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1. Vorgezogene Neuwahlen

The roller coaster of election polls
(…) When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to dissolve the government, he failed to create a real political agenda. The security issue was perceived as calm and his attempt to invent an economic agenda (…) and a governance agenda (…) was perceived as an election stunt. On this background, Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni’s Zionist Camp grew stronger, offering a more appealing social agenda. Early last week, Netanyahu succeeded in creating a security-related agenda (…) which led to a four-seat advantage over the Zionist Camp. (…) Bayit Yehudi Chairman Naftali Bennett realized that the settlers in his party are not interested in the social agenda (…) and that they are spilling over to Eli Yishai’s Yachad party. Yisrael Beytenu Chairman Avigdor Lieberman, who lost Knesset seats in the polls, shifted back to the right, and Shas Chairman Aryeh Deri, who realized that the social-economic agenda had already been taken by Moshe Kahlon, announced that he would not join a left-wing government. The roller coaster of election polls will continue until March 17. (…) This battle will be fought in the media coverage in newspapers and on television, not through empty slogans in ads and on billboards.
Baruch Leshem, JED, 10.02.15

Zionist Camp’s economics guru needs to revamp his program
(…) Trajtenberg’s plan isn’t right (…). It promises the world while forgetting there isn’t the money. (…) how can we talk about increased spending without getting into a Greek-style crisis? (…) The plan’s main plank is housing. It proposes giving away land for free if the government is allowed to rent the homes to young couples at subsidized prices. This isn’t a realistic plan (…). It’s a step backwards to the days of bribery and deception. Who would manage the housing stock? Who would get the homes? What would the criteria be? (…) On other issues — edu-
Israel’s ban of Arab lawmaker from election is unjust

The High Court will meet Tuesday to decide whether to confirm the disqualifications from the March 17 election of Arab MK Haneen Zoabi and far-rightist Baruch Marzel. Both candidates were disqualified last week by the Central Elections Committee, a move that contradicted the position of both the attorney general and the court itself. (…) Zoabi’s disqualification lacks all foundation. An Arab MK has fallen victim to a clause permitting the banning of a candidate or party expressing support for an enemy state or a terror group’s armed struggle. (…) Regarding Zoabi’s infuriating remarks, even in the interview in which she refused to call the kidnappers of three Jewish teens terrorists, Zoabi noted that she did not support their actions. (…) There is no clear, persuasive and unequivocal evidence, as required by law, proving that Zoabi expressed support for an armed struggle. As for disqualification based on denying Israel’s existence as a Jewish state, the rationale is problematic. One cannot prohibit a political discussion on the state’s character and definition, and in any case the High Court ruled, when reversing Zoabi’s disqualification during the previous election, that her opinions did not just the application of this rationale. In light of the election committee’s repeated disqualifications of Arab candidates for political reasons, Israel should tighten the requirements and drastically reduce the use of this instrument. Still, Zoabi and Marzel should not be treated equally.

Editorial, HAA, 15.02.15

Israel’s Arabs should join forces with sane Zionists

I would like to turn to Israel’s Arab citizens because we share the same fate: We share the heart’s desire and responsibility in the upcoming elections to turn the rule over from Benjamin Netanyahu’s nationalist-aggressive camp government to Isaac Herzog’s democratic peace camp government. In my opinion, the decision to choose the name “Zionist Camp” was not a bright one – not because I am not Zionist, but because it contains a rejection of my potential partners, Israel’s Arab citizens. (…) True Zionism has made it its goal to create a national home for the Jews here, alongside the Arab and in collaboration with them. Those Israeli Arab citizens who want to live in peace and equality with Israel’s Jews don’t have to become Zionist, but they can cooperate with the sane Zionists. (…) I ask those Arabs who are willing to advance the aspiration to replace the government to give their vote to Herzog. (…) This is not just a Zionist interest, but an interest shared by all of Israel’s sane citizens, both Arabs and Jews, who see our joint life in two states for two people as the beginning of the solution.

