil liberties, has become the responsibility of their own governments.

While there is no denying that Israel, in its efforts to maintain the safety and security of its own residents has imposed restrictions on movement within the areas it still occupies, and, in doing so, has at times erred on the side of caution, a vigilant Supreme Court and a variety of NGOs have upheld the human rights of the Palestinians in a manner that could only be the envy of all those now rising up against repressive Arab regimes across the Middle East.

Against this background, it is evident that the analogy of apartheid is both hideous and ridiculous. Still, it is not my intention here to whitewash Israel. We are a society guilty of harbouring bigotry, demonstrating insensitivity, misallocating resources, and acting callously. It is not an act of disloyalty to say so. President Shimon Peres himself recently acknowledged the manifestation of racism here when speaking to a group of high school students. But the difference between Israeli democracy and apartheid is that in the same breath he described it as "one of the most terrible of prejudices" and declared it to be "completely unacceptable that in Israel there are those who attempt to discriminate against others."

Accordingly, as individuals and as a nation we need to create the conditions that will allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state and eradicate racism, calling unceasingly upon our government to seek peace diligently and earnestly. The unrest that is sweeping the Middle East, like the social networks fuelling it, knows no borders. We must do all that we can to eliminate any cause for demonstrations against us, both from within and without, affirming the vow contained in our Declaration of Independence: "We extend our hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East."

I can only hope that those who are sincere about securing the rights of the Palestinian people are prepared to do the same. Israel Apartheid Week is as good a time as any to challenge them to work with us towards that end, recognizing our entitlement to a sovereign homeland even as they insist upon that right for others. If this is self-apparent to you, send this column on to someone for whom it might not be. Perhaps we might contain the rampant virus of IAW by going viral ourselves.

In Arab world, it's not just about Israel anymore

Joel Brinkley, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 March 2011

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=%2Fc%2Fa%2F2011%2F03%2F05%2FING21I1GUE.DTL>

As Middle East revolutions continue to spread like a contagion, Israelis are spinning like tops, afraid the Muslim Brotherhood will take over Egypt, fearful that the overthrowing of Sunni dictators will give new power to the Shiite theocracy in Iran - and much more. These are well-founded concerns. But I've spent many years working in the Middle East, and I have countervailing views.

For more than half a century, ever since the *nakba*, the Arab world's "day of catastrophe," the day Israel was founded, Arab leaders have used one consistent strategy to keep their people in line.

Our life's goal, they would say over and over, is to take back "Palestine." Nothing else matters. Deliberately implicit in that was the expectation that their people would stop thinking about their own stunted lives and focus instead on the fight.

For many years that seemed to work. Then came satellite television, the Internet, and over time, ordinary Arabs began to realize that Israel had nothing to do with their own circumscribed lives. All of it was the fault of their corrupt, implacable dictators.

Frustration grew and grew until finally a catalyst - that vegetable merchant in Tunisia who burned himself up - set the region on fire. Now the world has been watching actual and threatened uprisings, from Morocco to Iraq and beyond. They are televised. All of us can see and hear what these people want. And one remarkable fact is now patently clear.

Even after decades of indoctrination, these protesters, in state after state, have nothing to say about Israel. That conflict is not even a tertiary concern. Early this month, television did show one protester waving a poster-board depiction of Hosni Mubarak, stars of David scrawled across his face. But that was more about Mubarak than Israel.

Few Arabs hold warm feelings toward Israel. But for nearly all of them now, Israel is just an unfortunate fact of life, not an obsession. Remember, the *nakba* was 63 years ago. The most recent Arab-Israeli war ended 38 years ago. Today, well more than half of the world's Arabs were born years after these events. The average age in Libya right now is

24; in Egypt it's 25. These people now know that their dictators' alarmist warnings about Israel were cynical distractions.

