Peres: Mideast upheavals result of ‘misunderstanding democracy’

* By YONAH JEREMY BOB

Part of the chaos occurring with democratic upheavals across the region is a result of misunderstandings, since people confuse elections for democracy, President Shimon Peres on Thursday.

“But elections are just procedure. Democracy starts the day after elections and includes underlying values and substance,” Peres added in comments at a conference at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya on the future of the state comptroller in a changing society.

“The basic foundations of a democratic administration are harmed when a non-democratic party is elected though a democratic process,” he warned.

Next, the president discussed the complaint that today there are no “big leaders,” and how it is hard to become a “big leader” in an age where everything is less dependent on any one individual.

Discussing other important trends, such as the just announced major cuts in the defense sector, Peres said, “Before we needed a big army, but now we need to redefine what is ‘force.’”

In an age of “nuclear bombs that are so strong that you can’t use it [along with other unconventional and cyber weapons], why does it matter how many bombs you have” and how big an army you have, he added.

Peres said that the even after spending trillions of dollars on fighting terrorism, the United States couldn’t end it.

“Globalization is not a question, it’s a reality. Science is globalization and there is nothing anyone can do to stop it. We can’t fight over borders, as there are no borders,” he said.

But “negative things also come from science. Science by itself” has no conscience about whether it is used for positive uses “or to make bombs,” he said.

Returning to the topic of the conference, Peres said the role of the state comptroller is to protect the minority.

“The government only guards the need of the majority,” he said. “The comptroller guards each and every individual citizen’s rights.”

Peres said very strongly that there must be “no compromise” in terms of corruption in the government.

Peres congratulated Joseph Shapira, the state comptroller and ombudsman, on his ability to strike a balance between fighting corruption while paying attention to the right of every individual who needs attention to get it.

Greer Fay Cashman contributed to this report.