Kobi Richter, JED, 06.02.15

Isaac Herzog’s nerves would stymie him as prime minister

Is Labor Party chief Isaac Herzog the right man to be prime minister? (…) Herzog was a successful minister, both at the Tourism Ministry and the Social Affairs Ministry. He’s an excellent politician; everybody’s friend. He knows how to build a coalition and has close links to journalists, the wealthy and the heads of social-welfare groups. It’s hard to find someone who disagrees with him. (…) He’s creative in negotiations; just give him a reasonable chance to put together a cabinet and he’ll make a cocktail that Yesh Atid’s Yair Lapid, Yisrael Beiteinu’s Avigdor Lieberman and Meretz’s Zehava Galon can live with, not to mention the ultra-Orthodox parties. But stomach-churning questions remain. When was the last time Herzog took a position on an issue his political base didn’t like? He was in the cabinet during the Second Lebanon War and made no mark. He sat for years in the governments of Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and Netanyahu and never considered committing political suicide on any issue. Suicide? He didn’t even challenge the prime minister on a matter of principle. And more worrisome: How does he stand up under pressure? Can he, or must he, please everyone all the time? (…) Herzog is a man under pressure by nature, not to say hysterical. (…)
it’s frightening to imagine this man heading fateful discussions. (...) I’ll take him any day over Netanyahhu (...). But anyone who dreams that Herzog will evacuate settlers, sign a permanent agreement with the Palestinians or establish a constitution had better wake up.
Raviv Drucker, HAA, 15.02.15

2. Netanyahus Rede vor dem US-Kongress

Netanyahu, do the right thing: Don’t go to Washington
Don’t go, Netanyahhu, (...) precisely because the Iranian threat is so important (...) – don’t go. Because this trip will impair the exact issue that you are traveling on behalf of. (...) We know that Obama is wrong and that you are right. But if there is still a chance to get him to change his mind, you are making every possible mistake in order to turn him into a rival. (...) Mr. Prime Minister, there is a problem with your body language. You, the best speaker of all with the excellent PR skills, the man who knows so much, is succeeding in turning our most important friend, our strategic friend, into a rival. This isn't happening because you're wrong; it's happening because you convey constant anger. (...) So what good does it do that you are right? All you have succeeded in doing is deteriorating our relations with an American administration and an American president who we need so much right now, as we face a strategic threat. (...) 
Ben-Dror Yemini, JED, 08.02.15

Israel’s Republican governor
(...) Netanyahhu’s stance is known. (...) The invitation to address the American elected representa tives was not aimed at delivering information which is not available through other means. It’s a show of respect. It's not meant to be an oppositional situation, but the exact opposite: In such an invitation, the US expresses its support for a man and a nation through an event which is mainly ceremonial. (...) once the Democrats clarified that they do not approve of the visit, (...) the damage created by the visit has become much greater than what Netanyahhu stands to gain from it. Instead of creating a consensus of support, it is creating factionalism. Netanyahhu, despite his declarations, is thinking less about Iran and more about politics – Israeli and American. He is thinking like a Republican governor of a state in the Middle East. The party members are deriving pleasure from the slap in Obama’s face. The price will be paid by us.
Aviad Kleinberg, JED, 12.02.15

Netanyahu lost his audience
Prime Minister Netanyahu does not need to wait for a natural disaster or a security incident for an excuse to postpone his address to Congress. He needs to honestly explain that a leader is someone who at a moment of crisis can admit that a step he had planned has reached a turning point, and that the circumstances have changed. At this juncture, Netanyahu must make a decision not as a politician, but as a statesman who recognizes what's good for his country. (...) This visit was born in sin, and the punishment will follow. Obama has two years left in his tenure, and during this period, Netanyahu will not see the inside of the White House.
Orly Azoulay, JED, 11.02.15

Go, Bibi, go
(...) National security does not begin and end with elections. Netanyahu didn’t just start working against a nuclearized Iran. It looks like he understands better than Obama and the president's advisers just how serious the situation is. That's why he was invited to speak. (...) If it's necessary to beat down every door and turn over worlds to prevent the insane Iranian leadership from getting a nuclear bomb, that's what will be done, even at the cost of complicating relations with Obama. Congress understands that, and the citizens of the U.S. understand that. During World War II, the world was silent, and American Jews were ashamed to cause an uproar over what was happening to their brothers in Europe. Today, too, there are a few court Jews who are ashamed of us. They recall the German Jews of the late 19th century, whom the Zionist movement disturbed from assimilating into German society. Zionism portrayed them as having double loyalties and Palestina as their true land. We don't live by their dictates. Jews will no longer stay silent. Go, Bibi, go.
Dror Eydar, IHY, 08.02.15
Obama is not the person to address on Iran

