



Transcript

Israel and the Arab Spring

Jonathan Freedland

Journalist, Author and Broadcaster

Daniel Levy

Non-Resident Senior Fellow, New America Foundation and Century Foundation

Chair: Yossi Mekelberg

Associate Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

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Jonathan Freedland:

I'm amongst scholars and academics and specialists on the Middle East and here I am a journalist sounding off with much less specialist expertise than them. And so many journalists have been talking about the Arab Spring, including those who previously thought Arab Spring was a brand of mineral water, and so really the bar's been set very low I'm afraid by many of my journalistic colleagues so I do apologise for that.

I'm going to start with some of the obvious changes in terms of Israel and the Arab Spring and then if I can do it block by block, country by country, because that's how I think many in Israel see it just looking around them and how this impacts on each one of those relationships, and then finally I'll try and end with a kind of ledger of whether this is good or bad for those who long to see a peace between Israel and its neighbours.

The starting point I think should be with the most obvious impact, and they have been in some ways overlooked because we sort of got used to them but I think they bear just laying out the most direct impact. The first one to become clear and the most obvious was the loss in the fall of Hosni Mubarak, of Israel's key Arab ally. Egypt, obviously a kind of leader historically in the Arab world, but Mubarak as Sadat's successor was the key. The Egyptian-Israeli relationship, the key relationship, sort of underwriting even the other Arab-Israeli peace accords including, for example, the peace treaty with Jordan.

So the loss of Mubarak is just an immediate huge strategic change for Israel. And just to put a number on that, just to give a sense of how important that is for Israel, not having to worry about that southern border with Egypt and to know that Israel could pursue other interests in the region knowing that that border was settled, had a direct real world impact on Israel even on its economy. So that in 1974, in the era immediately after the October War, or the Yom Kippur War, but before the Camp David peace accord with Egypt, Israel was spending 30 percent, close to a third, of its entire gross domestic product on defence spending. Once the peace accord was in place and it no longer had to be concerned by that southern flank that steadily fell over a period of years until it was reduced in 2010 to just 7 percent of gross domestic product, and 30 percent to 70 percent or less, and when you're looking at why it is that Israel has so enjoyed tremendous economic growth over the last three decades, that fact alone is one of them; it simply had to spend less on defence. Now it's in a world where it has to worry about that border, not yet, not immediately, but it's there in the back of its mind – just that single change.

It's not just Israel that's been affected. Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President, also looked to Hosni Mubarak as a key Arab ally, again underwriting his actions, a kind of patron. When he was negotiating with Israel he knew that he had this big Arab power – Egypt – behind him, and you can see already the change, the fallout, where once Mubarak has gone and the new regime in Egypt [is] tilting slightly more towards Hamas, and therefore pressure on Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas' party to reconcile. So that's a change.

Israel too is nervous about the Jordanian border, worried if there could be some kind of popular uprising there but most obviously concerned about Syria, the trouble on the northern border, no longer the predictable enemy that Assad and his father have always been – the fear there could be a civil war, an implosion, a replacement, a new regime. Whatever constellation of circumstances, it's uncertainty and what Israel had always liked, like all strategic military planners, predictability, even in your enemies – predictability – and now that has gone.

That's just some of the more basic things, and just a last point is that now Arab leaders, even those who have not experienced an Arab awakening, an Arab uprising among their own people, surely they will now be more conscious than they were of public opinion and public sentiment. They have to listen now to the street in a way they might not have done before, and so I pose it as a question but Operation Cast Lead in 2008/9, one wonders now how possible that would be [that] Israel could do that knowing that even if Egyptian public opinion or Jordanian public opinion didn't like it the leaders would take care of business. Now that is less certain there. Those are some of the obvious impacts.

To point just now to take some different players in this ongoing drama – the United States first of all. Israel, if it relies on Egypt as its number one Arab ally, its number one ally has always been the United States, again underwriting its presence and position in the Middle East and through financial help as much as anything else.

