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1. “Sieg” in Gaza?

Nach 22 Tagen heftiger Kämpfe, die ca. 1300 Palästinensern im Gazastreifen und 13 Israelis das Leben kosteten, erklärte Israel am 17. Januar eine einseitige Waffenruhe. 12 Stunden später kündigte die im Gazastreifen regierende Hamas ihrerseits einen Waffenstillstand an. Daraufhin begann Israel seine Truppen aus dem Landstrich abzuziehen. Sechs europäische Regierungschefs, darunter Angela Merkel, hatten zuvor versichert, sich verstärkt für eine Unterbindung des Waffen-schmuggels nach Gaza einzusetzen. Andererseits hatten sie sich auch für eine Öffnung der Grenzübergänge zwischen Israel und dem Gazastreifen ausgesprochen. In Israel wird nun darüber diskutiert, wie der größte Militäreinsatz in dem Gebiet seit 1967 zu bewerten sei. Während der militärische Erfolg – insbesondere im Vergleich zum Libanonkrieg von 2006, in dem die Armee als unzureichend vorbereitet kritisiert wurde – zumeist als positiv befunden wird, herrscht Skepsis über die Langzeitwirkungen des Einsatzes.

Hamas down but not out

“The unilateral ceasefire declared in Gaza brings Hamas back to power in the Strip despite the irritation of Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Mubarak, as well as Olmert, Livni and Barak. The truce also brings the relationship between Israel and Gaza to square one, where the war started.

From day one, it was important for Hamas to endure, so that at the end of the war Ismail Haniyeh and his associates would be able to take power again. Jerusalem’s ceasefire declaration is perceived in their eyes as affirmation that Israel failed to break Hamas. [...]

The war deepened the schism within the Arab world, yet Hamas boosted its legitimacy even in Turkey. The war also deepened the schism between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and now Hamas will not allow Abbas any foothold in Gaza.

The war advanced Hamas’ strategy of objection to reconciliation with Israel, and many years will have to pass before an Arab peace initiative that includes willingness to recognize Israel becomes part of the discourse in the Arab world.”

Ronny Shaked, JED 19.01.09

Den Augenblick nicht versäumen

„Schwarzseher [...] werden die Ergebnisse des Krieges als Misserfolg darstellen, nur weil Ziele, die von Anfang an nicht gesetzt wurden, nicht erreicht wurden. Der öffentliche Diskurs sollte diese gefährliche Darstellung, die vor allem den Feinden Israels dient, nicht annehmen. [...]

Israel hat bewiesen [...], dass man auch der internationalen Kritik standhalten kann, die – wie in solchen Fällen üblich – weniger scharf ausfällt, als man anfangs glaubte.

Auch die einseitige Feuerpause könnte als wichtiger politischer Erfolg in die Geschichte eingehen. Die Rückendeckung, die Israel von bedeutenden Ländern in Europa erhalten hat [...], und die Tatsache, dass das Thema Waffenschmuggel an die internationale Tagesordnung gebracht wurde, all das gibt Israel eine gute Ausgangsposition, viel besser, als sie es vor dem Einsatz war.“

Yoav Shorek, HZO 20.01.09

And the winner is...

"It is clear to both sides that Hamas actually emerged stronger from the three weeks of fighting. Its senior figures in Gaza are already back on the street, not afraid of targeted assassination by Israel [...], and the movement's leadership is now united and no longer has to deal with allegations of discord between 'internal' and 'external' leaders. [...]"

Now Hamas is getting ready to deal with the strong pressure that will be exerted by the Arab states and some European countries, notably France, to unite the Palestinian ranks and form a national-unity government with Fatah. [...]"

This is exactly what Hamas is waiting for: Reconciliation is its next political 'lever.'

Thus Hamas, in the wake of the war, may achieve a status similar to what Hezbollah achieved following the Second Lebanon War, when it became a partner in the government."

Zvi Bar'el, HAA 23.01.09

Deterrence restored?

"Whatever the fate of the cease-fire, it is not too soon to praise the IDF for an astoundingly effective war against Hamas, and to thank our fighters for their extraordinary efforts - the disparagement of the foreign media notwithstanding - to avoid hurting non-combatants.

Israel is a civilized society that cherishes life and is loath to engage an enemy that takes cover among its own civilian population. Yet in the confrontation with Hamas, as Olmert stressed, it did its utmost to minimize civilian fatalities while nonetheless inflicting heavy losses on the terror group.