(...Netanyahu is right about one thing: The American president, who has his own political reasons, is making a huge effort to convince the Iranians to sign – sending them messages, letters and messengers and getting into an argument with the Congress. (...) Even today – two months before the scheduled date for signing an agreement – the Iranians have hardly budged while the Americans have reached the limit of concessions. Rouhani left the following instruction to his negotiations team: Iran will not give up any ability it has already acquired. It will not dismantle any centrifuges. (...) The Americans have agreed that Iran will continue to hold onto the major part of the centrifuges, but are demanding that the West will control the uranium enrichment products: The quantity, the enrichment rate and the transfer of surplus to Russia. That's ridiculous. It means that the Obama administration has basically agreed that Iran will become a nuclear threshold state, only the supervision will be tighter in the first years. In other words, the moment the Iranians decide to seize the opportunity, they will break through with a bomb very quickly. Iran is retaining the option to produce a nuclear weapon whenever it feels like it. (...) If Netanyahu really wants to influence the outcome of the nuclear talks, he shouldn't travel to Washington but to Paris and London, and deliver his address there. Unless he has a different consideration.
Alex Fishman, JED, 09.02.15

Bad Iran deal coming

(...It is reported that the incipient deal will leave Iran with most of its nuclear infrastructure intact and with a greatly reduced sanctions regime in return for Iran's collaboration in confronting Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. A fool's agreement indeed, the equivalent of inviting the fox into the chicken coop in return for the fox's promise to help protect the chickens. There can be no doubt that the Israeli government is apprised of the outlines of this "deal" and as a result the debate over whether Prime Minister Netanyahu should or should not address a joint session of Congress in early March at the invitation of the Speaker of the House, John Boehner, to discuss the Iranian threat, should now be laid to rest. He really has no choice but to do what he can to assure that the US Congress is fully apprised of the likely results of the most recent example of violently dangerous appeasement. (...) The president is desperate to be able to claim some sort of foreign policy "victory" to embellish an otherwise dismal record. He should not be given the opportunity to mimic Chamberlain in 1938, this time at the expense of Israel and half the Middle East besides, instead of merely Czechoslovakia.
Norman Bailey, GLO, 10.02.15

3. Vormarsch des IS


Ideology of death is making a comeback

(...) brutal acts and unrestrained violence, and even threats of annihilation, are not only a thing of the totalitarian past. (...) Many in the West still perceive the Islamist totalitarianism as marginal. They say that "Islam is a religion of peace," that there are "extreme Muslims" but that the majority are "moderate." They also talk about "radical Muslims" who react to the injustices of colonialism, and distinguish between "jihadists" and "Muslim brothers with a democratic orientation." The nuances are important: We must not generalize all the Muslims and we must not create a stigmatization of a culture struggle. Nonetheless, we must not blur the Islamist totalitarianism which is threatening the entire world. Today, with the absence of even a rhetoric promise or lip service for humanitarian intervention, there is a fear that the lessons of Auschwitz are becoming vague.

Yossi Shain, JED, 02.02.15

The world is helpless against jihad

(...There are wars. There is brutality against rivals and enemies. There are exceptions in every war. But when it comes to jihad, horror is a norm. Slaughtering a person in front of the cameras appeared to be the lowest point. We were wrong. The burning of the Jordanian pilot clarifies that we are witnessing something much darker. Pure evil that is turned into a snuff film. Make no mistake. The Islamic State is not just the organization operating in Syria and Iraq. Why in the past year we saw schoolchildren being massacred and entire villages being burned down with their residents in Pakistan and Nigeria. There is no real difference between Boko Haram, the Taliban
and ISIS. ISIS just likes to do it in front of the cam-
eras. We should pay attention to the numbers. In 2013, jihad killed 17,958 people. In 2014, the death toll jumped to 32,007. We are not talking about wars. We are only talking about jihad massacres. Tens of thousands are a statistic. One slaughter, followed by others, and the burning of a man alive, are making the full scope of the horror clear. The free world is helpless. (…) Some Hamas leaders are explicitly talking about the need to annihilate Jews, and not just Jews, but also Christians – and the response is another pro-Hamas rally, encouraged by the "forces of progress." It doesn’t end with an understanding towards Hamas. It continues with understanding, justification and sympathy towards ISIS as well among similar circles in the world and in Israel. (…) Jihad has become much stronger and more murderous. The world which is fighting it has become even more powerless. We should only hope that it sober up at some point. Let’s hope that by the time that happens, it won’t be too late.

Ben-Dror Yemini, JED, 04.02.15

Is the battle against ISIS winnable?

