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1. Syrien

Im Rahmen einer Pressekonferenz in Damaskus am 4. September 2008, an der neben dem syrischen Präsidenten Bashar Assad auch die Staatschefs von Frankreich, Türkei und Katar teilnahmen, sagte Assad, Syrien habe Israel einen Vorschlag für ein Friedensabkommen als Basis für direkte Verhandlungen zukommen lassen. Nachdem Israel und Syrien acht Jahre lang keinerlei Gespräche geführt hatten, haben in diesem Frühjahr indirekte Verhandlungen unter Vermittlung der Türkei begonnen. Nun bekundete Assad sein Interesse an direkten Gesprächen, schränkte jedoch ein, Fortschritte würden von der zukünftigen israelischen Regierung abhängen. Premierminister Olmert, unter dessen Ägide die Verhandlungen mit Syrien begonnen hatten, ist am 21. September von seinem Amt zurückgetreten. Sein Nachfolger bzw. seine Nachfolgerin wird weitere Schritte entscheiden müssen.

Die syrischen Annäherungsversuche an Israel sind Teil einer diplomatischen Offensive, mit der Assad versucht, sein Land aus der internationalen Isolation zu führen. So kündigte Damaskus ebenfalls an, in Kürze diplomatische Beziehungen mit dem Libanon aufzunehmen.

Erste Erfolge erzielte Assad mit seiner neuen Strategie bereits: Der Besuch von Nicolas Sarkozy vom 03.-04. September war der erste Besuch eines westlichen Staatschefs in Syrien seit fünf Jahren.

The last moment

„There is a reasonable possibility of removing Syria from the cycle of combat with Israel, but this possibility bears an expiration date. A determined Israeli leadership can work with the new American leadership to be elected in November to reach a peace agreement with Syrian President Bashar Assad in the spring or summer of 2009. However, if the Israelis and the Americans do not act with

urgency and determination, the opportunity is liable to be lost. [...]

If there is any step that could at present become a trend in the entire region, it is an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. Such a treaty would bring about a positive strategic change: It would isolate Hezbollah, cause difficulties for Hamas, threaten Iran and provide support for the concerned moderate forces in the Sunni Arab world.“

Ari Shavit, HAA 04.09.08

Assad's charm offensive

It is in Israel's long-term interest to have a peace treaty with Syria - but not at any price. The extent of any withdrawal must parallel the depth of the peace offered.

Yet we can't help but ponder why Assad's rhetoric veers so unsteadily between belligerence and conciliation.

Israel must be clear-eyed, first of all, on the nature of the Syrian regime, which happens to be engaged in brisk military build-up and procurement. [...]

Damascus is also a long-standing state sponsor of terrorism, hosting Hamas and other extremist Palestinian organizations. [...]

If Assad is making conciliatory sounds now, therefore, perhaps it's not because he has abandoned a belligerent posture, but because it serves his interests and deflects pressure. This, indeed, is a long-established pattern. [...]

Could it be that Assad is once again dangling the possibility of peace with Israel as a way to renew contacts with Washington and Paris and end his international isolation?

Then again, he may be sincere. If so, he should come to Jerusalem, or invite our premier to Damascus, and lay out his peace vision.“

JPO 03.09.08

Lächeln in Damaskus

„Jerusalem hat noch nicht den geringsten Erfolg durch diese Kontakte [mit der syrischen Regierung] erzielt, in Damaskus sieht das jedoch völlig anders aus: Im Moment hat es den Anschein, als seien die Kontakte in Istanbul der Anfang des Endes der Isolation von Syrien. Die nächsten Ziele Assads sind das Auftauen der kühlen Beziehungen zu weiteren europäischen Staaten und die Eröffnung einer neuen Gesprächsschiene mit Washington. [...]

Damaskus hat damit nicht das erste Mal bewiesen, dass Hartnäckigkeit sich lohnt. Seit einigen Jahren steht Assad unter israelischem und amerikanischem Druck [...], der ihn zwingen soll, seine Beziehungen zu den Aufständischen im Irak, sowie zu der Hamas und der Hisbollah einzustellen. Assad weigerte sich, dies ohne Gegenleistung zu tun, und brachte die internationale Gemeinschaft dazu, von der militärischen Option abzusehen. [...] Es gibt heute keinen westlichen Führer, der ernsthaft beabsichtigt, die Sanktionen gegen Syrien zu verschärfen.“

Jacky Huri, MAA 08.09.08

Assad's reckless behavior

“Notice how fast, in the middle of peace negotiations with Israel, Assad has jumped to Moscow to attempt to conclude an arms deal that would make his regime exponentially more dangerous regardless of whether peace with Israel is a certainty or a game of showmanship. [...] I ask Israel: Is there any doubt in your mind as to Assad's danger and reckless behavior? [...]