It has been disagreeable for the IDF to strike back at a Hamas whose gunmen operate out of homes, mosques, schools and hospitals. Israel, Olmert said, regrets the pain its actions have caused in Gaza.

But Israel will not commit national suicide. And in Operation Cast Lead, it was honoring its obligation to protect its people, in a theater of warfare cynically created by Hamas."

JPO 18.01.09

Failure

"This war ended in utter failure for Israel.

This goes beyond the profound moral failure, which is a grave matter in itself, but pertains to its inability to reach its stated goals. [...] We have gained nothing in this war save hundreds of graves, some of them very small, thousands of maimed people, much destruction and the besmirching of Israel's image. [...]"

We have not weakened Hamas. The vast majority of its combatants were not harmed and popular support for the organization has in fact increased. Their war has intensified the ethos of resistance and determined endurance. [...]"

The population in Gaza, which has sustained such a severe blow, will not become more moderate now. [...]"

Israel's actions have dealt a serious blow to public support for the state. While this does not always translate itself into an immediate diplomatic situation, the shockwaves will arrive one day. [...]"

Graver still is the damage this will visit upon our moral spine. It will come from difficult questions about what the IDF did in Gaza, which will occur despite the blurring effect of recruited media."

Gideon Levy, HAA 22.01.09

2. Amtsantritt Barack Obamas

Die Amtseinführung Barack Obamas als 44. Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika wurde auch in Israel mit Spannung verfolgt. Dabei wird in den Medien insbesondere darüber spekuliert, wie sich seine Strategie für den Nahen Osten und den „Kampf gegen den Terror“ von der seines Vorgängers unterscheiden wird. In seiner Antrittsrede hatte Obama sich explizit an die

„muslimische Welt“ gewandt, mit der er einen „neuen Weg, basierend auf gegenseitigem Interesse und Respekt“ suche. In Israel wird darüber diskutiert, was dies für das Verhältnis zu dem Iran und Syrien bedeuten könnte, sowie für die Zukunft von Friedensgesprächen mit den Palästinensern.

Wising you good luck, Mr. President

"You are the president of the Free World, and billions of people are looking up to you as of today

with their hopes and prayers. [...] And we, in our little corner, here in the Middle East, are anxious to see whether you shall continue the tradition of American presidents in recent generations and view us as an ally; your frontline aircraft carrier in this bloody region of the world.

We are anxious to see whether you will bestow on us all the good that the great America can offer, or whether, heaven forbid, you will see us as just one more nation among all others.

You have the power, almost all of it, to decide whether we shall be waking up every morning with a smile and new song in our heart, or whether, heaven forbid, more worried wrinkles shall be finding their way to our foreheads.”

Eitan Haber, JED 20.01.09

And the centrifuges spin on

“Obama's commitment to the State of Israel is not a given, the way it was for previous presidents. There is no sign in his past of any special feelings for us. [...]

Among the people Obama has appointed, there are several experts on what is going on here, and they have solid opinions about the kind of concessions they believe Israel must make. In their eyes, even Ehud Barak is too right wing. [...]

The long and the short of it is that we need to conduct ourselves differently with this new administration. [...] The next Israeli government will have to watch itself and not do anything rash. [...]

Obama may try to solve our grave defense problems [...] by calling for dialogue or reordering priorities, but it is worth remembering - and reminding the world - that for the moment, Iran's centrifuges are busy spinning, night and day.”

Yoel Marcus, HAA 23.01.09

Not by force alone

“In addressing the international community, Obama spoke about a new strategy that rests on international cooperation and adherence to values, and uses force only prudently and wisely. [...]

Israel was not mentioned in the speech, but its leaders need to listen carefully to the message that went out from Washington yesterday. It was impossible to mistake: Obama intends to put an end to the policy of his predecessor, George W. Bush, which encouraged the use of force over diplomacy. [...]

Like other governments worldwide, the new government in Jerusalem after the elections will be judged by its ability to integrate into the processes

Obama will lead and its willingness to cooperate with him. In short, on its success in building, not destroying.“

HAA 21.01.09

The meaning of the war in Gaza

“The Israel-Arab related issues that Barack Obama will face upon assuming the presidency now begin, unexpectedly, with the ugly unfinished business of Gaza. [...]

If Obama wants to avoid another round of fighting in Gaza, he will have to ensure that the effort succeeds.