(…) one of the reasons Islamic State is attracting recruits is that it appears to be winning, going from victory to victory. Potential recruits will naturally want to join such a group instead of its less successful rivals, and may even be persuaded that the group is winning because God is on its side. Here the United States’ role can be central: Stop the Islamic State group from having all these victories. Stop the momentum. Erode the image of success. (…) Islamic State did not gain all that territory and a surge of recruits from around the globe just because of ideology or because its opponents are sometimes regimes whose popularity and legitimacy are questionable. Victory breeds the sense of inevitable future victory – momentum. Defeat, retreat, setbacks, and casualties will have an opposite effect. It’s hard to see that happening without leadership from Washington, ranging from military aid and training, to diplomatic efforts to create and lead coalitions, to actual use of American airpower and some troops on the ground. Islamic State will not be defeated "merely" by battlefield successes, but it won’t be defeated without them.

Elliot Abrams, IHY, 02.02.15

The U.S.-led coalition is fighting ISIS with no clear goal

Should the coalition forces fighting Islamic State aim to destroy it or just halt it? (…) The coalition forces face two main problems: the absence of a clear strategy toward the ultimate objective, and the deep divisions among the forces that are fighting Islamic State. (…) the United Arab Emirates said it would stop participating in air strikes until a rapid-response force was established to rescue pilots who are injured or shot down in battle. (…) in Britain the question being asked is: (…) How can Islamic State’s power be degraded? Can this be done without the use of ground forces? And what does “containment” mean? Does it mean letting Islamic State continue to wield control in places where it has established itself and stopping it from spreading to other areas? The same questions are being asked in Washington. “We are doing what needs to be done in the war against ISIS,” President Barack Obama declared. His rivals in Congress are not convinced this is so, but they have no clear answers to offer either. It’s easier for them to criticize Obama than to put forth a realistic plan.

Zvi Bar’el, HAA, 10.02.15

4. Medienquerschnitt

Streit um Jury vom Israel-Preis

Jabotinsky himself wouldn’t qualify for the Israel Prize

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s attitude toward the Israel Prize is not at all surprising. With his deception, he is destroying yet another corner of independent thought in the institutions of the state. He treats them as if they were his private domain, just as he does when spending public funds on ice cream and on flying beds. (…) A casual glance at the writings of Ze’ev Jabotinsky shows that even this mentor of Netanyahu is unworthy of the 2015 prize, according to Netanyahu’s criteria. Would anyone espousing full equality for “the son of Arab, the son of Nazareth and my son” merit such an honor? Or to be a judge? Unthinkable. There are precedents for refusing to accept the Israel Prize. This year’s winner, if they have any decency, should also refuse. As Yeshayahu Leibowitz did in his time. The Talmud scholar Hanoch Albeck, definitely no leftist, refused the prize in 1957, stating in words that Netanyahu and his emissaries have long forgotten: “The multiplicity of prizes in the state and their distribution to
so many people diminishes their value to the point at which they become undignified. Secondly, the heavy tax burden carried by the public does not justify using this money for such dubious purposes, and I’m troubled by the possibility of enjoying the prize money."
Ariane Melamed, HAA, 13.02.15

Frauen gegen ultra-orthodoxe Belästigungen

Ultra-Orthodox extremists harassing women over ‘modesty’ comes at a price. Now it’s time to pay up
(…) Last week, Beit Shemesh women scored a clear victory against a municipality that has a notorious record for violating the rights of women and girls. Justice David Gideoni’s ruling offered a glimmer of hope when he awarded us (…) compensation for the insult and anguish caused by the Municipality’s failure to remove six of these ‘modesty’ signs which send a harassing and threatening message to women. (…) The four of us had all experienced numerous incidents of harassment and assault over the years, along with our daughters and friends. (…) Although the city made an initial half-hearted attempt to remove two signs, they were immediately replaced, and have remained there ever since. (…) In the wake of our victory, some have criticized us as wasting precious public money to compensate for a personal insult. I could argue 60,000 NIS is a pittance vs the millions wasted by our municipality. (…) The money that the Beit Shemesh municipality has been ordered to pay is but a drop in the ocean of the true price of its behavior. (…) This case should never have gone to court. Our case was about far more than merely the city’s failure to enforce administrative laws outlawing these signs. Mayor Abutbul failed on a much deeper and more fundamental side of common human decency, of protecting the weak from violent threats and harassment, of forsaking the basic rights of women and girls in this city. This was a completely unforgivable crime. (…) Nili Philipp, HAA, 01.02.15