One consequence I think of this year of Arab awakenings is the beginning of – it's not complete and it's not final – but a sort of slow, steady receding from the region by the United States... less interest and less influence in that region, typified by the slightly King Canute-like calls from President Obama as if urging to direct the waves, calling on Mubarak to go, and he didn't go and then eventually he does go but it doesn't seem as if it's because of what President Obama has said. And then most obviously in Syria where the American administration has found a hundred different ways to say Assad

should go and he's still there, kind of exposing the weakness of America, or at least proving that its writ no longer runs in that region in quite the way it once did. Yes, a role in Libya and the removal of Colonel Gaddafi but very deliberately avowedly not a leading role. The United States, Obama particularly, keen to be behind France and Britain in what he always said was the sort of logistic supporting role even though it was actually more than that.

There are two ways in which that is significant. The first – this is a cause as well – for why this has happened to the United States is that its standing in the region has been really buffeted by these changes, on the one hand in some places discredited by their association with the previous regime. Mubarak in Egypt – everyone knows they wanted rid of Mubarak and yet he was supported, propped up for so long by the Americans, so that damages the Americans' reputation in that region. But as I said, it's not complete, it is partial.

You look at Libya and there America and the west are thanked, not in all places but by those who wanted to see the back of Gaddafi. So it's patchy but overall a decline in that influence.

The reason why it's significant is that progress towards peace has happened when America is strong in the region, and not just strong but strong and playing the role of honest-broker. And it's my view that funnily enough it is always at its strongest and most influential when it is seen as most honest and most a broker; when it is seen as being even-handed, that's when its influence is at its peak and I would offer – there may be other periods – but as a recent example of a peak of American power would be exactly 20 years ago now when it was President George Bush Senior and Secretary of State James Baker who were in charge who pursued the most even-handed policy towards Israel and the Palestinians I would say, certainly in the last two or three decades, not matched since.

In that period it was at maximum influence. They're not at that now because of this sort of slow receding from the region and President Obama has a very specific problem as well which is instead of doing what most and previous American presidents have done, which is to assert his affection for Israel first and then administer the tough medicine second, he's got it the wrong way round and he demanded they stop building settlements first and then has spent all the time since insisting that he's their very best friend, and that's not an effective way of doing it and it has hobbled him and, I think because of the election coming up, we won't see any more action for another year. So that's the United States as a player.

Some people have hoped, with the United States out, the Europeans might step in. I would say don't hold your breath. Very divided, as they illustrated over the Palestinian bid for statehood in the UN – they couldn't come to a shared view – and even if they could they are not in any position, I would say, to act at the moment. And they have other things on their mind, what with the eurozone and imminent economic disaster they are in – what I like to joke, if this is a dispute about occupied territory – they are deep in preoccupied territory; at the moment they have other things on their mind. So don't look to the Europeans.

That said, even with all those divisions, it is interesting that the Europeans have a radically different perspective on how the Arab Spring affects Israel than the Israelis themselves, and it's useful just to go through this just to reveal in some ways the difference in the mentality.

What you hear from Israeli policy-makers – and I had a whole series of conversations about six weeks ago when I was there – over and over again they said: What the impact of the Arab Spring is on us, is it's telling us to wait and see because the map is being redrawn around us – this is like 1917 or 1918 and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Borders are being redrawn, will be redrawn, old states will disappear, new states will come in their place – it would be a kind of madness for Israel now to do a deal that obsessed about the 1967 borders when the 1917 borders might be about to be redrafted and changed and therefore the best thing for us to do is to wait, see what happens all around us and then maybe we can make a move. That's how Israeli government people, certainly policy-makers, see it.

The European perspective is almost exactly the opposite. Their view is, time is wasting, time is urgent; while everything's changing you've got to act now before things change some more because actually it's much easier to make peace with these incumbent despots who merely have to sign on the dotted line and then the deal is done, much harder to make a deal with a new and emerging democratic, or non-democratic, but a new and popular alternative, and therefore they feel the pressure should be on while you've still got King Abdullah in Jordan make progress with him but equally Saudi Arabia and other countries because who knows if they'll be there in a couple of years time. That's sort of the thrust.

Some of the Israeli view is we can wait and we can be patient because look at say Egypt, even with the Muslim Brotherhood gaining ground in those elections, nobody there is in any kind of mood to tear up the peace deal with

Israel because it would cost them so much, they would forfeit American aid, we've got time on our hands.

So a real distinction there between the rest of the world view of this – 'because of the Arab Spring Israel should move fast' – and Israel's own view.

Other players in the drama: So we've got the Americans sort of receding from the stage; the Europeans too preoccupied, too divided to do anything and radically different perspectives.