Still, Israel is not the only nation consumed with worry about what governments will replace the dictators who are falling from power. After all, in each of these countries, tyrants eliminated any significant opposition leaders. The only people who have had the freedom to organize are religious leaders. They can hold meetings and preach Islamic revolution in their mosques - generally without interference from anyone. And ever present on most everyone's mind is the Iranian Revolution in 1979, a secular citizens' revolt that was captured by the Islamists. Couldn't that happen again?

Watching these uprisings, however, we have heard almost no one clamoring for a fundamentalist Islamic government. On NPR a few days ago, for example, a Libyan businessman declared: "This isn't about the Islamists. It's about freedom and democracy!" Fundamentalist Islam is absolutely antithetical to multiparty democracy.

For Israelis, Iran is now the No. 1 bogeyman, but despite all the talk about possible new Iranian influence in the Arab world, it's important to note that Arabia and Persia have been bitter enemies for centuries. They hate each other even now. Few if any Arab nations would accept supplication to Tehran.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is another of Israel's worries. A few days ago, Ari Shavit, an opinion columnist for Israel's Haaretz newspaper, blamed America for allowing Hosni Mubarak to fall from power in Egypt, "paving with their own hands the road to victory for the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran."

That's a common Israeli refrain, but I wonder how they think the United States could possibly have propped up the hated dictator and betrayed 80 million Egyptians.

In any case, from the Muslim Brotherhood's own recent statements we know that the group is conflicted. Its younger leaders speak of democracy and pluralism, while its elders still cling to evil, racist views of Israel and the West. They seem to talk out of both sides of their mouths, speaking about freedom one day and Islamic fascism the next.

We can't know what the Muslim Brotherhood actually wants to do. But it's irrefutable that the vast majority of Egyptians, including the military, don't want the Brotherhood in a leadership role. And don't forget: At a moment's notice, all those people, in Egypt and elsewhere, can take to the streets once again.

***Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

ICEJ News, 4 February 2011: Messianic Jews in Israel are alarmed over a new wave of incitement against their community launched at a recent ultra-Orthodox rally in Ashdod at which the local chief rabbi compared them to Hitler and fliers called for their expulsion from Israel. Calev Myers, a prominent Messianic Jewish legal advocate, insisted this week that Ashdod police should open an official investigation against the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Ashdod, Yosef Sheinin, for his inflammatory speech to some 1,000 haredi protesters on February 22nd. Rabbi Sheinin said that unlike in the past, Christians can

no longer use blood libels against the Jews and now do it by inventing a new religion - Jewish believers in Jesus.

ICEJ News, 4 February 2011: Sirhan Sirhan, the Palestinian Christian who assassinated Senator Robert F. Kennedy as he was campaigning for President in California on June 5, 1968, failed to convince a parole board that he should be released from prison on Wednesday. Sirhan, now 66, told the board at Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga that "every day of my life, I have great remorse and deep regret," but also claimed that he didn't remember firing the shots that killed Kennedy and wounded five others.

ICEJ News, 7 February 2011: Ten Turkish journalists were arrested last week for being critical of the Turkish government, joining three others arrested two weeks ago. The arrests led thousands of people to gather for protests in Ankara and Istanbul last Friday, as Human Rights Watch condemned the recent arrests and urged the Turkish government to demonstrate its commitment to the press freedom.

ICEJ News, 7 February 2011: Israel's Supreme Court on Monday ruled in favour of Mohammed Bakri, the director of the documentary film "Jenin, Jenin" who was sued for defamation by five Israeli soldiers who fought in Jenin during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, who claimed that the film makes IDF soldiers look like "Nazis." Bakri responded to the charges by saying that "if anyone needs to regret anything, it's the Israeli army, which was continuously committing crimes." Meanwhile, a poll conducted by the *BBC* reveals that Israel is one of the least popular countries in the world, with only Iran, North Korea and Pakistan ranking lower than Israel. While respondents from the US and Russia were most likely to view Israel positively, Egypt and Turkey gave Israel the most negative ratings.
