

## **Intelligence Flubbed it (Again)**

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The sea changes inundating the Arab world appear to be overwhelming peoples and countries. Despite the strategic importance and historical significance of these events, experts and intelligence officers seem to have been blind to it. Most of them realized it was a genuine revolution only when it hit them between the eyes. Now the intelligence officers' nightmare has become daytime reality. Welcome to the new Arab world!

Israel and other states invest massive resources in their intelligence assessment bodies.

As intelligence experts we are expected to outline trends and warn of changes and processes that pose risks and opportunities. Alas, this is not the first time that intelligence pundits were caught off-guard by events crashing around them.

A scan of recent history: This is exactly what happened when Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait; when the Berlin Wall fell; when Gorbachev introduced Glasnost and Perestroika; and, lest we forget, when the 1973 Yom Kippur broke out.

After such failures, intelligence specialists and national civilian and military leaders convene to draw conclusions, but we're still caught by surprise each time. To explain the phenomenon, we need to examine the intelligence available to specialists, and how they analyze it and derive their intelligence assessment.

In each case, it was found, after the event, that the pundits had sufficient intelligence but their analyses were off the mark.

In light of the unprecedented happenings in the Arab world, the intelligence picture that was assembled, mainly from unclassified sources, indicated that the rising tide of unrest brewing on the "Arab street" over the gaps between the elite and the people was generating enormous tensions. Accessibility to the democratic world, made possible by the press (as well Internet, TV, and radio), entrenched the frustration in the Arab public and found release in demonstrations, which the government suppressed. Be this as it may, these signs were not clear enough for intelligence bodies and think tanks to conclude that the masses would overpower the tyrant, and the intensity of protests increase.

The intelligence specialists' mistaken assessments and inability to foresee paradigm shifts, even after the revolution erupted, (such as the estimate that Mubarak would remain in power until the next presidential elections) is indicative of the major flaw in the intelligence branches.



On the one hand, we excel in operative and tactical intelligence analysis, and in providing accurate intelligence in real time that enables spot-on targeted killings; on the other hand, we lack strategic intelligence.

How to improve this state of affairs? First, by establishing tighter cooperation between the intelligence bodies in the democratic countries on strategic issues, and second, recruiting the sharpest minds in the universities for intelligence work. This could lead to a better understanding of the powerful cultural, religious, historical, and socioeconomic forces flowing below the surface in Arab society. We need to collect detailed descriptions of the Zeitgeist in the Arab states and make them an integral part of the intelligence assessment. Also, academic institutions should be encouraged to research these matters and hold international conferences with the world's leading experts.

Having said all this, we must retain a sense of proportion regarding our capabilities and limitations, and remain open-minded and ever-questioning. Even if we pull our collective efforts together, it is doubtful if we'll be able to predict and evaluate every coming development. Therefore, as far as Israel's security and survival are concerned, we must always be ready to defend ourselves in any scenario.