Others are stepping into this vacuum. Watch Turkey very closely, hugely ambitious to be a kind of regional leader, very assertive under its current leadership taking bold initiatives against former allies, Israel included, and now housing the opposition in Syria, the Syrian National Council is based and housed in Turkey. So Turkey [has] clear aspirations to be a regional player and to stop, and to be a counterweight to, Iran which it sees as a direct rival.

And I think also, motivated in a similar way, Saudi Arabia – again watch that – for years happy to rely on the United States now concluding, like everyone else, that maybe the United States is backing off in quite a historic way and therefore thinking it should fill the vacuum and, for example, crushing the revolt in Bahrain, very conscious too in Saudi Arabia of keeping Iran in its box and preventing any kind of Shia larger sphere of influence.

That brings me very directly to Syria. Many people think everything we've seen in the so-called Arab Spring so far is mere warm up, the big one is really Syria; it's pivotal. Egypt, historically important, but Syria absolutely geo-strategically crucial. If it all implodes, that is Iran's major ally taken out of the equation. What comes in its place, the instability that comes in its place? From Israel's point of view that could be very worrying short-term, infiltration across the border, raids et cetera.

But longer term there are some who are very optimistic and they refer you to the statement by the leader of the Syrian National Council very recently in which he said, I think just last week in fact, that under him, if he topples Assad, he would break that strategic alliance with Iran – that's very comforting news for Israel, they want to hear that – even end the relationship or alter the relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon. But even more interestingly signalled that they would no longer have that relationship with Hamas that they've had, instead their relationship they said would be with the PLO, for which read Mahmoud Abbas et cetera.

So there are big changes afoot. Syria – at the moment Israel has clung to the idea, certainly it did at the beginning – that Assad, it was better the devil you

know. Now it's unpredictable and unstable and fuels that sense that I was describing in Israel that they should just wait and wait it out.

Two last things. First, missing so far out of the Arab Spring have been the Palestinians themselves and it's an interesting question whether there will be in 2012 a Palestinian Spring and a third intifada perhaps, another uprising of the Palestinians and then the question that flows from that was, if they had it against whom would it be directed? Would it be directed against Israel in the form of perhaps a non-violent third intifada, big civil rights style mass marches to the settlements or to Jerusalem, or would it be actually directed in a hostile way at the Palestinian Authority itself? Some question that actually the Palestinian Authority's aid etc has kept its population pretty pliant and therefore there wouldn't be that but that's a big question: will the Arab Spring come to the Palestinians?

The last area then and in a way just to draw these threads together. If you're a watcher of the so-called peace process – it's in the old joke there's been more process than peace, and not much process either – does these Arab awakenings around the region of 2011, do they harbour or give grounds for optimism or pessimism?

Well I'll start with the optimistic grounds. If there are peace treaties to be done with these new post-dictatorship societies, surely those peace treaties will be more enduring. It is much better, surely, to have a peace accord with the people of Egypt than with the dictator of Egypt. That surely is one that would last for the ages.

If you had a fall of the Assad regime in Syria, besides being good news for the people in Syria being killed in their thousands by that brutal regime, it would you imagine reduce Iran's influence and therefore that rejectionist block that Iran has been the sponsor of – this is the optimistic view – would be severely weakened, what they call the arc of resistance, but if you're thinking in peace process terms maybe that's a good thing if that is weakened.

And then lastly, a former National Security adviser of the Israeli Prime Minister wrote recently that if there was an upheaval in Jordan and the removal of King Abdullah, which on its face would seem like bad news because he has a peace accord with Israel, well maybe then the Palestinian majority who live in Jordan would take over and suddenly that could reconfigure the entire Israel-Palestine conflict because you'd have a Palestinian society on the East Bank who may be able to think in new frameworks. I'm not endorsing that, I'm just relaying that that's out there,

recently written as I said by a former National Security adviser. So those are the grounds from their point of view, optimists.

The grounds for pessimism: It is harder to get a peace accord with peoples than it is with a despot. Mubarak, enough sweeteners from the Americans signed on the dotted line; similarly with King Abdullah. A cynical view but it was easier to get a dictator to sign on the dotted line than it would be with peoples.

You have the collapse of key powers in the peace process – King Abdullah and Mubarak, Mahmoud Abbas has lost his power. You have the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in almost every country where there's elections, it's Islamists who are doing well – they are not well disposed to peace with Israel.

