

Professor Lawrence Davidson Discusses Egypt, the U.S., and Israel

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Lawrence Davidson says, *"Keep your eye on the language: When South Africa assigned rights according to race they called it apartheid. When Israel assigns rights according to religion they call it the only democracy in the Middle East."*

Lawrence Davidson is a professor at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania. His academic work is centered on the history of American foreign relations with the Middle East.

Throughout his career, Davidson has informed public discourse with his critique of American foreign policy in the Middle East and has embarked on this endeavor in a way that promotes citizen awareness. Davidson analysis has centered on the reality of American conduct in the Middle East and has performed this analysis in conjunction with an awareness of the propaganda that has permeated this debate for the past 65 years. Given this analysis and focus, Davidson has become an outspoken and unflinching critic of the U.S. alliance with Israel and the Zionists' treatment of the Palestinian people.

Davidson is the author of several books. His latest, published in 2009, is *Foreign Policy, Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*. This work locates the source of U.S. foreign policy formulation in the activity of powerful lobbies rather than in the White House or State Department.

Kathleen Wells: Talk to me about the significance of the events taking place now in Egypt i.e., the protest against Mubarak/the government. What will these events - the actual protests - mean for the region in general and Israel specifically?

Lawrence Davidson: The protests in Egypt, and Tunisia as well, are very significant because they show the people of the Middle East (and perhaps beyond) what is possible. That there is power in numbers - numbers that are organized and determined. It is not easy to bring these numbers into the streets. Indeed, people can go a very long time accepting oppression. But at some point action is possible. That is what the present situation demonstrates and it is significant.

For the region it means that no dictatorship is truly secure unless its army or police are willing to shoot down their own people, and even then they risk civil war. Governments are expected to provide economic security for their people. This is a real challenge for the regimes in the Middle East because, tied as most of them are to the world markets and Western banking institutions, they cannot actually solve their economic problems. The dictatorships try to get around this predicament by creating economic security for elite (usually a ruling class plus the military) and keep the rest of the population under control through force. But Tunisia and Egypt now show that that strategy is not foolproof. These dictators are increasingly in a bind.

For Israel, the present events are deeply disturbing. Israel's leadership, from the very beginning of the state, has believed that security is a function of alliances with the West and military force in the region. They have never sought any meaningful compromises with their neighbors. Their only "friends" in the region are dictators who cooperate with Israel because they fear it and because the

Americans pay them to do so. This is not a good basis for long term security. Israel's strategy of security through the application of force is now being revealed as inadequate. The country is confronted with implacable enemies in the north - an increasingly well armed Hezbollah backed by Syria and Iran. If Mubarak falls and Egypt becomes a democracy, Israel's ability to control matters to its west will be seriously weakened. The situation in Gaza will slip from its control because a popular regime in Cairo will normalize its border with Gaza. The Israeli blockade will collapse. The entire scenario also points up the fragility of the monarchy in Jordan. Israel will begin to feel as if it is surrounded by enemies once more. Yet they are so ideologically blinded that they will fail to realize that their own policies helped make it so.

Kathleen Wells: Respond to statements made from Israeli spokespersons that the protest in Egypt demonstrates that Israel is the only stable government in the Middle East and that Israel is the only real example of democracy in the region.

Lawrence Davidson: Israel is a democracy in the same sense that, say, Alabama was a democracy prior to Civil Rights. Real democracy includes a realistic level of equity under the law for all citizens. That is completely lacking in Israel where 20 percent of the population (the Israeli Arabs) are systematically discriminated against. So when Israeli leaders claim that their country is a democracy, they are simply saying that the Israeli Arabs can cast a vote. But that vote will never be able to change the inherently discriminatory system. So the vote is meaningless. The game is rigged.

There are, of course, other democracies in the region which the Israelis and their supporters conveniently forget about. Turkey is a viable democracy, especially now that the Turkish military is no longer interfering in politics. Lebanon is, in fact, more democratic than it ever was before the outmoded sectarian system imposed by the French was destroyed by civil war (That is what it took to democratize Lebanon!). And even Palestine was a democratic place before the Israelis and Americans decided that having Hamas win a free and fair election was unacceptable. So the claim that Israel is the only real democracy in the region is incorrect.

As to stability, well perhaps Israel is too stable. There are definite signs that the country is flirting with fascism. The present Knesset is passing laws that could destroy much of the Israeli left. That is not the kind of stability that is healthy for a supposed democratic country.

Kathleen Wells: General Petraeus submitted written testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee last March which stated, "... enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the area of responsibility."

Is Israel an asset or a liability to the United States? And specifically address how the characterization of asset or liability relates to policy formation.

Lawrence Davidson: General Petraeus's recent observation that the ongoing Arab-Palestinian conflict works against U.S. interests in the Middle East was simply a statement of fact. The unspoken, but clearly understood, second part of this was it works against us because of our close identification with Israel. What is so remarkable is that a high-ranking U.S. general publicly made the connection.

In my estimation the U.S. really does not behave as if it has interests in the Middle East separate from those of Israel. This can be so because our access to the oil in the Persian Gulf has been successfully separated from the issue of Israel. And that is so because the Gulf Arabs chose not to use oil as a weapon to influence our policy. That leaves the field of Middle East interests (apart from oil) wide open to Zionist lobby pressure and manipulation. So the tail (Israel) is definitely wagging

the dog (U.S.) in this regard.

So is Israel an asset or a liability? Well, it is an asset to most of the representatives and senators in the Congress who get so much money and electoral support from Zionist-oriented lobbies and their members. And it is a horrible liability to the U.S. as a country in that Israeli behavior supported by America generates sheer revulsion in millions of Arabs and Muslims. But, you know, as Tip O'Neil once observed, "All politics are local." And what the members of Congress and those running the political parties are into is winning elections here in America. Lobby money greases that process. That is more important to them than hatred in the Middle East - even if that hatred can be predicted to lead to on-going terrorist actions. That is the way our politics works.

Kathleen Wells, J.D.

P.S.

* The Huffington Post. Posted: February 11, 2011 04:58 PM:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-wells/professor-lawrence-davids_b_821449.html?ref=fb&src=sp#sb=584311,b=facebook

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