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Israel's Economy

Food prices in Israeli supermarkets recently surveyed rose 19-38% since September, based on a sample of 23 products including meat, fish, vegetables, basic foodstuffs and cleaning products. The overall average rise in prices across the supermarkets was 30%. The survey was conducted in branches of four main discount supermarket chains in the Tel Aviv region. Each store was examined twice.

For a short while following the summer protests, when hundreds of thousands protested food, housing and amenities prices, consumers expected prices to be reduced permanently. This was not to be. By way of example, Taster's Choice coffee rose by 45% in the last month and cornflakes by 46%. The cost of mineral water rose 50%. Canola oil was 102% more expensive. The price of almost every sampled product is now higher than when the protests began.

The Government responded to protests by establishing the Trajtenberg Committee, which submitted recommendations that were meant to revolutionize national priorities. Prime Minister Netanyahu undertook to ensure his Government would immediately adopt and implement the recommendations, whatever they might be. He has since back-pedaled. The recommendations, considered by many to be limp and insufficient, have been modified, discussed, dissected and altered. What remains of them now awaits Government approval. The recommendations suggested nothing to increase competition in Israel's highly centralized banking and credit cards system, or in the pension savings industry. Five families control the automotive industry, and a single company controls all of the major malls. Taxation is still contra-social and contra-business and industry, except for those whose connections or finances enable them to massage the system.

Corporate tax is theoretically high (24%), but the larger monopolies pay 4-8% or less because they are accorded special tax reliefs, specific tax assessments and dozens of taxation loopholes tailored for them by the Finance Ministry.

Just under a quarter of Israelis live below the poverty line, with less than live on less than \$1,375 per household per month. The middle class is increasingly impoverished. One of the

worst problems in Israel is the cost of housing, which has soared. A square meter for a flat in the center of the country (approximately a square yard) costs \$4,347. A three-bedroom apartment costs about \$520,000, equaling 135 monthly salaries.

The Finance Ministry's Budgets Department reflects an inherent, structural conflict of interest. The Department is responsible for macroeconomic policy, which means it must ensure that the budget is always balanced. But it is also responsible for income, leading them inexorably toward a steady increase of taxation. As is well known, taxation is a brake on economic activity, and often a source of significant inequality.

Will the Arab Spring Turn into Winter?

By Robert Reilly <rreilly@msn.com>. Originally published Monday, 12 September 2011 by [www. Mercatornet.com](http://www.Mercatornet.com).

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Robert Reilly has worked in foreign policy, the military, and the arts. His most recent book is [The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis](#)

With the lunatic tyrant Moammar Gaddafi almost gone from Libya and the ground shaking under Bashir Assad's feet in Syria, one could only wish that hopes for the Arab Spring were on as solid a foundation as many seem to think. One's heart naturally goes out to those who have been trampled for generations by one-party states or megalomaniac supreme leaders. These people are getting their first taste of freedom, and it is exhilarating for them and for all in the West who wish them well.

For example, John O'Sullivan celebrates that "Egyptians, Tunisians, Syrians, and Libyans have now proved that they too value liberty and that they are prepared to make terrible sacrifices for themselves and their fellow-countrymen. That does not establish that liberal democracy can thrive in the Middle East, but it settles the question of whether Arab societies want it. They do." Well, if they want liberal democracy, why not establish it—especially after having sacrificed so much to overthrow the tyrants? What possible obstacles might there be to achieving this?

Some think the obstacles are few. In "The Arab Spring Is Still Alive", Matthew Kaminski, of the *Wall Street Journal*, makes a direct comparison to the democracies

that emerged after the fall of the Soviet empire and suggests that this will be as easy a transition for the Arabs. However, this leaves aside a critically important ingredient: culture. The peoples of Eastern Europe had a far better time adapting to democracy because, despite the depredations of Communism, they had roots in a Judeo-Christian culture that holds that all people are created in God's image. Part of that image is the primacy of reason, founded in God's own *logos*. The integrity of reason and its ability to know morality is the foundation of freedom of conscience and the freedom to choose.

In asking where the Arab Spring might go, we would do well to consider sources of legitimacy. Upon what accepted principles might the new order establish itself? In Islam, sovereignty is exclusively God's because, in the Qur'an's account of creation, man is *not* made in the image and likeness of God. At a recent inter-faith Iftar dinner, a rabbi and an evangelical preacher both spoke movingly of everyone being made in the image of God. The Sunni imam also spoke movingly, but not in these words. I asked him afterwards and in private if he, too, as a Muslim, could proclaim that man was made in the image and likeness of God. He blanched, but

recovered by simply saying that we were all equally made by God. Yes, but that is not the same thing.