From Israel's own point of view it has lost one of its big boasts always historically that it was the only democracy in the region. It liked making that boast; it has now lost that boast. So for people in Israel they might put that on the negative side of the ledger.

And lastly, you have seen the weakening, the decline in influence in the United States and previously when they have been able to play the role of honest-broker you have seen some progress but if they're not able to do that now then that would be a sign of gloom.

So that's a kind of ledger. It won't surprise you to know that the pessimism and the pessimistic entries were longer and outweighed the optimistic ones on the ledger but, for what it's worth, that was my take on the impact of the Arab awakenings on Israel.

Yossi Mekelberg:

It reminds me what the Palestinian author Emile Habibi said. He called himself an 'opsimist' – a bit of this and a bit of that is always good in the Middle East.

Daniel Levy:

I said I would cover the ground left by Jonathan and as I crossed off point after point it's going to be 15 minutes on Morocco, Western Sahara, Polisario and the peace process.

What I thought I'd try and do is dig into a couple of those responses that have characterized the debate in Israel around the Arab Spring, why I think those

have fallen short, what a new regional management strategy might look like and the one that I think is, albeit it's a moving target that is beginning to take shape from the Netanyahu government, why again I don't hold out too much hope for that being a sustainable strategy for Israel, and then just quickly what one might be able to do.

I think Jonathan touched on them, and I think the two leading narratives that have taken root in Israel have been, this is a period of instability, of uncertainty, it's not a time to make gambles [or] to go for risky political adventurism even in the direction of peace, and let's wait for the dust to settle. That's certainly the governmental line.

The other line which has been embraced by some of the mainstream and opposition in Israel has been encouraged by Europe, America, the west, certainly some of the commentariat in Israel, has been quick – let's do the peace even if the Ancien Regimes of the Arab world are reaching for their last breath this is the time to reach an accord with them, we need to get a two-state solution while it's still possible.

I actually think the former sounds more credible than the latter in the current environment but I think there are holes in both of them and I want to touch on those quickly.

First of all, and this is certainly not unique to Israeli political leadership, what you'll find is a very consistent thread between what people thought before the Arab Spring and what they are therefore advocating as a consequence of the Arab Spring. So if you thought the peace process was rather ill-advised and hopeless then it's even more so now and if you thought it was rather urgent to try and jump for a deal then you think even more so now as well.

I don't think that it is realistic in the current circumstances to try and do a hocus-pocus back to negotiations with Abbas – let's seal a deal with Abbas, he'll look behind him and maybe Jordanian King Abdullah, maybe the Gulf rather quietly pushing from behind – but I don't think that deal is there to be done, not one that would have legitimacy and credibility. Or at least I'd suggest the following; whereas on the Israeli side there might be a willingness to give less in order to receive more, I think what Israel would actually have to be doing would be to give more in order to receive less.

I think there'd have to be much greater clarity on Palestine actually being a sovereign state, on Palestine having some of its own security arrangements, some kind of Israeli historical acknowledgement regarding the refugee issue, I don't think you could fudge the Jerusalem issue quite so much and what you'd get in return would be Israel being somewhat taken off of the list of

grievances or downgraded on the list of grievances but I don't think this would be a great historical – excuse the phrase – 'coming to Jesus moment' for the Arab and Israeli Middle East and all living happily ever after.

The second response. In fact this is an opportunity notion that requires one missing ingredient, it's an opportunity for peace if you insert into that equation that the new circumstances are generating pressure on Israel and those in Israel who argue that we have to move quickly are in fact saying, 'we're under more pressure'. I don't think that's really the perception of most Israelis, that there's an immediate, a clear and present threat that needs to be responded to.

The second response, which is the governmental response, which is this is no time for peace follies, I think has as its weakness that it's quite transparent that the Netanyahu government didn't want to make progress anyway and secondly, that it is not approaching the interregnum either with a view to 'let's stabilize the status quo' or with a view to saying, 'Look, eventually things will settle down, we've got to be in a more accepted position – we've got to improve the prospects for further down the line, therefore let's not go too out on a limb with settlements, with outposts, let's not stir up domestic issues with the Palestinian Arab population inside Israel et cetera et cetera – and it's doing the opposite.'

