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Political upheavals sweeping through the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb last year have already reshaped and are still reshaping geopolitical order in this region, thus complicating the situation of Israeli and regional security. From this perspective, the most important element of this „revolutionary domino” is Egypt. The provisional military council, which still holds power, has declared that it would honor the peace agreement with Israel, but now, with the Muslim Brotherhood scheduled to form a new Egyptian government in the near future, it is very hard to predict in which direction the situation will evolve.

Until now, neither the Israeli government, nor Israeli society have clearly responded to the events in the region. Although Israeli abstemiousness from any intervention, including a verbal one, into situation of other states of the region could be perceived as reasonable, Israel’s idleness may appear, especially in a long-term perspective, to be cost-intensive, not only for Israel. Lack of support for these bottom-up social movements in the region can become opportunity cost, since Israel is losing a chance to boost its reputation among the Arab societies which stand against their authoritarian regimes.

The main aim of the article is to examine the situation in terms of security, with a special focus on the Egyptian-Israeli relations intertwined with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The analysis encompasses the period, since the fall of Hosni Mubarak until today. In terms of the subject, the article covers events which have been taking place for the last year and which are relevant to the topic of this article (i.e. agreement between Fatah and Hamas, lifting Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip).

The article has a uniform composition, with a few subsections, which are entitled as follows: historical introduction into Egyptian-Israeli relations, the policy of Hosni Mubarak towards Israel, Palestinian Autonomy and the conflict, Israel’s reaction to the Arab revolts, new opening of the Egyptian policy after the fall of Mubarak and elections in Egypt, negative and positive potential of this „new opening” in terms of Israeli-Palestinian conflict and restoration of

Egyptian-Israeli relations, recapitulation. The research material that is used in the article includes media (especially press) releases, statements and comments of the relevant politicians, available experts' analyses and statistical data.

Egyptian-Israeli relations until the change of power in Egypt

At the very beginning, mutual relations between the two countries were very hostile, which is easily observable in the fact of the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948, called The War of Independence by Israeli, and Nakba Day (arab. *Yawm an-Nakbah*, The Day of The Catastrophe) by the Arabs. In this war, lost by the Arab side, Egypt was not yet a political leader of the Arabs because this role was occupied by the king of the then Transjordan, Abdullah I. Nevertheless, Egypt, together with Iraq, made the greatest military contribution, sending around 20 000 soldiers¹.

The situation changed after the war in 1956, which was called the Suez Crisis. On 26 VII, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, which undermined interests of western powers, especially Great Britain. Moreover, Israeli seafaring through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tirana was blocked since 1949, so Israel was eager to establish a free way for its ships through both passages. After consultations with France and Great Britain, Israel launched the operation „Kadesh”, which was later assisted by France and Great Britain².

Although in terms of military achievements Egypt lost the war, it won a lot politically. Being a victim of a joint western-Israeli aggression, Egypt became a leader of the Arab camp and soon the most powerful part of it. Another outcome was a reversal of alliances. After having been attacked by western powers, Egypt became a natural ally for the Soviet Union. It recognized People's Republic of China as the sole representative of the Chinese nation and received financial help from the USSR for the construction of the Asuan dam and military assistance – those are the symbols of the first Egyptian reversal of alliances³.

The cooperation between Egypt and the Soviet Union lasted for the next 16 years and was even stronger after an Israeli pre-emptive attack in 1967 because Egypt was still striving to gain advantage in the conflict with the Jewish state, and for that reason cooperation with the USSR was indispensable. But the situation changed after Anwar Al Sadat's rise to power in 1970. He was determined to recover the Sinai Peninsula from Israel, which had occupied the territory since the Six-Day War. As the initial peace measure failed, he decided to confront Israel

¹ P. R. Kumaraswamy, *The A to Z of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Lanham (Maryland) 2009, s. 22-23.

² *Ibidem*, p. 251-252

³ See: H. M. Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, New York 1976.

with armed forces once again. Due to deteriorating relations with the USSR and in order to mislead Israelis about Egypt's military potential, Sadat expelled Soviet military specialists from Egypt and then launched a surprise October war in 1973⁴.

Despite initial military successes, the coalition of Egypt and Syria lost with Israel, which was already supported by the United States⁵. That was a turning point in the policy of Anwar Sadat, who eventually came to the conclusion, that the only way to settle the conflict with Israel and to regain Sinai, was a peace agreement. New policy of Sadat in this regard led also to the second reversal of alliances. Endorsing a peace solution of the conflict with Israel made Egypt a partner for the western countries supporting Israel, and most of all for the USA.