[...] One way to ensure that the ceasefire holds is for Obama to reevaluate the heavy restrictions that Israel and the Quartet, with Egyptian and PLO support, placed a year and a half ago on contact with Hamas and on open commerce with Gaza. This war demonstrated that Hamas, even if (hopefully) defanged, is here to stay. Obama, the new leader on the block, is well situated to effect a new departure with regard to engaging Hamas - just as he intends to engage Iran and Syria - and opening the Gaza-Israel passages to commerce, thereby reversing a foolish and counter-productive policy.”

Yossi Alpher, JPO 20.01.09

The war as a warm-up act for Obama

“In recent months, foreign-policy experts from Obama's camp have debated whether there's any point in a new peace initiative. [...] The Gaza War proves [...] that] after the years of neglect under Bush, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has blown up again, on Obama's doorstep. [...]

Any serious American initiative requires pressure on both sides. Conventional wisdom says that a new president won't risk public confrontation with Israel - particularly not a Democrat president, who is more dependent on Jewish votes. But conventional wisdom may no longer be valid. [...] While public support for Israel continues, blind support for hawkish Israeli policies can no longer be assumed, even among Jews. [...] In such circumstances, Obama can reasonably hope to build political support for an assertive diplomatic initiative. Since outside pressure is necessary to disentangle Israel from the territories, this is a positive development.”

Gershon Gorenberg, HAA 18.01.09

Bush's parting lesson

"Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton pledged in her Senate confirmation hearings that the new administration will immediately seek to engage Iran diplomatically. [...] Moreover, she pledged that the Obama administration will make an immediate push to establish a Palestinian state.

Clinton's testimony makes clear that Obama's major initiatives will all involve forcing Israel to pay a price. According to a source in close contact with Obama's transition team, the first price that Israel will be pressured to pay will be the Golan Heights."

Caroline Glick, JPO 15.01.09

3. Ausschluss arabischer Parteien von den Knessetwahlen

Der Beschluss, zwei arabische Parteien von den Knessetwahlen im Februar auszuschließen, ist am 22. Januar vom Obersten Gerichtshof aufgehoben worden. Zehn Tage zuvor hatte das Zentrale Wahlkomitee, in dem Mitglieder aller Knessetparteien vertreten sind, mit großer Mehrheit für eine Disqualifizierung der Parteien Balad und der Vereinigten Arabischen Liste Ta'al gestimmt. Die Petition gegen die Parteien, deren Mitglieder arabische Bürger Israels sind, war von den rechten Parteien Israel Beitenu und HaBayit HaYehudi

("Das Jüdische Haus") eingereicht worden. Grundlage des Ausschlusses bildete eine Gesetzesnovelle von 2002, die besagt, dass eine Partei disqualifiziert werden kann, wenn sie den militärischen Kampf eines verfeindeten Landes oder einer Terrororganisation unterstützt.

Dass der Ausschluss vor Gericht nicht standhalten würde, war jedoch schon vor der Entscheidung abzusehen: Bereits 2003 hatte der Oberste Gerichtshof die Teilnahme Balads in einem ähnlichen Fall bestätigt. Gerade deswegen war den am Ausschlussverfahren beteiligten Abgeordneten vorgeworfen worden, mit dem Verfahren auf Kosten der arabischen Minderheit auf Wählerfang gegangen zu sein. Insbesondere Eitan Cabel, der Vertreter der Arbeitspartei, musste sich heftiger Kritik aus den eigenen Reihen stellen, da er entgegen der Erwartungen ebenfalls für einen Ausschluss gestimmt hatte.

Don't disqualify the Arab lists

"The Central Elections Committee will deliberate on three petitions today calling for the disqualification of

Balad's candidate list [...] and on a petition against United Arab List-Ta'al's election list. [...]

This reflects a dangerous level of shortsightedness and narrow-mindedness. The state has a clear interest in having the Arab community's representatives - its genuine representatives - participate in the political game and serve in the Knesset. Israel has a clear interest in not pushing these representatives out, forcing them to create an independent political system.

It is precisely the intense debates between the extreme right and Arab parties that exemplify Israeli democracy and its ability to include such disparate factions under one roof. [...]

It is especially in these days that such a decision is so important, when the Arab parties are conducting a legitimate struggle against Operation Cast Lead."