So I think both positions leave something to be desired. Of course these aren't the only actors and these aren't the only positions coming out of Israel. I think one has to fundamentally wrap one's head around what the new right-wing elite in Israel looks like in order to understand Israel today, in order to understand the responses of the current government and I'm going to touch on that in a moment.

And I think you're also going to be soon looking at how all these developments are affecting the 20 percent of the Israeli population that is Palestinian Arab and that is following developments in the region very very closely and I would expect them actually to be having a greater voice in pan-Palestinian politics. I think we might be seeing a period in which Palestinian politics reunite having been so divided; that reunite more than just in the Hamas-Fatah sense but rather in the diaspora refugee communities, Palestinians in the occupied territories and Palestinians inside Israel but I won't go on too much into that.

Israel had something of a regional management strategy and if one wants to be a little flippant about it you'd call it 'peace process forever', as we've suggested.

I don't think anyone really credibly thought talks that were launched again in Washington in September of 2010 were going to deliver. At each iteration of this resuming the peace talks the deep structural flaws of asymmetrical negotiations between an occupying power and an occupied people, the exacerbation of that asymmetry because the honest-broker is anything but and then heaping on top of that the fact that both populations have gone on a certain journey since the 1990s and that journey has been away from rather than towards the kind of deals that were on the table.

So I don't think that peace process could deliver but as long as everyone was ready to play make-believe it was a kind of management strategy, but to have make-believe you needed the Grand Poobah [inaudible] in the room and that was Hosni Mubarak, and in the absence of Hosni Mubarak you can't play Annapolis-style relaunch of peace negotiations make-believe anymore.

I don't think Jordanian King Abdullah can carry that weight on his shoulders. I don't think the SCAF or a democratically elected Egyptian government are going to step in and play that role and while the Gulf may quietly be talking to Israel I don't think that is going to be brought out into the open at any moment. So that old management strategy is no longer with us.

What is the new management strategy? To understand where Israel is going with the Arab Spring I think the first thing one has to appreciate is that Israel currently has a coalition that combines deeply reluctant de-occupiers – and I'm being generous – with people who are committed to greater Israel. And so I think it's not doing them a disservice to suggest that they are not looking for this opening that will allow them to quickly find a way out of the territories; that was available, it wasn't taken as an opportunity.

And therefore I don't want to be too dismissive of the way that they are looking to respond to the new region and I'd suggest that – as I say, a moving target – but it has several elements to it.

First of all, both camps are wobbly in the region. If the region was divided essentially into two camps – a western allied so-called axis of moderation, non-democratic, didn't always look that moderate to its own citizenry but we would describe it in those terms and an axis of resistance – both look wobbly today.

On the former side I think Israel looks at this and says: Number one: so far we've only lost the republics, not the monarchies – Jordan, Morocco, the Gulf, have not seen revolutions. And number two: there's a huge interest on the part of the Gulf for these revolutions not to go further.

Saudi is investing a lot, especially into not losing Jordan. Israel is perfectly capable of conducting quiet relations with the Gulf and looking out for shared interests. All these places are still allied with America and Israel still has the odd ability to advance its interests in America. Perhaps the Israel-Palestine conflict will go off 'off-Broadway' as countries turn in on themselves and more focused on what the successor governments are going to be and even Islamist governments.

Remember, it's not so long ago that Israel basically helped the creation and entrenchment of Hamas because it saw Islamists as far more manageable than secular nationalists of the PLO. And I imagine that one of the messages that Washington is sending right now is, don't be so spooked by the Islamists, we can actually manage this, I think we've tried before and it's gone spectacularly wrong but I think that was because of the certain asks that the west made of them.

So I think Israel looks at this and says: Well if they're at war with each other fighting with SCAF, with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt over power etc maybe they'll leave us alone for a period of time. Secondly the axis of resistance could perhaps get weaker if the Assad regime falls, albeit Iraq may be moving closer into that orbit, especially now with the withdrawal of the US. For some this means that we're moving towards a perfect storm when one would pre-emptively take action on Iran – I think that would be terribly ill-advised and I'm not at all sure that that's what the government in Israel – I think that's what the government wants us all to think it is ready to do, and I don't rule it out given who's in government – but I still think it's a fantastic distraction.

I think it's the issue on which Israel still finds it most easy to say we're in the same camp as Europe, as the west, as the US – that in a parenthetical.