With the brokerage of president Jimmy Carter, the peace accords between Egypt and Israel were signed in Camp David (US) on 18 IX 1978, by Anwar Al Sadat and Menachem Begin (prime minister of Israel). Egypt regained Sinai, but lost authority among other Arab countries, a fact which appeared most notably in the exclusion of Egypt from the League of Arab States in 1979⁶. Nevertheless, the most important part of the peace accords in terms of Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the first (out of two) treaties signed by both sides. It stated that the complete peace process in the Middle East can be achieved only by ensuring Palestinian autonomy and self-government. The statement was differently interpreted by each side of the accords, the USA, Egypt and Israel, but it was important that Egypt accepted to a certain degree some scope of political responsibility for the future regulations on Palestinian autonomy and statehood.

Policy of Hosni Mubarak

Anwar Sadat paid the highest price for the peace with Israel – he was assassinated in an attempt organized by an Egyptian officer. The attack was most probably initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood (The Society of the Muslim Brothers), a fundamental Islamists group, which has never fully accepted the peace accords with the Jewish state⁷. The power in Egypt was then assumed by the air force commander, Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak set himself clear aims of his policy: continuation of the political line accepted by his predecessor and staying in power. Both aims were opposed by the Islamists led by the Muslim Brotherhood, which made them the main enemy of the new Egyptian president. In this way Hosni Mubarak and Israel

⁴ N. J. Ashton, *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-73*, London 2007, s. 136.

⁵ D. Little, *The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, Chapel Hill 2002, s. 92.

⁶ P. R. Kumaraswamy, *op.cit.*, s. 22-23.

⁷ *Ibidem*, s. 225-226.

found common ground to cooperate on, as the Muslim Brotherhood gained already measurable influence among the Palestinians, which materialized most of all in Hamas and Islamic Jihad⁸, which won election in PA in 2006, and seized full power in Gaza Strip one year later⁹.

Combating Islamist radicalism was not the only platform of cooperation between Egypt in Israel, but this element was intertwined with the next one: Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As mentioned above, one of the Camp David accords concerned the creation of the Palestinian Autonomy. Both sides, Hosni Mubarak and the government in Jerusalem, were aware of a negative capability of the conflict, which could destabilize the situation in the whole region. Therefore they shared one common aim – to reach some kind of agreement that would provide at least a minimal level of stability. It seemed that Hosni Mubarak really was striving for such a peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, even more than Israelis themselves, who could allow themselves to persist in *status quo* without any agreement for a long time¹⁰. Mubarak, meanwhile, treated the possibility of such an agreement as another tool in a combat against the influence of Islamists in Egypt and in the region.

There are many facts which prove the described direction of Mubarak's policy towards Israel and the conflict. Egypt was always supporting peace initiatives that aimed at reconciliation between the Israelis and Palestinians. During the Madrid conference, Egypt was a stabilizing actor, representing Palestinian interest, but trying to set some level of equilibrium, which finally led to the Oslo Accords¹¹. In the year 2000, when Jerusalem and occupied territories were struck by the Second Intifada, just after having condemned the visit of Ariel Sharon at the Mount Temple, Hosni Mubarak initiated efforts to alleviate the conflict. On 17 X all parties met in Cairo to negotiate a cease fire and a plan of further talks. Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak did not come to an agreement, and shortly afterwards power in Israel was taken by conservative Likud and Ariel Sharon, who was absolutely not considered in Egypt as someone who can lead Israel to peace, because of his military past¹². The peace process broke down completely after the operation Defensive Shield in 2002¹³ and the relations between Egypt and Israel were broken off as well.

⁸ See: B. Rubin (ed.), *The Muslim Brotherhood: the organization and policies of a global Islamist movement*, Basingstoke 2010.

⁹ http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-06-14-gaza_N.htm (8 VI 2011).

¹⁰ E. Levy, *PA: Israel not interested in peace*, <http://www.ynetnews.com> (28 VI 2011).

¹¹ See: N.J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 2003.

¹² Especially because of Sharon's role in the massacres in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

¹³ See: S. MacBride, *Israel in Lebanon: The Report of International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International Law by Israel during its invasion of the Lebanon*, London 1983.