His desire to acquire more offensive lethal weapons shows clearly his truest of intent towards Israel, and more importantly a political judgment not worthy of Israel's peace overtures for his impetuous disposition. [...]

By not delivering a resounding blow to Assad, who has facilitated thousands of rockets to rain on your country, Israel has yielded its power to his regime of terror. [...]

[T]hinking it can persuade him to fold back into the community, Israel started peace negotiations with his regime and as a favor to the Israeli gesture of goodwill, Assad struck again with his newer role as the darling of an angry bear, which has existential ramifications for the whole Levant region. [...]

It is not Israel's job to remove a dictator from power and the Syrian opposition will never ask for it. But given his short history, why does Israel continue to support him by allowing him the luxury of negotiating with you?”

Farid Ghadry (Reform Party of Syria), JED 02.09.08

Sarkozy in Damaskus

“Wie konnte es passieren, dass Syrien – noch vor kurzem völlig isoliert – plötzlich zu einem beliebten Gesprächspartner geworden ist und Sarkozy ihm sogar einen Besuch abstattet?

Israel trug seinen Teil zu dieser Sanierung bei. Der Prozess begann bereits im 2. Libanonkrieg. Was in weiten Teilen der arabischen Welt – und nicht nur dort – als Sieg der Hisbollah gewertet wurde, brachte Syrien als Patron dieser Terrororganisation seinen Einfluss im Libanon zurück und festigte seine Position. Dann trug Israel zu der Verbesserung des Ansehens Syriens bei, indem es die Friedensverhandlungen wieder aufnahm. Das Ergebnis ist eine zunehmende Legitimation.“

Salman Shuval, IHY 08.09.08

2. Bürgermeisterwahlen in Jerusalem

In Israels Hauptstadt Jerusalem stehen in diesem November Bürgermeisterwahlen an. Zu den Kandidaten gehören Nir Barkat, säkularer Oppositionsführer im Stadtrat, der Milliardär und Geschäftsmann Arkadi Gaydamak, sowie Meir Porush, Knessetmitglied für die ultra-orthodoxe Partei United Torah Judaism. Aufgewirbelt wurde diese Liste durch die Ankündigung von Arie Deri, dem Ex-Innenminister und ehemaligem Vorsitzenden der wichtigsten ultra-orthodoxen Partei Shas, ebenfalls kandidieren zu wollen. Seine Kandidatur ist kontrovers, weil er wegen Bestechung und Betrug zwei Jahre Haft abgesessen hat. Nach israelischem Recht sind solche Vergehen von politischen Vertretern moralisch besonders verwerflich und ziehen eine Sperrzeit nach sich, während der es verboten ist, für ein öffentliches Amt zu kandidieren. Wann diese Frist für Deri endet, ist jedoch umstritten, da die gesetzlich vorgeschriebene Zeitspanne während seiner Haft verlängert wurde. Außerdem steht es Deri offen, Präsident Peres um eine Verminderung der Frist zu ersuchen.

Die Kandidatur des ultra-orthodoxen Kandidaten könnte entscheidend für den Ausgang der Wahl sein, da die gläubigen Bewohner Jerusalems sich in ihrem Wahlverhalten oftmals nach den Angaben ihrer religiösen Führung richtet. Die arabischen Bürger, die etwa 30% der Bevölkerung ausmachen, nehmen traditionell nicht an den Wahlen teil, um der israelischen Annexion Ostjerusalems keine Legitimation zu verleihen.

Deri ist im Gegensatz zu Porush bereits die Unterstützung wichtiger spiritueller Führer zugesichert worden. Kandidat Arkadi Gaydamak hat seitdem angedeutet, aus dem Rennen aussteigen zu wollen. Medienumfragen zu Folge würde der favorisierte Nir Barkat bei Teilnahme von Deri deutlich an Stimmen verlieren.

Oi, Jerusalem

“Jerusalem residents [...] have their heartfelt day-to-day concerns such as not enough jobs being created, ever more unaffordable housing, and sky-high rents. [...] Modern Orthodox and secular Jewish parents see the education system tilting in favor of haredi pupils, who already comprise 58% of Jewish enrollment. Zionists are troubled about a migration of thousands of Jews annually from a city that is 33% Arab. Arabs, while refusing to vote out of opposition to Israel's control of Jerusalem, worry about atrocious city services.

Jerusalem desperately needs a mayor who can, without favoritism, minister to this complex mosaic. The capital of Israel begs for a Zionist mayor who understands that talk of an undivided Jerusalem is hypocritical when services and infrastructure in Arab neighborhoods are scandalously inferior.