There is a third camp which is Turkey, and I don't want to get overly indulgent on the idea of Turkey being a model, but I think what's interesting there, which you haven't had in the non-democracies or in the axis of resistance, is the ability to wield soft power on the part of Turkey, and of course an ability to wield hard power. The question here is how much of a priority is Israel-Palestine as an issue for the Turks. I think the answer is only when Israel forces it onto the agenda. It may well be that events in the territories mean that it will be constantly forced onto the agenda.

And I'd argue that the Israeli government has a broader management strategy. In some ways the Arab Spring is helping Israel to slightly *Segway* out of the old '*we're all shared democracies*' into a new kind of narrative

which is *'we are together on a frontline of a Judeo-Christian civilization or struggle against the Muslim world'* and sometimes international law is being abused etc, so this is the new shared values narrative that the current Israeli government would pursue.

To wrap up why I think that is unsustainable, four points:

1) Arab regimes – and Jonathan talked about it – that have to take account of Arab public opinion because they are more democratic, those regimes I think it's pretty safe to say, and sometimes it will be a priority and sometimes it won't, but they will be less tolerant of Palestinian disenfranchisement and the denial of Palestinian freedom than Arab autocracies were. Whether things happen in Jordan and whether borders change there are still going to be Palestinians there and if Israel is in control of those Palestinians and denying them their freedoms then that is going to be on the agenda.

2) Secondly, Israel is eroding its own soft power capacity. We haven't talked about it much but what you see in the erosion of Israeli democracy – and those of you who follow it on a day-to-day basis and see legislation that's being introduced, and see the phenomenon both of a nationalism spinning out of control, of an ethnocracy more than a democracy as well as an increasingly powerful and intolerant set of religious leaders and institutions – is going to eat away at that very important well of identification with and support for Israel, including amongst Jewish communities overseas, albeit that might be a long-running phenomenon.

3) Thirdly, the US may get pulled back into the region but I think the signals in recent weeks have been very, very clear. The US has turned towards Asia and Treasury Secretary Geithner may have to hot-foot it over to Europe if there's an economic crisis and America may still be in Afghanistan and have other interests in the region, certainly energy interests, but the more America gets sucked back into the Middle East the more accelerated American decline will be and therefore Israel's ability to rely on America will be affected.

But I think the most unsustainable component of this – and this is what I want to end on and it's the point that Jonathan touched – is where is the Palestinian Spring and what will be the Palestinian strategy.

And here I think that all of the above could be manageable without Israel having to check the fundamentals of its position vis-à-vis the Palestinians, for as long as you have a divided Palestinian leadership that doesn't have a strategy and that is really rather easy for Israel to deal with.

I will say that from the perspective of being one year into the developments that are sometimes called the Arab Spring the resilience, the robustness of these old Oslo structures of having a Palestinian Authority that's reliant on Israel, that's reliant on the donors, of having a PLO leadership that has a strategy that looks much more like an Ancien Regime than of the new emerging Arab politics, that has shown much greater resilience than I would have imagined, but I think it would be a fool's bet to imagine that that continues indefinitely.

The Palestinian UN move was a very delicate diplomatic shot across the bow. It was a not a new strategy. What we haven't seen is the Palestinians saying: Sanction Israel. What we haven't seen is the Palestinians saying: Just give us democracy in one state. What we haven't seen is the Palestinians pursuing popular non-violent struggle. What we haven't seen is the Palestinians saying: You know what, we built a perfect parastatal structure in the Palestinian Authority, you didn't hand over the land, we're going to close down the PA, et cetera. And I think that eventually that will shift and create new questions for Israel.

I don't expect much from 2012. I think, as Jonathan said, Europe will be preoccupied, America will be preoccupied, but I think it will be a good time to wrap one's head around and understand the changing region, how it affects Israeli-Palestinian considerations and – which I won't talk about because I have run out of time – the changing dynamics inside Israel.

The Israeli right-wing have been in power for almost 35 years with a small hiatus I would argue. People don't appreciate enough that there is a new ruling elite in Israel; how to converse with that elite, what makes that elite tick, what it means to have a rapidly growing ultra-orthodox population; what it means to have part of the right-wing that is no longer too shy to admit that it wants a greater Israel Jewish state, and democracy can go hang.