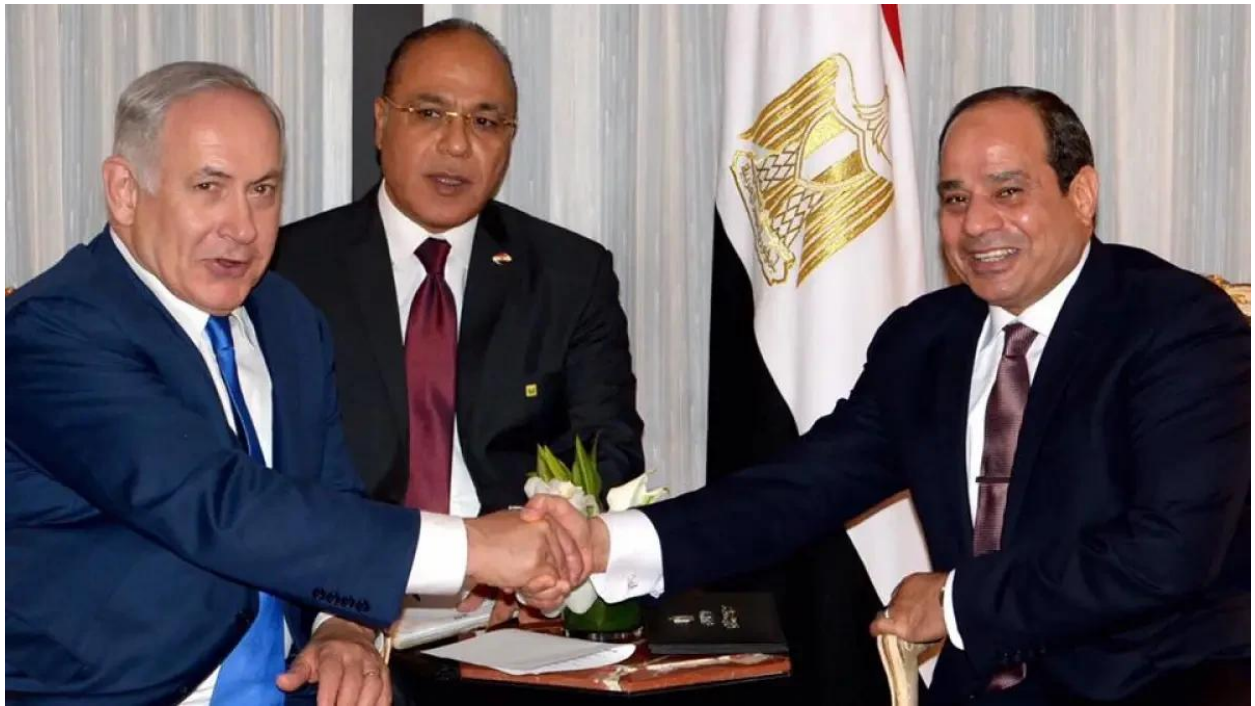


How Did Israel Benefit from the Rise of Sunni Islamist Movements to Power? A Strategic Assessment

Hamza Hassan | October 27, 2025



This is an AI-generated English translation. The original text is in Arabic.

Since the Arab Spring, it seemed that the Arab region was entering an unprecedented transitional phase, resembling what it experienced in the mid-twentieth century. The revolutions that erupted in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Libya suggested that the traditional regimes that had lasted for decades were facing a real existential crisis, and that Sunni Islamic alternatives had become the strongest option with the greatest opportunity to reach power. Indeed, these forces appeared to many as the most organized and capable of presenting a new model for state management. However, the following years proved that this historical moment was far too brief, and the hopes that the peoples and supporters of change had placed upon it quickly turned into disappointments. The Islamic experiences were deliberately aborted before they could be completed, and the military and security regimes drowned in the

blood of their peoples, losing what remained of their internal legitimacy, finding themselves more reliant on international cover. It is here that Israel entered, not as a secondary player, but as one of the most prominent direct beneficiaries, as it found in this turbulent scene an opportunity to enhance its security and achieve unprecedented strategic gains.

Egypt: Aborting the Islamists and Subjugating the Army

The Egyptian case is the clearest example of the above. The Muslim Brotherhood, which came to power through the 2012 elections, was not given any opportunity to build stable institutions or impose a coherent vision for governance. Within just one year, President Mohamed Morsi found himself facing a solid alliance of the army, security agencies, and the media, supported by generous Gulf cover. This alliance systematically worked to weaken him and distort his image, until the famous phrase in police stations at that time became: "We are on vacation for four years", referring to the suspension of work in anticipation of the end of Morsi's term. They did not wait those years, but rather ousted him through a military coup led by his defense minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in July 2013.

