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1. Fragile Waffenruhe im Gazastreifen

Die Waffenruhe, die seit Juni zwischen israelischer Armee und palästinensischen Kämpfern im Gazastreifen angehalten hatte, wurde Anfang November unterbrochen. Nachdem israelische Truppen in das Gebiet eingedrungen waren, um einen Tunnel, der offiziellen Angaben zu Folge zur Entführung eines israelischen Soldaten hätten dienen können, zu zerstören, nahmen die Hamas und andere palästinensische Gruppierungen den Raketenbeschuss israelischen Territoriums wieder auf. Während der nächsten zwei Wochen tötete die israelische Armee eine Reihe palästinensischer Militanter und hielt die Grenzübergänge zum Gazastreifen geschlossen, während die Hamas mit Raketen antwortete. Gleichzeitig wies Israel die Kritik der Hohen Kommissarin für Menschenrecht der UN zurück, der zufolge die Blockade des Gazastreifens internationales Recht verletze und zu beenden sei.

Trotz der Kämpfe zeigten beide Seiten Interesse an einer Fortsetzung der Waffenruhe. Die Hamas gab schließlich an, ein von Ägypten vermitteltes israelisches Angebot angenommen zu haben. Nachdem die Waffen 24 Stunden geschwiegen haben, verfügte Verteidigungsminister Barak nun die Öffnung der Grenzübergänge für humanitäre Güter. Die Hamas kündigte indes bereits an, die Waffenruhe nach ihrem Auslaufen im Dezember neu aushandeln zu wollen.

The Gaza 'siege'

"Here's what anyone who follows events in the Gaza Strip - cursorily - might reasonably conclude: An Israeli 'siege' periodically leaves 1.5 million people hungry and in darkness. Innocents are 'collectively punished' while the IDF capriciously 'raids' Gaza killing Palestinians. [...]"

The truth is that Gaza's misfortunes are largely self-inflicted. Hamas has made battling Israel its highest priority regardless of the damage this causes Palestinian society. [...]

With Hamas in control of Gaza, Israel imposed a limited embargo on the hostile territory. Nevertheless, on any given day dozens of trucks carrying food, fuel and medicine are allowed in. [...]

Israeli defense officials do not want the cease-fire to fall apart. At the same time, Jerusalem is not willing to allow a creeping escalation of Hamas violence. If the Islamists end the cease-fire, the cost must be a relentless pursuit of their leaders so as to diminish the capacity of Hamas to govern.

Over the long haul, Israel simply can't tolerate an Islamist regime anywhere between the Mediterranean and the Jordan that is dedicated to its destruction.

Those concerned about the well-being of the people of Gaza should put the pressure where it belongs - and tell Hamas to stop the violence."

JPO 12.11.08

Clueless in Gaza

"And how else did we respond when the Kassams started flying? We stopped trucks bringing food, medicine, fuel and other supplies into Gaza, except for on one day when we let the trucks through. What is the point of this? [...]"

This isn't weakening Hamas or Islamic Jihad, it's not turning the Gazan population against them, it's not curbing terrorism. The siege does absolutely nothing to enhance Israeli security and probably harms it by creating more terrorists.

So what we should do about Gaza is finally, genuinely, end the occupation. Let the people there come and go by sea and air like people do in a free country. Let the trucks go through Israel into Gaza with no more than normal inspection. [...]"

Maybe if we keep in mind the stark imbalance of power in our favor, we can go back to the cease-fire

and avoid the 'big operation' everyone's predicting. [...]

I repeat: The war Israel is fighting with Gaza is the most one-sided war on earth. If the point is to end it, or at least begin to end it, the ball is not in Hamas's court - it's in ours."

Larry Derfner, JPO 19.11.08

When will Israel respond?

"The moderate and sane Arab world is expecting an Israeli blow against Hamas leadership, including its organizational infrastructure and resources. [...]

There are those who mistakenly interpreted Hamas' willingness to agree to the latest lull as the interest of a boxer seeking to avoid a knockout blow by taking a break. [...]

Now it turns out that the aspiration for a lull was a well planned tactical phase in creating a system of deterrence vis-à-vis our leaders in Jerusalem. [...]

Our reluctance to violate the lull despite the Qassam rocket attacks is being perceived by Hamas as an inability to target its leaders as we did in the past.

