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From: Lanny Davis <

To: H

Sent: Thu Feb 17 14:37:30 2011

Subject: Israel, Tahrir Square Demonstrators United by Common Values of Liberty and Freedom

B6

Purple Nation

February 17, 2011

Israel, Tahrir Square Demonstrators United by Common Values of Liberty and Freedom

By Lanny J. Davis

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It is not a stretch to say that the demonstrators in Tahrir Square, who created a revolution by demanding liberty and freedom, had more in common with the government of Israel than with any other Arab government in the Middle East.

No, I am not stretching to see the possibility of a "purple nation" approach everywhere in the world. But it is a simple, indisputable fact that what the demonstrators in Tunisia and Tahrir Square demanded are the values that have governed Israel since its founding over 60 years ago — freedom of the press and assembly, guarantees of due process and the rule of law, civil rights, human rights, women's rights and, most important, equal protection under the law for all Israeli citizens — including the more than 1 million Palestinian Arabs who have the same rights as Jewish citizens.

The first messages communicated out of Israel (as well as from the American Jewish community and from pro-Israel groups around the world) were negative toward the freedom demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Israeli senior officials and

the average Israeli were understandably fearful that if Mubarak were overthrown and the Tahrir Square demonstrators successful, Israel security would be imperiled. This left the strong and unfortunate impression among the pro-democracy demonstrators in Egypt that Israel preferred the tyranny of Mubarak to freedom and human rights for Egyptians.

There was genuine and rational fear among Israelis and pro-Israel groups in America, certainly justified by almost every respected poll, that a democratically elected government in Egypt would be anti-Israel, would repudiate the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and, most dangerous of all, would open up the borders of southern Gaza to arms and rockets to be used by Hamas in terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians.

But I submit these polls are misleading. Public sentiment can be changed with facts, and more effective communication of them — especially when there is a powerful new message that can reframe the entire perspective of the Arab street: democracy and hope for economic opportunity and a better life in the future.

But two things must be done immediately — one by Israel, the other by President Obama.

First, Israel needs an intense and effective strategy to communicate the facts about Israeli democratic values and especially equal protection under the law, including for Arab Israeli citizens.

Best of all would be to find credible, secular Arab small-“d” democrats who are willing to carry this message — on Al Jazeera, on the Internet, the social media, the blogosphere, text messages and all other methods shown to be so effective in recent weeks to reach the average citizen of Arab nations.

And Israel can encourage this shift in public opinion by way of repeating their already existing policy again and again publicly: support for a two-state solution and, in the interim, continued economic development assistance for the Palestinian Authority and going forward, for emerging democracy movements and governments in the Middle East and Iran.

Second, President Obama now has an opportunity to use his bully pulpit as president, and as the most influential international leader in the Middle East, to emphasize at every opportunity the common democratic values shared by the Arab and Iranian demonstrators and the people and government of Israel, as well as the American people, and Israel's and Israel's public commitment to a two-state solution.

Now, I am not naïve.

I know that anti-Israel hatred has been deeply embedded into Arab culture over decades and decades — cynically used by Arab autocrats and dictators to divert the attention of the Arab street from the poverty, joblessness and hopelessness bred by their corrupt, anti-democratic regimes.

But this may be a rare moment where the magnetic appeal of freedom and liberty is so powerful that it can overcome this historical diversionary anti-Israel hatred.

Thanks to the courageous young people in Tunisia and Tahrir Square, there may be a great opportunity to communicate a truly “purple” message — to use the shared values of democracy and individual liberty as the trumping message that unites Israelis and Arabs and brings peace, at last, to the Middle East and peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

As my late mom would say, “From your mouth to God's ears.”

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Mr. Davis is the principal in the Washington D.C. law firm of Lanny J. Davis & Associates, which specializes in strategic crisis management and is a partner with Josh Block in the strategic communications and public affairs company Davis-Block. He served as President Clinton's Special Counsel in 1996-98 and as a member of President Bush's Privacy and Civil

Liberties Oversight Board in 2006-07. He is the author of "Scandal: How 'Gotcha' Politics Is Destroying America" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

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