The Islamic doctrine of *tanzih* teaches that God is so infinitely transcendent that absolutely no comparison can be made between Him and anything else. There is nothing "like" Him, certainly not man. The Judeo-Christian notion from *Genesis* of man possessing the *imago Dei* is a scandalous blasphemy in Islam. There is nothing God-like in man's reason, which is unable to apprehend morality and has no integrity of its own. This is why there is no freedom of conscience acknowledged in Islamic jurisprudence.

This helps us understand the huge support - some 84 percent, according to Pew Research - for the death penalty for apostasy from Islam in Egypt today. Freedom of conscience remains an alien notion. Therefore, one must ask whether the desired freedom of the Arab Spring is truly based upon the proposition that *all* people are created equal. How many Egyptians actually believe that Copts and Muslims, men and women, believers and nonbelievers are equal - to say nothing of Jews and Muslims? Where is the underlying support in their culture for the truth of this proposition? If it is not there, it will be freedom for some and oppression for others. As Bernard Lewis has pointed out, the discourse in Egypt today is still "religiously defined" and "the language of Western democracy is for the most part newly translated and not intelligible to the great masses."

Yes, as Kaminski says, "the voice of the people... is heard loudly in Tahrir Square." But one should recall that the largest such gathering of several million people was in February for Muslim Brotherhood spiritual leader Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who had recently returned from exile. The Muslim

Brotherhood is the quintessential Islamist organization, founded in 1928 to restore the caliphate. In his book *Islam and Secularism Face to Face*, al-Qaradawi stated that "secularism is atheism." Not a good sign.

Until the problem of the underlying culture is addressed, there will be no soil in which the Arab Spring can permanently root itself. As has been the case in the past, the transition may be from one set of oppressors to another. Speaking of the desolation in which Gaddafi's ruinous rule has left Libya, Fouad Ajami writes, "There are no viable institutions to sustain it..." Indeed, there are not, which is why the Transitional National Council has turned to traditional sources of authority in Islam. In a constitutional declaration, the rebel council stated that Libya will be democratic but that "Islam is the religion of the state and the principle (sic) source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence." This statement closely parallels a provision in the Egyptian constitution, placed there by Anwar Sadat when he was the ruler. It did not betoken democratic development. It remains to be seen whether democracy can prove in any way compatible with a literal, or any other, understanding of this constitutional declaration.

Are these obstacles insurmountable? Must the Arab Spring turn into winter? Must these people's dreams of freedom be dashed once again? Are they forever prisoners of a dysfunctional culture? In my book, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, I tried to give the background to these questions, but it may be best to let Arab intellectual reformers answer them. There is an exciting new venue in which to see what they have to say - the website: Almuslih.org. (It is in both Arabic and English.) According to its mission statement, *Almuslih.org* "aims to maximize the exposure and distribution of journalism and

analyses promoting progressive thought in the Arab Middle East and the Muslim world." Go there to see how some of the most brilliant minds in the Arab world, like writer Sayyid al-Qimny, Abd al-Hamid al-Ansari, the former Dean of Islamic Law at Qatar University, and Hassan Mneimneh, director of the Iraq Memory Foundation, understand the situation today and what must be done to secure a democratic future. Invariably, they address the problem of the culture.

Contrary to al-Qaradawi's condemnation of secularism, Tunisian philosopher Latif Lakhdar, one of the brightest lights in the Muslim world, calls for "an acceptance of the division between the domains of faith and politics." He also states that a reformed Islam "ends the conception of the world divided up into an Abode of Islam destined for expansion and an Abode of War destined for 'Jihad unto the end of time,' as al-Bukhari's Hadith has it." Lakhdar says forthrightly, "our faith today constitutes a part of the problem, and it is incumbent upon us to reform it, in the school of religious rationalism, so that we turn it into a part of the solution."

I am particularly delighted by the most recent posting on Almuslih, an article titled "Freedom and the Progress of Civilization", by Mohammed al-Sanduk. Al-Sanduk confirms my thesis in *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* that the greatest scientific and cultural achievements of the Arab Muslim world occurred during, and because of, the ascendancy of the rational theologians, the Mu'tazilites, whose thinking "laid emphasis on the freedom of choice and on the responsibilities that accompany this." Likewise, its decline resulted because of their suppression. He even provides a chart which tracks the rise and fall of Muslim scientific achievement parallel to the rise and fall of Mu'tazilite thought.