Meanwhile, Hosni Mubarak did not abandon his struggle to achieve stabilization, at least within the Palestinian Autonomy. In 2003, in Cairo, he organized a meeting of all Palestinian parties, to achieve reconciliation between them. His aim was to incorporate Hamas Islamic Jihad into the mainstream of Palestinian politics under the leadership of Fatah and neutralize them by the same token. Mubarak did not manage to bring Palestinian parties to an agreement because Hamas and Islamic Jihad refused to accept Fatah leadership and to abandon an armed struggle against Israel¹⁴.

Nevertheless, in the meantime Egypt established contacts with the administration of prime minister Sharon, which resulted in another peace initiative. Sharon began to introduce his unilateral disengagement plan,¹⁵ which envisaged Egyptian responsibility in Gaza and Jordanian in the West Bank, in terms of security. Against Palestinian objection, Egypt engaged some forces to train Palestinian police forces in the Gaza Strip. Sharon's plan finally failed in 2005, when Palestinians assumed full control over the Gaza Strip, but did not follow the scheme of „land for peace”, which some representatives of Israeli government were predicting¹⁶. The strongest position in the Gaza Strip was taken by Hamas, which was of course against the interest of both Israel and Egypt. This unfortunate turn of events laid base for a future very close cooperation between both states, regarding the Gaza Strip.

Since the very beginning of Hamas in 1987, it was quite obvious it will not find the support of Hosni Mubarak and Egypt. In his effort to bring Israelis and Palestinians to a negotiations table, Mubarak was supporting Fatah with Yasser Arafat (and Mahmud Abbas later on), as its nationalistic and left-winged political ideology were much closer to the political ideology promoted or represented by Hosni Mubarak. It proved exceptionally strong during a crisis in the Gaza Strip after elections in PA in the year 2006, when Hamas got the upper-hand in the parliamentary elections¹⁷. After the creation of the Hamas government with Ismail Haniyeh serving as prime minister, the tensions between both parties were growing and led eventually to an armed clash. Despite many attempts to reconcile both sides, the conflict escalated and led finally to a civil war both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the middle of 2007 the division between a Hamas-controlled Gaza and a Fatah-controlled West Bank occurred. This situation created space for

¹⁴ A. Howeldy, *What truces*, „Al-Ahram Weekly”, nr 623.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Disengagement+-+Plan+-+General+Outline.htm> (28 VI 2011).

¹⁶ J. Peters, *The Gaza Disengagement: Five Years Later*, „Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs” 2010, IV, nr 3.

¹⁷ S. Wilson, *Hamas Sweeps Palestinian Elections, Complicating Peace Efforts in Mideast*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/26/AR2006012600372.html> (8 VI 2011).

an Egyptian-Israeli cooperation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The firm blockade of the Gaza Strip was created from the Egyptian and Israeli side¹⁸. Hosni Mubarak ordered to fight every attempt of breaching this blockade, as he was afraid of Hamas' aggressive militancy influence on fundamental groups in Egypt.

The policy of Hosni Mubarak with regard to Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears to have been a very clear project. The main foundation and propeller of such a policy was a fight against Islamist fundamentalists and their influence in Egypt. Therefore, Mubarak had consequently supported the moderate party of Fatah and its leaders, aiming at bringing PA and Israel to peace. The last few years were marked by a close cooperation with Israel with regard to the Gaza Strip blockade, thus preventing Hamas from receiving reinforcement from the outside and from attacking its borderlands with Egypt and Israel. The fact that Mubarak's policy was promoting *status quo* so strongly in the past few years plays a significant role in the context of the Egyptian revolt and changes that it has been bringing lately, which will be shown further on.

Israel's reaction to the Arab revolts

Israel's reaction to the Egyptian revolt, and the fall of Mubarak, was in general terms very one-sided and intra-orientated. Moreover, in the course of the revolt, the reaction was very ambivalent and unsteady. At the beginning of the riots, the president of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, stated in an interview that *Mubarak's contribution to peace will never be forgotten*¹⁹. He additionally expressed concerns about a possibility of future free elections in Egypt, which may bring to power fundamentalist, like the Muslim Brotherhood. The reactions of other Israelis politicians, including Binyamin Netanyahu, were not referring to the situation in Egypt itself, but were pointing that Israel is taking a close look on the ongoing events and will do everything that is necessary to ensure Israel's security. On the other hand, when the government in Jerusalem saw that the protesters were gaining a real chance to succeed in their demands towards Mubarak to step down, Netanyahu cautiously valued positively „the advancement of free and democratic values in the Middle East”²⁰.

The attitude prevailing within the Israeli society was very diversified . During the time of Mubarak's fall, Israelis were showing a lower level of indifference than

¹⁸ P. R. Kumaraswamy, *op.cit.*, s. 89-90.