Sexskandal bei der Polizei

On gender equality, Israel police get criminally low marks
The Coastal District Commander of the Israel Police, Hagai Dotan, is the seventh high-ranking officer in the past year and a half to leave the force under embarrassing circumstances, the fifth one to do so due to allegations of sexual harassment. (…) The organizational rot that has spread throughout the Israel Police is now spreading beyond the borders of the force. Much of the problem stems from an unenlightened, chauvinist worldview that endangers female officers (…). When sitting around the conference table at senior police headquarters, alongside the commissioner, are 18 men at the rank of major general and not a single woman at that rank, it is hardly surprising that the prevailing understanding is a chauvinist one that views women as inferior, lacking the necessary qualifications to attain the highest ranks and key positions and, as a result, subject to every whim of their male superiors. Women constitute at least 30 percent of the police force, serving in all field positions including operational ones, as detectives, homicide investigators and station commanders. How is it that the force has failed to produce even one major general? Was there no woman who met the professional standards of the serving major generals, many of whom are now being ignominiously removed from the force? (…)
Editorial, HAA, 06.02.15

Palästinenser boykottieren israelische Produkte

The PA’s boycott
To the uninitiated onlooker, the Palestinian Authority’s announcement this week of a boycott of given Israeli goods – a prelude, it warns, to a total ban on blue-and-white products – sounds like fair tit-for-tat. The exclusion of six of the best-known Israeli brands from Palestinian stores was portrayed as retaliation for the government’s recent decision to freeze the handover of tax and tariff revenue it collects for the PA. (…) More than the PA hurts Israeli producers, it emboldens the BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) activists overseas to openly extend their campaigns from “settlement products” to any brand associated with Israel. (…) Israel failed to dissuade the PA, a supposed peace partner, from its cynical ploy. The revenue freeze was imposed to signal that adversarial provocations will henceforth carry a price. The PA cannot have it both ways – it cannot expect Israel to dutifully funnel funds to Ramallah while Ramallah drastically escalates hostile initiatives. Nevertheless, rather than accept that biting the hand that feeds it does not pay, the PA appears dead set on making a bad situation worse. (…)
Editorial, JPO, 11.02.15
Alternative Zweistaatenlösung

Let Gaza be Palestine

(...), what is the two-state solution, and why has it made so little progress? (...). In physical terms it would mean the majority of Israeli Arabs living in a state alongside the State of Israel, and that would entail joining the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, which would have to be accomplished by means of a corridor across Israel or a tunnel. (...). The Arabs would want east Jerusalem as their capital, but a divided city is unacceptable to Israel. (...) The Israelis would demand a demilitarized West Bank, and that is unacceptable to the Arabs. (...) At present large areas of Gaza lie in ruins and there is no space to both clear the rubble and rebuild. (...). It was reported in September of last year that Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi had offered a large chunk of the Sinai to Gaza but that Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority, refused the offer. (...) Egypt could be paid for it and use the funds to develop and duplicate its canal. (...) The northern coast of Sinai has golden beaches, warm inland waters and year-long sunshine – lots of it. (...) The rubble of shattered Gaza would be a godsend to the engineers building the piers of a new port, and the flat land around the tiny El-Arish airport could support and extend into the full-scale international airport. (...) Gaza becomes Palestine, whether Abbas likes it or not. (...) That would be a practical, physical plan and solution to the two-state solution. (...) Stephen Gabriel Rosenberg, JPO, 14.02.15

Netanyahu contra Yedioth Ahronot

Netanyahu and Mozes are on the same side

(...), if until now it was "the media" that was the amorphous but chief enemy in the Likud's campaign, the prime minister has now narrowed it down to one main opponent: Yedioth Ahronot, with all its satellites. (...) for Netanyahu there is no difference between his rivals' attempts to replace him as the country’s leader, and Mozes’s aspiration to reign over the communications market. It is not clear where the editorial board of "Israel Today" ends and where the prime minister's bureau begins, and any threat to either is a threat to both. It is not just that Netanyahu names Mozes for the first time; he also publicly endorses Sheldon Adelson's newspaper and identifies with it unreservedly. (...) The fight between Netanyahu and Mozes is (...), about power and influence. (...) This is not the press and media of 1996; today, they have many facets, from Facebook, to Twitter, to countless networks and reports, and television channels. Reality has been taken out of the hands of those who believed they were anointed from on high to shape it. The political and media hegemonies both sense the crumbling of their main asset: the ability to define the public’s order of priorities and public taste, whilst ensuring their continued existence. All that's left to them is to hammer each other, in order to put themselves back at center stage and divert public attention from any disturbance liable to undermine that. Netanyahu’s public clash with Mozes serves Mozes just as much as it serves Netanyahu. (...)

Li-or Averbach, GLO, 09.02.15

HAA = Haaretz
JED = JediothAhronoth / Ynetnews
JPO = Jerusalem Post
IHY = Israel HaYom
TOI = Times of Israel
GLO = Globes