Hamas interprets Israel's conduct as grave weakness [...]. Sources in the Strip dismiss the frequent border crossing closures in response to lull violations by opposition elements. They don't get overly excited by it, and look who they sent to respond to it in the media...the official in charge of electricity supply. The equation is clear: Israel is battling 'peaceful' residents and fighting generators and supermarkets. In Hamas' view, Israel is scared to confront the group's leaders. [...]

The common perception among Arab commentators is that Israel has ceased to be the 'threatening Israel.' [...]

If there is a sort of consensus in the Arab world regarding who should not be 'ruling the territories,' the answer is Hamas. Therefore, the repeated question is: How long will Israel show restraint? How far would Israel let Hamas go? That is, when will Israel announce its intention to deliver a powerful blow against Hamas leaders and its organizational infrastructure? Observers in Amman, Cairo, Rabat, and Riyadh will not be sorry to see it happening."

Moshe Elad, JED 13.11.08

Tahadiyeh light

"As things looked last night, it seems Hamas can confidently tack on a few advantage points recently accumulated in its conflict with Israel in the Gaza Strip. The massive barrage of Qassam rockets (as well as, in recent days, Katyushas and Grads) completely removed from Palestinian discourse

criticism of the organization, which recently left reconciliation talks with Fatah.

Hamas has successfully conveyed the message that it has overpowered Israel and will soon be able to return to the cease-fire [tahadiyeh] from an advantageous position. [...]

Despite Minister Haim Ramon's recent declaration that the tahadiyeh is 'dead,' it appears that a large-scale military operation in the Strip is still not in the offing."

Amos Harel, HAA 16.11.08

A rift to deep

"The ceasefire that was successful for five months and has only been interrupted recently (and which will likely be renewed) gave Hamas the opportunity to consolidate its control over Gaza.

Hamas was helped in this regard by the boycott and siege that Israel and the international community imposed on Gaza. The siege is only weakening the private sector, the backbone of the social support for Fatah and the peace camp in Gaza. Meanwhile, unable to trade in any traditional manner, some 100-200 tunnels have been dug under the border to Egypt. These are under the direct or indirect control of Hamas, which not only operates its own tunnels but decides who can operate others and taxes them to boot. The siege, with its consequences, is shifting the balance of power among Gazans decisively in favor of Hamas. "

Ghassan Khatib, JPO 19.11.08

Crushing the tahadiyeh

"Every party is careful not to declare that the cease-fire is over, since whoever does so will immediately be denounced as responsible for crushing that fragile construction. But the truth is, it's already gone. [...]

Had things gone according to the deal secured in May, Israel would in about a month be announcing a lull in the West Bank, as well. It would stop arresting Hamas members and quit launching operations against their actions. In such a situation, Hamas would have been able to chalk up an extraordinary achievement: It - and not Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority - would have been responsible for reuniting the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; it - not Fatah - would have seen to the Palestinians' security. [...]

But the sneaking suspicion is that [...] Israel's decision to nibble away at the tahadiyeh is connected to the situation in West Bank. [...]

The last thing Israel means to do is to let Hamas dictate a cease-fire [in the West Bank], too. Israel would rather restrict the battlefield to what the south is already 'accustomed,' than to give Hamas more areas of influence, if not control. At all costs, Hamas must not be given an excuse to apply the tahadiyeh in the West Bank as well. If that means Qassams falling on Sderot, then so be it. But it would be a good idea for someone to explain this to the people living in the western Negev, so they can prepare themselves."

Zvi Bar'el, HAA 16.11.08

2. Kommunalwahlen

Am 11. November fanden in Israel Kommunalwahlen statt. Insbesondere das Rennen in Jerusalem wurde mit Spannung beobachtet. Die wichtigsten Anwärtler auf das Bürgermeisteramt in der Hauptstadt waren der säkulare Geschäftsmann Nir Barkat und sein ultraorthodoxer Rivale Meir Porush. Dies stellte viele linke Wähler, die sich weder mit dem religiösen Kandidaten noch mit der rechten Politik Barkats identifizieren konnten, vor ein Dilemma, da keine wichtige Partei aus dem linken Spektrum einen eigenen Kandidaten ins Rennen schickte. Barkat gewann die Wahl schließlich mit 52% der Stimmen. Da der Großteil der palästinensischen Einwohner der Stadt die Wahlen traditionell boykottiert, hatte der Wahlkampf sich stark auf die Kluft zwischen dem säkularen und religiösen Sektor konzentriert.