¹⁹ O. Efraim, *Peres praises Mubarak for his contribution to peace*, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4024283,00.html> (6 VI 2011).

²⁰ J. Lipman, *Cautious support for Egypt protests from Israel's Peres and Netanyahu*, <http://www.thejc.com/news/israel-news/44542/cautious-support-egypt-protests-israels-peres-and-netanyahu> (6 VI 2011).

their government and 74% of them state that Arab uprisings are of great interest to them. The numbers are not so clear any more when the Jewish Israelis are asked about how they value the events of Arab revolts in general: 52% assessed them positively. Only 47% gave a positive answer to the question how the uprisings will influence countries bordering with Israel. Even less positive numbers are presented as an answer to the question about the future of the peace process: 38% say it will have no effect and over 27% that it will have negative influence. Quite surprisingly, in comparison with the above-presented results, over 70% of Israelis stated that a passive attitude of their government in the wake of Arab revolts was correct²¹. This number means a slight discrepancy with the indicator saying that the Israelis are interested in the Arab uprisings: they believe that these events are important for their country, but at the same time, they perceive them as something that is not clear and does not require an active involvement of their country. At the same, it is worthy noting that a vast majority of Jewish Israelis, as much as 70%, said there are slim chances of creating a democratic system in Egypt in near future, whereas 49% stated that there is a high probability that a new regime in Egypt will be Iranian-like²².

It can be seen that Israel did not come out with any coherent stance towards the revolt and changes in Egypt. At the beginning, the perspective of losing such a partner as Hosni Mubarak to the containment of a strict policy of radical Islamism was quite frightening in terms of the Gaza Strip blockade, which if loosened, could greatly strengthen Hamas. There are some cues that Jerusalem had exercised some pressure on Washington to deliver support for Mubarak²³. On the other hand, when it became clear that the Egyptian president will lose power, and that nothing else can be done, very cautious and timid support of civil movement was demonstrated.

In terms of the above-described reaction of Israel, one can see that Israel has lost a unique chance to make a step forward in the relations with his closest neighbors and the Arab world at all. A clear support for the bottom-up democratic movement in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria, could boost Israel's reputation among the Arabs. „To boost”, does not mean to make the Arabs think positively of the Jewish state, but to improve a little bit its reputation, which would be of crucial importance in the upcoming socio-political transformations in the Middle East. Israeli support for the protesters would prevent a probable new Egyptian government from criticizing it for favoring a former dictator, who ordered to shoot at his own people. Such a support could also create a better atmosphere for the political opening that we have been recently witnessing.

²¹ <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=204> (6 VI 2011).

²² <http://www.bicom.org.uk/context/opinion-polls/peace-index> (6 VI 2011).

²³ <http://worldscenetoday.com/2011/02/01/israeli-critics-us-should-support-mubarak-jerusalem-post/> (8 VI 2011).

New opening of the Egyptian policy

Meanwhile, with Israel following the policy of non-involvement, the first signals of the upcoming new opening in Egyptian foreign policy can be observed. The main candidates for the position of the president, the representatives of the society and even the ruling Military Council are making statements and undertaking actions that mark a serious change in the Egyptian foreign policy. One of the main and measureable appearances of this change is a new policy towards the Gaza Strip. Fulfilling one of the postulates issued by the protesters during demonstrations on the Tahrir Square, the Gaza Strip blockade was lifted. Firstly, in April, Egypt stopped the construction of a steel wall, ground-set along border with the Gaza²⁴. The next step was made at the end of May 2011, when the Military Council decided to fulfill its promises, and fully opened the Rafa crossing²⁵. This decision has officially ended 4-year long blockade of the Gaza Strip and has greatly complicated Israel's security situation. One can make a justified assumption that together with all kind of legal commodities, also illegal material, like weapons, explosives etc. will start penetrating the border to the Gaza Strip as well. In the context of the first in seven years terrorist attack in Jerusalem,²⁶ such a new situation regarding Gaza and probable significant strengthening of Hamas military potential, Israel seems to have well-founded reasons for concern about own security. The danger of Hamas and Israel falling into a spiral of violence, with Hamas rocketing southern Israel and IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) making counter-operations in the Gaza Strip, has greatly increased.