In theory, such a mayor can easily be elected because the ultra-Orthodox comprise just 20% of the city's population and 30% of its Jews.

The [ultra-Orthodox] advantage is that practically 100% of their eligible voters turn out to vote for the candidates endorsed by their spiritual leaders. In contrast, less than half of the [other] voters bestir themselves to cast a ballot, and often split their vote. It is intolerable that our capital be administered by anyone who does not wholeheartedly embrace the ethos of Israeli society. Jerusalem deserves a mayor who embodies tolerance and a respect for tradition, someone who will distribute resources on the basis of fairness and pluralism. [...]

The majority rules - but only if it bothers to vote.”

JPO 11.09.08

Disgrace has no limits

“Last week Deri announced his candidacy for the Jerusalem mayoralty. As someone who considered himself innocent all along, it's no wonder he decided that the law preventing him from running in elections doesn't apply to him, or that at least it's possible to do something so that it won't apply. [...]

It is no coincidence that Deri's trial caused the Knesset to make the law more stringent and demand a seven-year cooling-off period, and it is no

coincidence that Deri of all people is questioning its validity. The Deri trial was not like other public trials. Deri did not cooperate, remaining silent during his interrogation, wasted the court's time for many years, and afterward led a wave of protest against the State Prosecutor's Office and the court. [...]

Moral turpitude is an ethical and normative issue, and it was legislated into law only when it became clear that it was not self-evident. The very request to shorten the period of moral turpitude shows that the message was not internalized. [...]

Aryeh Deri should not be the mayor of Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, not now and not in the future, regardless of the period of unsuitability determined by law, because he took bribes. If the president pardons him of moral turpitude, he will transfer the disgrace to himself as president. Shimon Peres must take into account that the President's Residence has already absorbed more than enough disgrace.”

HAA 11.09.08

Jerusalem needs Deri

“I heard on the radio some annoying representative of the Movement for Quality Government in Israel. He spoke about Aryeh Deri with deep disgust, which made me furious. More than this speaker represented the rule of law, he represented himself and his friends, the secular Ashkenazim, who find it difficult to accept a person who's not one of their own.

Aryeh Deri was convicted of bribery offences. That much is true. [...] Now we are dealing with a different matter – the ability to forgive. We are a public that must learn how to forgive and weigh things in a to-the-point manner. We should be asking ourselves whether Deri is right for the job of Jerusalem mayor or not; without settling scores or basing the decision on inappropriate motives. [...]

Why not let Jerusalem residents decide? [...]

We should hope that Aryeh Deri [...] is treated fairly by the media. Because if this happens [...] Jerusalem will gain an excellent mayor for many years to come. Let's hope it happens.

Hanoch Daum, JED 14.09.08

3. Livni gewinnt Kadima Primaries

Aus den Wahlen zum Vorsitz der Regierungspartei Kadima ging am 17. September Außenministerin Zippi Livni hervor. Sie schlug ihren wichtigsten Konkurrenten, Verkehrsminister Shaul Mofas, mit nur 431 Stimmen und übernimmt nun den

Parteivorsitz von Ehud Olmert, der am 21.09. als Premierminister zurückgetreten ist. Auch Mofas kündigte an, eine Auszeit aus der Politik nehmen zu wollen.

Livni hat nun 42 Tage Zeit, um eine Mehrheitskoalition zu bilden, an deren Spitze sie die erste Premierministerin seit Golda Meir werden würde. Diese Pläne könnte die Arbeitspartei, auf die Livni als Koalitionspartner angewiesen ist, jedoch durchkreuzen. Medienberichten zufolge traf sich deren Parteivorsitzender Ehud Barak zunächst mit Oppositionsführer Netanjahu, bevor er Verhandlungen mit Livni begann. Allerdings ist zu bezweifeln, ob die Arbeitspartei bei baldigen Neuwahlen mit so vielen Stimmen rechnen könnte wie Netanjahu, dessen Partei Likud von Umfrageinstituten ein gutes Wahlergebnis vorausgesagt wird.

First test of leadership

“The Kadima primary determined who would replace Ehud Olmert as the leader of the party that won the last Knesset elections. The head of the largest party will now attempt to form the broadest possible coalition. Since the prime minister must resign due to corruption and not because he lost the confidence of the Knesset, it may be assumed that the platform of the government that remains in office will not change much. [...]

The way Livni tries to form a government will be the first test of her leadership. Being clean means more than not accepting envelopes filled with money. Political cleanliness also requires making decisions that are statesmanlike and not opportunistic. Livni has to prove that in contrast to her predecessor, she chooses the persons best suited to the job to be her cabinet ministers and not those who claim to represent the ‘grassroots,’ those who threaten the unity of the ranks and those who threaten to call for new elections. [...]