In Tel Aviv wurde indes der amtierende Bürgermeister Ron Huldai wiedergewählt. Im Vergleich zur vorherigen Amtszeit verlor seine Liste jedoch an Mandaten im Stadtrat und sieht sich nun einer regen Opposition gegenüber. Huldais wichtigster Konkurrent, Knessetmitglied Dov Khenin von der kommunistischen Partei Chadash, und dessen Liste „Eine Stadt für alle“ errangen 34% der Stimmen. Khenin, der in seiner Kampagne unter anderem günstigere Wohnungspreise versprochen hatte, war gerade bei jüngeren Wählern auf Anklang gestoßen.

Everyone thinks Jerusalem is lost

„It has never been more difficult to decide whom to vote for as mayor of Jerusalem. Both leading candidates project a worrying extremism. [...] The fact that Arcadi Gaydamak and Green Leaf candidate Dan Biron are the only others running for election reflects a fascinating phenomenon: The State of Israel has despaired of Jerusalem, and abandoned it. It turns out that not a single party fighting for leadership of the country believes it has a chance at success in running the city - in other words, everyone believes Jerusalem is lost. [...]

Porush and Barkat are both committed to maintaining Israeli rule in the entire city 'forever.' Of course, they have only a negligible influence on the political future of Jerusalem, but their attitude toward the Arabs could affect the level of tension in the city. Barkat and Porush together sound like Avigdor Lieberman. From that perspective, there is no difference between the two candidates. [...] And so all that's left is to envy those Jerusalemites who have already left the city."

Tom Segev, HAA 10.11.08

Barkat's agenda

"Barkat's stunning 52-43 percent victory over Meir Porush is being acclaimed by everyone who sees Jerusalem as the epicenter of Jewish civilization and the focal point of Zionist aspirations, as well as a 'normal' city where real people - Jews, Muslims and Christians of all stripes - live and work.

He comes to power just as the global economic crisis is being felt in Jerusalem - already the poorest city in Israel. So it is essential that he focus on the issues that matter most: jobs, housing and transportation. [...]

The new mayor must be a healer. He's made a good start by trying to form an all-inclusive city council bringing together parties ranging from the [ultra-orthodox] to the devoutly secular. Let him also find an informal way, outside the limelight, of routinely consulting with Arab leaders. [...]

There's no right-wing or left-wing, religious or secular, Jewish or Arab or Christian way of picking up the garbage or reducing the wait for a bus.

Mr. Barkat, get the job done - and do it fairly, efficiently and inclusively. "

JPO 13.11.08

Seculars, Jerusalem isn't yours

„Secular Jerusalemites, [...] Jerusalem isn't yours. It really isn't. Jerusalem is more ultra-Orthodox than ever, and this trend will only grow stronger. [...]

Jerusalem will become more Orthodox, more devout, and worse for secular residents under a secular mayor. Nir Barkat will be a mayor at the mercy of an Orthodox coalition. The implication is that the ultra-Orthodox will receive much more from him than in their rosier dreams under an Orthodox mayor. [...]

In the name of unity, fraternity, and clinging to power, a secular mayor will give the Orthodox everything they want. After all, you know that without the Orthodox he cannot govern.

An Orthodox mayor would not dare close shops on Shabbat, because he's Orthodox. A secular mayor won't dare open stores on Shabbat, because it will prompt a mess. [...] The ultra-Orthodox will only gain from Nir Barkat's victory, because a secular mayor is good for the Orthodox and bad for the seculars. The seculars will lose big time."

Mordechai Lavi, JED 12.11.08

Huldai deserves renewed trust

"In the important, central city of Tel Aviv, MK Dov Khenin is challenging long-serving Mayor Ron Huldai. Khenin heads Ir Lekulanu, a new list that has attracted media attention and young voters alike. Their protest is important, but most of their arguments, including the claim that Huldai is 'mayor for the wealthy,' are unfounded. Huldai inherited a crowded city with run-down infrastructure, negative migration and an annual budget deficit of between NIS 140 million and NIS 180 million. Ten years later, Tel Aviv has an annual budget surplus of NIS 20 million [...]. Significant infrastructure work has been carried out. [...] The southern neighborhoods have received particular attention, while investment - in quantity and quality - in health, culture and welfare has increased. [...] Huldai has proved himself to be a dedicated, fair and industrious mayor who has kept most of his promises. Those are the facts, and because of them he deserves to be rewarded once again with the public's trust."

HAA 11.11.08

Shades of Obama

"Despite the fact that both candidates have the necessary qualifications, I have no hesitation when it comes to choosing between Ron Huldai and Dov Khenin.