Before the opening of the Rafa crossing, yet another significant event took place. Due to active brokerage of Egypt, on 14 V, in Cairo, Fatah and Hamas signed an official second agreement on unity government. Mahmud Abbas and Khaled Meshaal decided to create a government of technocrats, responsible for preparations of parliamentary elections, preferably this year. Security issues in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will be, respectively, the responsibility of Fatah and Hamas²⁷. The reaction of Israel was flat – prime minister Netanyahu condemned the agreement, saying that Abbas has to choose peace with Israel or with Hamas, which still officially seeks Israel's destruction.

From the perspective of a conservative government in Jerusalem, the situation has deteriorated dramatically since the fall of Hosni Mubarak: Israel witnessed firstly a terrorist attack on its own territory, the Gaza Strip is not blocked any-

²⁴ <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/397326> (8 VI 2011).

²⁵ <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=222597&R=R3> (8 VI 2011).

²⁶ C. Balmer, *Bombing near Jerusalem bus stop kills woman, 30 hurt*, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/03/23/uk-israel-explosion-idUKTRE72M3S520110323> (6 VI 2011).

²⁷ Text of the agreement: <http://middleeast.about.com/od/palestinepalestinians/qt/Fatah-Hamas-Reconciliation-Agreement.htm> (8 VI 2011).

more, and the only Palestinian leader who had a potential to lead PA to a peace agreement, has reconciled with Hamas. Additionally, the elections in Egypt mark a new opening of the Egyptian policy towards Israel and the region – not so favorable a policy, as it was during Mubarak's rule. First of all, Muslim Brothers from the Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafis from Al-Nour are the most important parties of the parliament²⁸. Islamic parties won a clear majority, even though a few months earlier support for them was much lower: the Freedom and Justice enjoyed the second largest support (12%) after Wafd Party (23%)²⁹. The Muslim Brotherhood very strongly voices its critical attitude towards Israel and is calling for a policy change and support for Gaza, implicitly for Hamas³⁰. For the time being, it seems that the most important postulates of the Muslim Brotherhood have been met: Egypt has opened border with the Gaza Strip and Hamas enjoys official recognition of Egypt and is a part of PA government. The second „bad news” for Israel is a strong position of the former leader of the League of Arab States, Amr Mousa. He enjoys the highest public support (30,7%) over one month before presidential elections scheduled for May and June this year. The next candidate, a Salafi preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, has support at the level of 28,8%)³¹. It is bad news for Israel because Amr Mousa has been known for his criticism of Israel already for many years, and lately he strongly opts for the rationalization of Egyptian foreign policy towards the USA, Israel and Arab neighbors. In addition to sometimes aggressive rhetoric, Mousa has passed the message that he would end the policy of dependency to the USA and Israel, sustaining peace at the same time. In his opinion, Egypt should „get up off its knees” and take a justified position of the Arab leader in the region and in the League of Arab States. Another important statement from Mousa is that he predicts and accepts the dominant roles on the Egyptian political scene for the Muslim Brotherhood.³²

²⁸ 37,5% of People's Assembly seats for the Freedom and Justice, and 27,8% for Al-Nour. Next, secular parties received below 10%: New Wafd (9,2%) and Egyptian Block (8,9%). The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi dominated also the higher chamber of the parliament, the Shura Council. More data about elections' results at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com> (5 X 2011).

²⁹ *Egypt National Survey, March 9-20*, International Peace Institute Poll Conducted by Charney Research, s. 8.

³⁰ See: A. C. McCarthy, *Hamas Is the Muslim Brotherhood*, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/258381/hamas-muslim-brotherhood-andrew-c-mccarthy> (8 VI 2011).

³¹ Next candidates seems to be off the race, with the support below 10%. See: <http://news.egypt.com/english/permalink/101703.html> (25 IV 2012).

³² K. Szulc, *Prawdopodobna reorientacja polityki zagranicznej Egiptu*, <http://www.pcsa.org.pl/products/prawdopodobna-reorientacja-polityki-zagranicznej-egiptu/> (7 VI 2011).

Recapitulation

The Middle East, especially the above-described Egyptian-Israeli relation, is facing a serious turning point. As almost all situations of a significant change, Egyptian, and broader, Arab revolt and its consequences for the security in the Middle East, can bring both threats and chances. In this short recapitulation, the author will present these problems and chances that are standing before the actors of the Middle East scene.

The threat for the regional security derives from two sources: from Israel and from its neighborhood. The problems coming from outside of Israel were described in the previous section and they are the following:

- Presenting practical reorientation of the Egyptian foreign policy (end of Gaza's blockade, unity government in PA) and possible future continuation of this reorientation after parliamentary elections (if they are organized at all);
- Strengthening Hamas, both politically and militarily, may lead to more offensive actions in Israel, and Israeli armed response – spiral of violence;
- Unity government with stronger Hamas, and weaker Fatah (Mahmud Abbas has lost unconditional ally – Hosni Mubarak) will be far less eager for peace talks with Israel.