HAA 12.01.09

Oberste Richter, rettet Israel

„Die Initiative von Israel Beitenu und Nationale Union, die arabischen Parteien auszuschließen, ist nichts weiter als eine Wahlkampagne. Dies ist ein Trick, um noch ein paar Wählerstimmen zu erhalten, aber im Grunde wissen auch sie, dass eine solche Entscheidung dem Image Israel in der Welt sehr schadet.“

Dan Margalit, IHY 13.01.09

In praise of moral decision

„The Knesset's Elections Committee conveyed a message, via a large majority, to the political leadership of Israel's Arabs: Those who reject the Jewish people's right for a state of their own would no longer be able to enjoy the perks of serving in the Jewish state's parliament. [...]

There is no denying that Israeli Arabs enjoy the advantages of living under Israel's democracy without being asked to bear the price of its existence in terms of putting their lives on the line. [...] As opposed to most Israeli citizens, they are also not a target for terror attacks. [...]

The last time we saw a decision to disqualify a party, High Court judges reversed the motion to disqualify Azmi Bishara from running in the elections; later on it turned out that they were protecting a Hizbullah agent."

Emanuel Shilo, JED 14.01.09

Democracy in a panic

"Israeli democracy has been exposed in all its fear and panic. [...] What is so threatening about a party that champions a model other than 'Jewish-

democratic' or that seeks to replace the concept of 'independence' with the concept of 'Nakba?'

Do they have the power to undermine the Jewishness of the Jews or the Israeliness, Zionism and the sovereignty of Israel? [...]

Those who fear the abuse of democracy would do well to make do with the 1984 Supreme Court decision ruling that the restrictions over the right to be elected should be imposed 'only as an extreme last means of dealing with a clear and present danger.' Any other means, including the slap in the face the Arabs received on Monday, destroys democracy rather than protecting it."

Avirama Golan, HAA 14.01.09

What a democracy owes itself

"Democracies are not obligated to commit suicide. Spain, for instance, bans the political party affiliated with the terror group ETA. [...]

Paradoxically, the disappearance of Balad and UAL from the Knesset might allow the emergence of Arab parties that actually cared about building the kinds of parliamentary alliances that can get things done for the Arab sector.

Israel's proportional representation system allowed the UAL and Balad to gain six seats in the current Knesset. The tragic dynamic is that the more radical the party, the more support it garners from the Arab public. It doesn't help matters that the major parties give Arab voters little incentive to shun the extremists.

In a world where 21 states define themselves as 'Arab,' and 56 proudly identify as Islamic, we do have a problem with Knesset members who begrudge Jewish self-determination within the rubric of a democratic Israel that respects minority rights.

The Likud's Bennie Begin cautions that Israeli society must be 'very, very, careful' about outlawing factions or disenfranchising constituencies in wartime. To that we would add: But neither should our polity shy away from making tough decisions to protect the system from those who would destabilize it."

JPO 13.01.09

Don't silence the critics

"Democracy is not about silencing the critics. It is in fact the opposite of that.

The attempt to curb freedom of opinion and the right to elect and be elected threatens the State's stability more than the expression of an infuriating opinion. The High Court's decision Wednesday reinforces these basic perceptions. In light of the ongoing

difficulty to understand this, as displayed at the Knesset's Elections Committee where politicians conduct themselves as public relations professionals and take irresponsible decisions, we would do well to take away their power to disqualify Knesset lists."

Boaz Okon, JED 22.01.09

We'll pay for court's mistake

"The military campaign in the Gaza Strip helped us better understand the reality we're living within. The emerging trends of disloyalty among growing sectors of Israel's Arab community are indeed frightening, and we must not repress them. The opposite is true. We should do everything in order to change them. A democracy must stand up for itself, and in this context the High Court's ruling in respect to the Arab parties is a mistake we shall be paying a price for. [...]

It will be wrong to think that all Israeli Arabs are traitors. There are loyal citizens out there who fully understand the immense advantages inherent in being an Israeli citizen, rather than a resident of Ramallah or Gaza. With these people we have a basis for the establishment of stable relations, yet the radicalization led by the likes of the Supreme Arab Monitoring Committee and the northern branch of the Islamic Movement jeopardize the delicate fabric of ties between us and the entire Arab community. [...]

The State of Israel must reinforce those who wish to see coexistence, yet at the same time adopt an iron fist against those who call for its physical and spiritual destruction. [...] The kind of leniency shown by the court the other day will continue to encourage the radicals and marginalize the moderates. [...]

Loyalty is both a right and a duty. Every citizen must respect the Declaration of Independence and the State of Israel's Jewish and democratic character. [...]