One of the best essays on the website is "A Manifesto for Reform", by the eloquent Hasan Hanafi, chairman of the philosophy department at Cairo University. He writes that "no real change can take place if there is not a change in the mindset first." This is the reason, he says, that prior efforts at reform have failed because they "started with social, political and economic structures rather than with inherited intellectual substructures, which remained unchanged even as liberal, western enlightenment-derived structure was superimposed over them." This has not worked because "the imported freedom therefore perches on an infrastructure of inherited fatalism, while the imported Rights of Man sit atop a substructure of the inherited Rights of God, in the same way that the imported sciences are superimposed over an infrastructural legacy of miracles." As this brilliantly insightful sentence implies, the real problem is theological, and it is at this level reform must take place.

Without a different theology, can one have democracy? Iranian philosopher, Dr Abdulkarim Soroush, explicitly answered this question: "You need some philosophical underpinning, even theological underpinning in order to have a real democratic system. Your God cannot be a despotic God anymore. A despotic God would not be compatible with a democratic rule, with the idea of rights. So you even have to change your idea of God." Can this be done? Can what seems to be the bedrock of Islam change? This seems a very tall order, though there is precedent for it in Muslim history. However, if it is going to be done, it will no doubt be accomplished by courageous Muslim thinkers such as those appearing on Almuslih.org. Read it, and you will feel spring in the air.

The Rise of Sharia Law Is Likely to Bring War to the Middle East

By Martin Gould and Kathleen Walter , Monday, 24 Oct 2011 06:56 PM

Frank Gaffney, Ronald Reagan's Assistant Defense Secretary spoke up on the day the purportedly moderate Islamist party Ennahda won victory at the ballot box in Tunisia, a day after Libya's new rulers declared that country will be run on Islamic principles, under Sharia law. Gaffney now leads the nonprofit Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C. He does not believe Ennahda is a moderating force. "I don't believe there is such a thing as a moderate Islamist party," he said. "The challenge with Islamists is that they seek to impose Sharia on everybody, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. "They may, as a matter of tactical expediency, choose to do so in incremental ways, often nonviolently, at least initially. Because ultimately they must — according to Sharia, according to what they believe is God's will — They will be satisfied with nothing less than the ultimate supremacy of Sharia, and they certainly will not resist the use of violence when it becomes expedient to get their way."

Gaffney foresees a rising tide of Islamist governments throughout the Middle East and North Africa, perhaps spreading further. "We're witnessing not just the violent kind of jihad in which Islamists believe God compels them to engage, but, where they must for tactical reasons, [exercise] a more stealthy kind, or civilizational jihad, as the Muslim Brotherhood calls it. We're witnessing that playing out, not only in places in the Middle East but also in Europe, in Australia, in Canada and here in the United States as well."

The spread of Sharia is "the most urgent and grievous challenge we face as a free people. Those who follow this program of Sharia believe that God is directing them to engage in jihad or whatever form of warfare is necessary to accomplish their goals ... Through stealth, they have successfully penetrated important parts of the free world including our own government and civil society institutions."

The Obama administration must cease "embracing" the Muslim Brotherhood, Gaffney said. Such an embrace is "legitimizing our enemies," he said, "facilitating their influence operations and their penetration, and it greatly increases the prospect that they will be successful at what the Muslim Brotherhood's own documents indicate is their desire to destroy western civilization from within."

Gaffney noted that Ennahda had won what appears to be a clean election in Tunisia, but that does not mean there ever will be another vote in the country. "The problem is not simply democracy. People are pointing to Tunisia as a perfect example of democracy at work. Democracy is fine if all you want is one-man-one-vote one-time. That is precisely what the Muslim Brotherhood and its like-minded Islamist friends want."

The US must ensure that democracy has a future in North Africa and elsewhere in the region, Gaffney said. "What we are likely to wind up with, not just in Tunisia, not just in Libya, not just in Egypt, but probably in due course in Syria — as we have in Lebanon, in Gaza and probably, down the road, will have in Yemen, Bahrain, and maybe Saudi Arabia — is the takeover, the unmistakable takeover, perhaps through the ballot box, of people who will not seek or allow others freedom, who will impose Sharia and who will use whatever resources they amass as a result, not only to suppress their own people, but to endanger us."

Will Israel Attack Iran?

Obviously, MaozNews readers expect an answer to that pressing question. I therefore state at the outset: I don't know. I have no privileged access to inside information. But I would say this: any evaluation must take into account the pros and cons of any contemplated action. The pro of such an attack would be, at best, a delay of a number of years — three to five, according to the

experts' estimation – to the achievement of Iran's military nuclear aspirations. The cons, to my mind, by far outweigh the pros. The international press has said enough about these cons to require me to spell them out here.