The former represents the arrogance of military generals, the ties to big money, the conceit of piggish capitalism, official indifference, the high-rise apartment buildings of the extremely wealthy [...].

The latter stands for the exact opposite: governmental modesty, accessibility, consideration for the disadvantaged, environmental protection and faith in humanity. [...] Obama-force winds seem to have been blowing through the streets of Tel Aviv these past few weeks. [...]

I will vote for my candidate without the slightest doubt or hesitation."

Shay Fogelman, HAA 11.11.08

3. Rabin - Gedenktag

Anlässlich der jährlichen Gedenkfeier für den 1995 von einem Rechtsextremisten ermordeten israelischen Premierminister Yitzhak Rabin versammelten sich auch in diesem Jahr Zehntausende in Tel Aviv. Auf der Veranstaltung sprachen unter anderem Präsident Peres und die Kadima-Vorsitzende Zippi Livni, die beide Rabins Engagement für den Frieden und die Notwendigkeit gesellschaftlicher Einigkeit betonten.

Auch in den Medien wurden das Vermächtnis Rabins und die Lehre aus den Geschehnissen thematisiert. Aus dem rechten Lager wurde dabei die Kritik laut, dass die Gedenkveranstaltungen aufgrund ihrer Politisierung selbst zur Polarisierung beitrage und die Stimmung gegen die Gegner von Rabins Politik anheize.

A political asset in Rabin Square

"For the 13 years since the murder of Yitzhak Rabin, those making political gain, or those who think that since the murder the right needs to be in a constant state of apology and repentance, have not learned a thing. [...]

Memorial assemblies also provide a platform for the shameless, who blame others for their own personal responsibility for the tragedies the 'peace process' has brought on us. Some people had prophesized that the process would not bring peace, but death, the deepening of hatred between Arabs and Jews and the deterioration of Israel's status around the world. [...]

Even Rabin himself [...] was not far from deciding [...] to break off with his 'partner,' Yasser Arafat. But the murderer put an end to the process of Rabin's awakening from the Oslo delusion. [...]

And that is how Rabin's murder has led indirectly to the murder of hundreds of Jews, which would have

been prevented if only Rabin had lived and had found the courage to halt the process of deception known as Oslo. [...]

Today, as a result of the patronizing and insensitive behavior of those who have drawn no personal or national lessons from the murder, a large portion of the nation finds itself alienated - and avoids following even the media on the memorial day."

Israel Harel, HAA 13.11.08

I wish to remember Rabin too

"Ever since he was murdered, there are those who seek to turn Rabin the man into a myth. And as a myth, it is only natural that he will be enlisted for specific causes and be used for political gains. [...]

Indeed, Rabin was assassinated because of his political way. Because of Oslo. This should not be blurred or forgotten. However, in the same breath, we need to add that this does not grant his political views added moral weight; back then, and at this time too, many good people object to these views and continue to strongly object to them. [...]

Today, 13 years after he was murdered, instead of the assassination turning into an all-Israeli symbol, it has remained the exclusive possession of a specific political camp. Today, it appears that taking part in the mourning, shock, and disgust with the murder is a privilege reserved to Oslo loyalists, while my memory of Rabin the man has been completely marginalized.

Just like me, there are many who on this day wish to mourn Rabin the leader; like me, there are many who wish to reconnect to the shock that hit us as a society and nation, and to repeat the lesson of the terrible murder. However, year after year, there are those who insist on monopolizing the mourning and the memory, while keeping whole sectors out of it."

Reuven Rivlin, JED 10.11.08

We need a Rabin Party

"Friend or not, Rabin is missed. Missed are his responsibility and seriousness. Missed are his good judgment and sobriety. Missed is Rabin's true path, which tried to combine security and peace. [...] He was neither a genius nor a saint, but he was a Tel Aviv sabra who assumed responsibility for the country's fate. [...] As the person responsible, he didn't just see a leftist or rightist reality, he saw an overall and complex reality.

Labor under Rabin received a mandate for peace because the public believed that Rabin's peace would be peace with security. [...] There is no

question that Israel needs the Labor Party. [...] Israel needs Rabin's party. [...]

In the final analysis, just as Rabin was a responsible leader, Labor is a responsible party. We must not give it up."

Ari Shavit, HAA 13.11.08

HAA = Haaretz

HZO= Ha Tzofe

IHY = Israeli HaYom

JED = Jedioth Ahronoth

JPO = Jerusalem Post

MAA = Maariv

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