The time has come to convey a clear message to the next government: Without loyalty, one shall not be granted citizenship."

Arik Sinai, JED 22.01.09

4. Knessetwahlen

Nachdem die Kämpfe in Gaza beendet worden sind, rücken die für den 10. Februar anberaumten Knessetwahlen wieder in den Fokus der öffentlichen

Aufmerksamkeit. Umfragen zufolge wird Benjamin Netanjahus Partei Likud die meisten Sitze gewinnen – ein Ergebnis das auch vor der Militäroperation vorausgesagt wurde. Der Arbeitspartei werden inzwischen einige Mandate mehr prophezeit, nicht genug jedoch, um Kadima unter der Führung Zippi Livni den zweiten Platz strittig zu machen. In den Medien wird analysiert, welche Auswirkungen der Gazaeinsatz auf die Positionen der Vorsitzenden Netanjahu, Barak und Livni und ihre Parteien haben könnte..

Pictures of victory

“While the campaign in Gaza was touted by our leaders as a way to ‘change the security reality in the South,’ for our leaders, its most important goal was to change the electoral reality ahead of the February 10 general elections. Indeed, for them, the operation would have more appropriately been named ‘Operation Cast Ballots.’ [...]

By waging Operation Cast Lead, Olmert, Livni and Barak hoped to turn the absence of military defeat into the building blocks of political triumph. The operation was supposed to secure their political futures in three ways. First, it was supposed to change the subject of the electoral campaign.

As Olmert looks ahead to retirement, and as Livni and Barak vie with Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu to replace him, all three politicians wanted the elections to be about something other than their failures to defeat Hizbullah, their failure to defend the South from Hamas's growing arsenal, and their failure to contend with Iran's nuclear weapons program. This goal was accomplished by Operation Cast Lead. [...]

[But] just as the goal of not losing did not bring Israel victory over Hamas, so too, Livni, Olmert and Barak's bid to use the operation to increase their political cache does not seem to have succeeded. Opinion polls taken in the aftermath of Olmert's announcement of the cease-fire on Saturday night showed that Likud has maintained, and even expanded, its lead against Kadima and Labor.”

Caroline Glick, JPO 19.01.09

Light artillery

“In another three weeks, Israel will be going to the polls to elect the 18th Knesset and nobody has a clue yet whether the war has produced a new leader or changed the political map. Just because someone has led the country in a successful war doesn't mean that person automatically deserves to be its civilian leader. [...]

Ehud Barak has emerged from the Gaza war as a Class-A military leader, and theoretically at least, if he is elected to the Knesset in the upcoming elections, he could become prime minister. [...] But the public that stood in awe of his skills as defense minister may not necessarily see him as the man for prime minister. Many people still hold it against him that he stayed away from politics for six years after his defeat at the polls. [...]

Barak has doubled his ratings in the public opinion polls, but he and his party are still in third place - not in a position to put together a government. [...]

[Meanwhile] Benjamin Netanyahu has been standing on the sidelines, playing the role of patriotic kibitzer and international PR man. He is sure the public will vote for him, although it is hard to say exactly why. [...]

But Kadima is not going to disappear from the map [...]. According to the polls, it will survive as one of the two major parties thanks to Tzipi Livni. [...]

To Livni's credit, she was the first person to get up in the Knesset and demand a military response to the Qassam attacks, long before Barak ordered the operation.“

Yoel Marcus, HAA 20.01.09

One war, three losers

“The war has also produced political winners and losers. The winners are Ehud Barak and Binyamin Netanyahu, and the loser is Kadima.

The defense minister has reminded his many eulogizers that he has not forgotten how to fight. It took poise and resolve to plan and execute this operation, and it is good to see that under Barak's leadership the IDF has addressed its flaws of summer '06. [...] All this means renewed respect for Barak and his party, and therefore also more votes. Yet those will come from Kadima, not Likud.

For Netanyahu, the very emergence of hostilities in the Gaza Strip is a vindication of his warnings three years ago that unilateralism would result in violence. [...]

Kadima, at the same time, will have to explain what happened to the unilateral-retreat ticket on which Ehud Olmert made it run back in '05. [...]

No wonder, then, that some Kadima cynics hoped to delay next month's election. They know that the one idea behind which they once rallied, sweeping unilateral retreats, emerges from this war as defeated as Hamas and its missiles.“

Amotz Asa-El, JPO 15.01.09

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

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