On the other hand, Israel's concern is not so much an Iranian nuclear attack – the Iranian Government is fully aware of Israel's capacity to respond, as well as the prospects of a determined response from the West. It would spell the total destruction of Iran. Israel's main concern, and that of the world is two-fold: an accelerated Middle East Nuclear arms race involving various countries in the region, and the influence that a nuclear-confident Iran will seek to exert in the Middle East and beyond. Prominent Israeli security figures, including former Mossad heads Meir Dagan and Efraim Halevy, believe that Iran does not pose a threat to Israel's existence. In their view, the danger posed by Tehran to the Sunni Muslim world, particularly its neighbors the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, is graver. A battle is raging over hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East, and *that* is not exclusively Israel's concern.

Trends in the Churches in Israel

The Israeli church is maturing. There is a growing generation of second-generation Christians, confident of their faith, secure of their place in society and increasingly competent at home and in the workplace.

Most churches still lack solid, theologically-mature and biblically-informed teaching. As a result, there is a low level of understanding and a low level of theological commitment. But there is a hankering for a more substantial teaching ministry and a refusal to preserve congregational taboos. At the same time, as has often happened in the history of the church, false doctrines are forcing church leading to sharpen their theological wits and draw up a more coherent, more biblically-based understanding of the Faith.

Congregations that were satisfied to conduct services in Amharic, English or Russian are being increasingly challenged to use more Hebrew and to adopt a more local cultural flavor, without the accretions of Jewish religiosity. Intuitively, the young people sense the Gospel teaching that the people of Christ are one, and that such oneness should find practical expression in the way church life is structured and conducted.

While some have chosen to focus on what might be described as Christian entertainment, coupled with a focus on counselling, a kind of feel-good spirituality that purports to promote spiritual understanding, a growing number of young people are attending university, sharpening their intellectual skills and bringing their newly-developed abilities into the life of their families and churches. It is to be hoped that they will also come to apply those abilities in the realm of spiritual comprehensions, the study of scripture and the development of a consistently Christian worldview.

Characteristically, God is brining out of the ashes of my generation (I'm one of the oldest local Christians in the country) a beautiful rose.

Ministry and Family News

After a long summer break, with some advances made, we are about to resume full steam work on the **Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth**. As stated earlier, we expect this project to be completed by the end of 2012. My English **commentary on Malachi** is scheduled for publication by CrossBooks in January 2012, at which time it will be available from Amazon and Barnes & Nobles, at Crossbooks own website (<http://bookstore.crossbooks.com/>) and in bookshops around the country. Look for *Malachi, A Prophet in Times of Distress*.

HaGefen has decided to produce my **commentary on Matthew**. Editing is scheduled to commence in February of next year. I'm working hard (very hard) both on my **thesis** and my

commentary on Romans. I expect these, too, to be completed near the end of 2012. Meanwhile, I am negotiating the publication of another of my books in Hebrew by another publisher.

I've still on a learning curve so far as **working on a MAC** (Apple) is concerned. I've yet to learn some of the tricks I knew well on the PC, and have yet to find a way to sync my Android mobile phone with iCal for Mac (OS X) or MS Outlook. But I confess I find the MacBook Air far more intuitive and easier to learn than I did the PC. (I know, I know, some of you read this with a wry smile and an "I told you so" in your mind. Enjoy!)

Our families are all well. **Noam** has turned 12, and is becoming a vivacious, socially and intellectually competent young lady. She, with Dad (**Eran**), Mom (**Avital**), and her siblings (**Maya**, 10 [Karate, singing and a goalie in her soccer team] and **Nadav**, 6 [soccer and anything physical]) are expected to visit us in Israel next summer. **Avital** continues to be very much involved in the charter school, which all three children attend – she teaches an art history class. They are also much involved in the life of their community. **Eran** is busy at work, and with being a husband and a father.

Shlomit and Keith are expecting their second child in March of next year. Little **Jonathan** has learned to walk and is a constant delight to his parents. Keith is happy at work in the church, learning from his mentor and sharing an open home with the congregation. He and Shlomit love to welcome people into their home, where Shlomit can demonstrate her cooking and homemaking abilities and they can both reach out to people.

Yotam (2) has commenced play-school twice a week. In consequence, his English vocabulary is fast exceeding his Hebrew and German. **Avishai** (7 months) is eating more solids, sleeping less and continuing to grow. **Marcus** and **Tamar** are active in church, often hosting individuals and small-group events and seeking to support the Pastor and the pastoral team.

We are greatly blessed in our wonderful sons-in-law and thrilled to see that each of the daughters, in their own way, take after their mother in cooking, offering hospitality and social abilities.

Rose is scheduled to complete her military service in February and is eager to commence her studies in preparation for university. We are presently looking into the various possibilities, as she decides on the professional direction for which she would like to prepare herself.

TAX-deductable **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**. Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**.

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