If Livni wants to lead and not to be led, she must build a government that reflects her agenda.”

HAA 19.09.08

Is the rightist instinct wrong?

“Tzipi Livni is the new hope of the Left. [...] [S]he speaks in codes that the Left takes pleasure in: Territorial concessions and diplomatic compromise, coupled with the supremacy of the courts.

She is secular enough, not a general, and every rookie leftist feels that with Tzipi Livni one can close a few deals and evacuate a few settlements. [...]

For the very same reasons, rightists instinctively fear Tzipi Livni's presence in the Prime Minister's Office. [...]

Now that she won, rightist voters are convinced that all those leftists will be leading her by the nose until she signs, with her own hands, on the borders of the new Palestinian state and removal of the settlements. [...]

This could be a self-fulfilling prophecy. [...]

If the various rightists will stay away from her from the outset, her move to the Left would only be accelerated.

So do[es] the Right [...] have to embrace [...] Tzipi Livni? I'm not sure. But I'm also not so sure that we need to so quickly show her the same hostility that was justifiably directed at Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert when they changed their views.”

Uri Orbach, JED 20.09.08

Livni's challenge

“Assembling a coalition and handing out portfolios alone does not advance the national interest. What matters is an agenda - a vision.

Domestically, we'd like to see Livni advocate reform of the political system to promote representative government and diminish the influence of sectarian parties; to see her reach out to citizens on both Right and Left. [...]

But it is foreign and security policy that will dominate the next prime minister's agenda. Livni must define the path for addressing the Iranian nuclear threat. [...]

What does she think will happen when Mahmoud Abbas completes his term as Palestinian Authority president in January? [...]

What's her plan for Gaza, where ever more extreme Hamas factions are solidifying power? [...]

She will also have the opportunity to take a fresh look at negotiations with Syria. [...]

Israel cannot afford a rudderless policy drift, for months on end, as party politics sort themselves out. This is a nation longing for honest, capable and inspiring leadership - urgently.

Can Tzipi Livni provide it? 16,936 of Israel's voters said yes on Wednesday. Now she must persuade the rest.”

JPO 18.09.08

Livni's limited mandate

“More people will arrive at the Yarkon Park to see Paul McCartney perform than the number of people who bothered to show up at polling stations in order to elect the person who may become Israel's next

prime minister. [...] A total of 0.5% percent of the public – this is the mandate received by a leader during one of the most fateful and complex periods in the State of Israel's history. [...]

The big question that remains is what will [Labor party chief] Barak be doing? Will he announce his decision to go to elections, or will his well-founded fear of elections overcome other considerations at this time? In any case, it would be interesting to see the next moves of the man who demanded that Olmert be replaced and pushed Kadima to hold the primaries. [...]

The decision on the next move is in Livni's hands. She already proved that she is able to win – but how about taking decisions? We'll wait and see."

Sima Kadmon, JED 18.09.08

Der Verkehrsunfall des Verkehrsministers

"Shaul Mofas' Ausscheiden aus dem politischen Leben ist vor allem für Zippi Livni und die Regierungspartei ein schwerer Schlag. Mofas geht nach Hause und auf dem Weg lässt er die Vakuum-Bombe über Kadima platzen. Er hinterlässt ein großes Gefühl der Leere auf dem Gebiet der Führungsqualitäten, der Sicherheit und der Moral. Livni ist ohne Mofas schwächer und weniger beliebt – ohne vereinte Partei im Rücken, ohne stabile Grundlage, die notwendig ist, um ihr zu helfen, [...] eine Regierung zu bilden. Anstatt vor Tausenden Parteimitgliedern am Messegelände zu stehen und die Arme gemeinsam mit dem Besiegten zu heben, ist Livni allein am Schlachtfeld zurückgeblieben. Mit so einem Verkehrsunfall hat sie nicht gerechnet."

Shalom Yerushalmi, MAA 19.09.08

Mofaz's double game

„Shaul Mofaz is mistaken when he claims that the press was on Tzipi Livni's side [...]. Livni won because the public perceived her as representing cleaner politics. [...]

If Mofaz does leave politics, it will be good news. If there is one outstanding chronic disease in Israeli political culture, it is the inability of the loser to go home and dismantle his camp of supporters. [...]

With Mofaz's departure, Livni can make decisions more relevant to matters at hand, and even enlist Mofaz's supporters, rather than try to mollify him and his supporters. One hopes that Livni will not listen to those who claim that Kadima is falling apart because it has lost its main security figure."

HAA 21.09.08

HAA = Haaretz
JED = Jedioth Ahronoth
JPO = Jerusalem Post
MAA = Maariv
IHY = Israeli HaYom

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