Analyzing these threats, one cannot separate them from the factors threatening the security, that derive from Israel's policy, as they are strongly intertwined. The policy of Israel in past year was very confrontational, and therefore was in fact deteriorating the level of the state's security. Continuing construction of illegal settlements on the West Bank and in Eastern Jerusalem led to an almost complete collapse of the peace talks with Fatah. Moreover, such an aggressive Israeli stance has complicated greatly, the already difficult situation of Mahmud Abbas, the Palestinian president who was striving for peace with Israel. The failure of peace negotiations, for which Israel is internationally blamed, also by the USA and Europe, has weakened the position of Abbas in PA and strengthened the position presented by Hamas. Without clear support from Egypt, Fatah seems to be in retreat in the new unity government. Hamas in the meantime, politically accepted, growing in support and in military strength, thanks to a lifted blockade, will probably intensify bombing and rocketing of Israel. Hard-lined policy of Israel can deliver proofs for the Palestinians that a peaceful option of Fatah has failed, and Hamas armed option is getting more valid. Hamas' offensive can prove Israelis that their conservative government was right, and that a strict policy against Hamas is needed. Such a scenario of self-fulfilling prophecies is the greatest threat for the region in a short-termed perspective. In addition to growing military pressure exercised towards Israel, the IDF may face another, far more complicated problem. It seems that not only Fatah, but also Hamas are embracing

a non-violent strategy³³. IDF soldiers are not well prepared to react to civil disobedience shown by the Palestinians, and as media coverage of the clashes between the two sides is very broad, Israel may suffer from serious image damage³⁴.

Israel's policy and its lack of positive reactions on the Egyptian and Arab revolts mean a lost chance of a quicker reconciliation in the Middle East, but it is a short-term perspective. As it has been signaled before, each threat can become a chance, especially in the long-term perspective. Positive outcomes of the present turning-point and crisis in peace negotiations in the Middle East could in long-term perspective be followed by:

- The relations between Egypt, PA and Israel could get much more „real“. Till now, Israel was dealing with Hosni Mubarak, who exercised dictatorial rule, that had no foundation in the public support. Short-termed aggravation of mutual relations after elections in Egypt and PA, could lead to more realistic agreement between both sides in the future³⁵;
- If Egypt secures the unity government agreement between Fatah and Hamas, it could be a chance to bring Hamas into a more mainstream policy, distract it from the influence of Iran and make it renounce forcible struggle against Israel and recognize Israel's right to exist.

The changes in the Middle East pose a challenge for every state and non-state actor of the region. Both negative and positive scenarios are possible. Certainly in the nearest future the Middle East will still be a very volatile region. Political configuration in Israel seems to be the most antagonistic at the moment, which can result in an open conflict, if one takes into account the growing strength and position of Hamas. Against the backdrop of the revolts, especially the still unresolved situation in Syria, and the whole process of power-shift, as well as Iran with its nuclear ambitions, the situation seems to be as explosive as it has not been for a long time now. Nevertheless, there are still constraints and forces which are able to secure the minimal level of stability, which may result in a more firmly-grounded agreement within the triangle Egypt – Israel – PA, based not only on the agreement between political leaders, but between leaders who are socially responsible and who represent interests of their societies to a greater extent.

However, if one was to judge the upcoming immediate trend in the region, it is negative and the security in the Middle East has been deteriorating. The radical Muslim Brotherhood won the elections in Egypt. If the Military Council gives away the power and allows the Islamists to seize it, the worst case scenario for the Israelis may come true. If the peace treaty between new Egypt and Israel is

³³ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4166834,00.html> (6 V 2012).

³⁴ One can see many movies on YouTube.com, picturing the outcomes of Palestinian non-violent protests in the Occupied Territories.

³⁵ Clear majority of 63% in Egypt still declares support for the party, that would sustain peace with Israel. *Egypt National Survey, op.cit.*

renounced or broken, the situation can get out of control of any key player in this region. Such scenario seems to be quite possible, if one takes into account the way how the delegation of the Muslim Brotherhood travelling around Europe and presenting their views treats relations with Israel. They say that Israel had already violated the treaty – now it is only the matter of Muslim Brotherhood's response. The question now is, where more durable agreement could be negotiated in the somehow new Middle East, if the short-term turbulences do not destroy the long-term perspective.

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