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‘Ilan Grapel incident is unlikely to become a trend’

By YAAKOV LAPPIN
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"Visits by Israeli citizens to an Arab country were dangerous acts before the Grapel and Schalit affairs," counter-terror expert Boaz Ganor says.

Visiting Arab states is a dangerous act for Israeli citizens, but the prolonged arrest of Ilan Grapel by Egyptian authorities is unlikely to become a trend, security experts told *The Jerusalem Post* on Tuesday.

Asked whether the Grapel and Gilad Schalit affairs made it more dangerous to visit Arab countries, Boaz Ganor, founder and executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, said, "Visits by Israeli citizens to an Arab country were dangerous acts before the Grapel and Schalit affairs, and will be dangerous after them, both for the visitor himself and Israel."

Ganor added that Israel should weigh a ban on such visits which would also apply to those who hold dual citizenship, such as Grapel.

"Alternatively, they could be made to sign a declaration before their departure, stating that they are aware of the risks they are taking, and that Israel will not be obligated to secure their release," Ganor said.

Nevertheless, he added, Arab states were not likely to adopt the arrest of Israelis as a tactic to extort Israel.

While Schalit was kidnapped by a terrorist organization that "will continue to try and kidnap soldiers and civilians," the Grapel affair was designed to satisfy the Egyptian masses, and was a stage-managed incident meant to use "the traditional rival – Israel – to distract Egyptians from their real problems," Ganor said.

Grapel's release was already decided on following American and Israeli pressure, but the Egyptian government required "a concrete tradeoff to placate domestic opinion. This is how a minor deal was developed for Grapel's release."

[Yehuda Ben-Meir](#), of Tel Aviv University's [Institute for National Security Studies](#), said it would be difficult for an Arab state "with which we have relations, like Egypt or Jordan, or informal relations, like Morocco or Qatar, to just arrest someone if there is not at least some sort of unusual behavior that can be used" to fabricate a spying story.

On the other hand, an Israeli who travels to radical states like Syria, Iran or Yemen, is risking his life “and should not complain” if he finds himself in custody, Ben- Meir said.

Ely Karmon, a senior counter-terrorism researcher from the ICT, added that Cairo has a record of arresting innocent Israelis such as Azzam Azzam and Ouda Tarabin and framing them as spies to prove to its anti-Israel public it is looking after state security.

Addressing the threat of kidnapping Israelis abroad posed by terrorist organizations, Karmon said Hamas “is still not ready” to take such action, but that “Hezbollah is certainly interested and able” to do so.

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