This coup was not merely a change in the internal scene, but a major regional turning point. On one hand, an experiment that could have reconsidered the Camp David Accords was aborted, or at least used it as a political pressure card against Israel, as was evident during Operation "Pillar of Defense" in Gaza in late 2012 when a government Egyptian delegation visited the sector at the height of the aggression, prompting Tel Aviv to temporarily halt its operations. Israel realized then that the existence of an Egyptian government with an Islamic reference could reopen the peace file on the popular arena.

On the other hand, the Egyptian army found itself embroiled in widespread bloody repression, such as the Rabaa al-Adawiya massacre, which stripped it of any moral or political legitimacy and exposed it to increasing international criticism and pressure. This situation pushed it to seek external cover to ensure its reintegration internationally, and here Israel played a pivotal role, as it contributed to facilitating the return of relations between Cairo and Washington, presenting itself as a guarantor for the survival of the new regime.

Then came the most significant development: unprecedented security coordination in Sinai. President Sisi himself acknowledged the existence of close cooperation with Israel in confronting armed groups, and multiple reports indicated that Israeli aircraft carried out strikes inside Egyptian territory with official approval. This kind of security cooperation surpasses anything that had been proposed in previous decades, confirming that the relationship between Cairo and Tel Aviv is no longer just a cold peace, but a practical partnership on the ground.

Concurrently, the UAE pumped billions of dollars in support of the new regime, a leverage that effectively formed an indirect Israeli influence channel over the Egyptian decision. Thus, the moment of having a Sunni Islamic party at the helm of power was exploited to justify the coup and draw the army into a circle of subjugation, while Israel emerged as the biggest winner: A potential adversary was removed, and a massive army was neutralized and turned into a partner.

Syria: State Collapse and Capacity Dismantling

If Egypt represents a case of "neutralization", then Syria presents a model of "complete dismantling". The Syrian regime, which has long presented itself as a bastion of resistance, faced a wide popular revolution since 2011, which quickly turned into a complex regional and international war. With the fall of Bashar al-Assad at the end of 2024, Israel found itself facing a security vacuum contested by external powers, becoming the most free player in it.

Since then, Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes targeting air defense systems, weapon depots, and military research facilities, and the destruction of what remains of the Syrian defensive structure has become a permanent policy, ensuring its long-term strategic superiority. In the south, it imposed a new reality after the Russian and Iranian withdrawal, expanding its influence around the Golan Heights reaching Sweida and Daraa, where sectarian crises and Druze demands became gateways for direct or indirect Israeli intervention.

With the rise of Ahmad al-Shar'a (formerly known as Abu Muhammad al-Julani) to the head of power in Damascus with his Sunni jihadist background, the Syrian position became increasingly fragile internationally. This background made it easy to question his legitimacy, forcing him to make implicit

concessions to Israel to ensure his survival. Thus, Syria transformed from a central state that Tel Aviv considered a threat into a fragile mosaic that poses no strategic danger, but rather a continuous opportunity for external intervention.

Iraq and Lebanon: The Ally Protects the Regime's Back

Iraq and Lebanon were not immune to these transformations, but the context there differed. The political upheavals occurred years before the Arab Spring. In Iraq, the American invasion in 2003 led to the dismantling of the state and the rise of extremist Sunni forces like "ISIS", while Shiite forces backed by Iran benefited from the vacuum, making Baghdad closer to Tehran than to any other party. This alliance with Iran provided a protective umbrella that prevented the Iraqi state from falling into the same Israeli trap.

As for Lebanon, it remained a prisoner of an internal equation governed by the power and influence of Hezbollah, in the absence of a strong Sunni leadership. Although the economic and political collapse weakened the state, the presence of Hezbollah and its regional ally Iran prevented Israel from achieving a benefit similar to what happened in Egypt and Syria. In fact, the emergence of "ISIS" and its bloody practices contributed to improving the image of those Shiite factions locally and internationally compared to the Sunni factions that found themselves in a position of continuous defense of their legitimacy.

Dual Benefit: Islamists and Regimes Together

From Egypt to Syria, the same pattern is repeated: Israel did not benefit from the Islamists alone, nor from the regimes alone, but from both together.

- The Islamists were quickly thwarted and were not allowed to present any coherent political project.
- The regimes drowned in blood, losing all moral cover, which made them more dependent on Israel and the West.

Between them, Tel Aviv strengthened its position through neutralized or destroyed armies, safer borders, and political and economic influence across the Gulf, and an improved image in the international community as "the stable state in a sea of chaos", indeed, the state that neighboring Arab countries cannot stabilize without aligning with its interests.