

Is Turmoil in Egypt a Threat to Israel?

On the first night of the so-called “Arab Spring” in Egypt, I sat for three hours at a desk at CNN (video at the end of the article). That night I did my best to convince an inexperienced, and not very knowledgeable young anchor that this was not the kind of democracy that he and all those in the liberal Western press were making it out to be.

Given my firsthand knowledge of the situation, both empirically and academically, I sought to give him and his viewers a distinct picture of what would unfold. I warned that Islamists would soon sweep these well-meaning young people under the Egyptian sand.

Here we are, nearly eight months later, and I have never been invited back to CNN because they know I have every right to say, “I told you so.”

What was about to happen was apparent to those of us who have watched Islamists who, for years, were salivating to destroy public enemy No. 1 in the Arab world, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. For years they have longed to destroy the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel for which Mubarak was a guardian. As they waited, they quietly organized while supporting and supplying Hamas behind the scenes.

To be sure, the hard work and heavy price of the uprising was paid for not by the Islamists, but by a small group of genuine liberals from among Egypt’s educated young people. The Islamists watched from the shadows while some of these young people paid the ultimate price and died for the revolution. Once the revolution succeeded and Mubarak resigned, the Islamists came out of hiding and began flexing their muscles and are now running the country through intimidation and fear.

Sadly, for some of us—but not the Obama administration—this was expected.

Today the Salafists, who are heavily funded by their fellow Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, are literally forcing a weak and ineffective government's hand to appoint cabinet members and governors who are sympathetic to them.

All of this is taking place under the watchful eye of the wavering Egyptian army who has prosecuted civilians who criticize them while Islamists and the criminal elements in society are exercising true power. The Egyptian army's main focus in the last eight months has been to rebuild the army's multi-billion dollar businesses that were undermined by Jamal Mubarak and his new entrepreneurial class, all of whom are now under arrest with the former president.

However, the unintended consequence of the army's passivity and decriminalizing of al-Qaida and Islamic terrorist elements is that jihad fighters have moved in force into the Sinai Desert from Afghanistan, Yemen and Gaza. One Egyptian newspaper estimated that at least 6,000 al-Qaida fighters are now in Sinai.

First, they overwhelmed the police and took their weapons and now they are reaching their longed for goal—to attack Israel.

On Aug. 17, some of these al-Qaida fighters crossed the Egyptian-Israeli border, reportedly dressed in Egyptian army uniforms. They killed eight Israeli bus passengers and wounded 44 more. Israel mistakenly killed three Egyptian soldiers in the confusion and crossfire, inciting the wrath of a mass of Islamists in front of the Israeli Embassy in Egypt. There they demanded the end of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Finally, the Egyptian army moved into Sinai, breaking the spirit of the Camp David agreement in order to "quell the unrest." Still, al-Qaida is daily increasing in number in the Sinai desert, posing a real serious threat to Israel.

So the question is this: Does the Egyptian army have the will and the stomach to fight the thousands of al-Qaida fighters who have the support of millions of Islamists in Egypt, especially now that they see their goal of menacing Israel is in sight? This is going to be the ultimate test for the Egyptian army who has been funded for years by billions of American tax dollars.

Where is the Obama administration that was quick to turn their backs on one of America's oldest and most loyal Arab leaders? Oh yes, they condemned the attack on Israel. How noble! The American administration needs to be more forceful in its fight against terrorism, regardless of where it originates.

Dr. Michael Youssef's expertise on the Islamic culture and the Middle East in today's post-modern world is actively sought by hundreds of thousands of followers around the globe. With a Ph.D. from Emory University in social anthropology, his Egyptian heritage gives him particular insight into the cultural and religious entanglements of international affairs. □It is estimated that over 10 million viewers/listeners around the world are tuned in every week through an international Christian media ministry founded by Youssef, . It broadcasts via radio and television to over 200 countries and in over 20 languages. Follow Youssef, a common sense intellectual and renowned author of 24 books, on twitter @michaelayoussef and through his news blog, .

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