



Schlaglicht Israel Nr. 21

Annapolis Spezial

Aktuelles aus israelischen Tageszeitungen

12. November – 25. November 2007

1. Stärkung von Präsident Abbas

Am kommenden Dienstag, den 27. November 2007, soll das von Präsident George Bush verkündete und von seiner Außenministerin Condoleezza Rice entworfene „Nahost-Treffen“ stattfinden, das manche schon zu einer „Nahostfriedenskonferenz“ hochstilisiert haben. Israel versucht, sich mit Gesten zur Stärkung von Präsident Abbas, in ein positives Licht zu rücken. Dazu gehört die beschlossene Freilassung von 411 palästinensischen Gefangenen (von mindestens 12.000 in den Gefängnissen) und die Räumung von 25 Strassensperren (von weit über 400). Gegen den Rat der Militärs genehmigte Olmert zudem den Import von 50 russischen Panzerwagen für die palästinensische Polizei. Diese Schützenpanzer sollen in Nablus gegen „Terroristen“ eingesetzt werden und den Abbas-treuen Streitkräften helfen, „effektiv“ zu sein.

A gesture to the Prisons Service

“The release of another 440 Palestinian prisoners is a nice gesture to the Israel Prisons Service. It lessens the terrible overcrowding in the jails, albeit only slightly. And it eases the burden on the security establishment, which has not completely succeeded in avoiding its obligation to allow some family members to visit their loved ones once every two weeks.

[...] During the 1990s, Israel released some 10,000 Palestinian prisoners within the framework of the Oslo accords. Just as it was in Ireland and South Africa, that is the accepted practice: When, in a struggle against national repression, the parties agree to make peace, the occupying party recognizes that the violence of the prisoners it

releases was a response to its own violence. This is not a gesture, but a necessary step toward a solution. The released Palestinians included almost all of those who had been convicted of murdering other Palestinians? (due to suspicions that they were collaborators?). But Israel refused to release Palestinians who had been convicted of murdering Jews. It also refused to release detainees from East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Israel. Some 84 prisoners who belong to these four categories have already been in prison between 18 and 30 years, serving life sentences that will end only with their own deaths.” Amira Hass, HAA, 21.11.2007

An endless pool of prisoners

“Why is Israel releasing 440 Palestinian prisoners specifically ahead of the Annapolis conference, and not 500 or 300, or 2,000 as the United States had expected? The impression is that no one is exercised by the security risk entailed in releasing prisoners - aside from politicians who want to make political capital off of it - and that all the wheeling and dealing revolves around the question of how many prisoners "are worth wasting" on this or that event.

This regular game with the fate of people - some 10,000 of them - who are incarcerated in Israel, taking no account of the length of their prison sentences but only the political utility their fate can serve, warps Israel's image as a law-abiding state. If at any given moment there is a pool of candidates for release, it stands to reason they could have been released long ago.

The impression created is that Israel's prisons have become a gestures bank with revolving doors: At night they arrest dozens of wanted gunmen and in

the morning decide to release several hundred, just so long as the supply of prisoners doesn't dry up and a few dozen candidates for immediate release are always available.

[...] In the run-up to Annapolis there have been several rounds of releases: 250 prisoners ahead of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, 90 prisoners for the Ramadan holiday, and now another 440 in anticipation of next week's conference.

The revolving door creates the feeling that there is a mutual understanding between the government and the military judicial system, and that the judges know too that sentences handed down are merely grounds for negotiation; that prisoners are a reservoir of bargaining chips. In return for a captive, thousands are released; in return for the Annapolis conference, only a few hundred; and in honor of a holiday - a few dozen.

Holding prisoners for the purpose of bargaining is a distortion of the rules of justice. If there are thousands of prisoners in jail who pose no security risk, it would be better to release them not in measured batches and not ahead of events, but as soon as possible. When Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says that the easiest gesture Israel can make is releasing prisoners, the resulting impression is that they are being held just for that purpose. That is a highly problematic reason for incarceration." HAA, 22.11.2007

A stronger Abbas?

"The decision by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to allow the transfer of 25 Russian armored vehicles and two million bullets to the Palestinian Authority, over the objections of the security establishment, is somewhat breathtaking. Just five months ago, Hamas took over Gaza in what Fatah called a "coup," thereby capturing tons of weaponry provided to the Palestinian Authority.

This transfer, along with the proposed release of hundreds of security prisoners, are labeled "gestures" and "confidence-building measures" aimed to "strengthen" PA President Mahmoud Abbas. This is an abuse of the word "gesture," which usually means something inconsequential and easily reversible. This latest report came the day after the funeral of Ido Zoldan (28, father of two), who died in a hail of bullets fired on his car by terrorists from Fatah, the Palestinian faction supposedly led by Abbas. This attack, at best, shows that Abbas does not even control his own

movement in the West Bank, let alone Hamas in Gaza.

Israel's security services see a rather high probability that any arms Israel provides to the Palestinian Authority will ultimately be used against us, as has happened in the past. What confidence does our government have that the bullets and armored vehicles that we now provide will not ultimately be used to murder more Israelis?"

JPO, 21.11.2007

2. Olmerts schwache Position

Hinsichtlich der Verhandlungen zur Ausarbeitung eines neuen Friedensplans für eine Zwei-Staaten-Lösung ist Olmert innenpolitisch in einer schwachen Position. Seine Koalition hält nur, weil es in der gegenwärtigen Knesset keine Alternative gibt. Seine Verhandlungsposition wird maßgeblich von seinen Koalitionspartnern eingeschränkt – selbst wenn er wirklich ein Abkommen erreichen wollte. Wenn er es wagen würde, die Kernfragen auf den Tisch zu legen, die die eigentlichen Themen wären, die diskutiert werden müssen, dann wäre sein politisches Schicksal besiegelt. Shas und Yisrael Beiteinu haben schon angekündigt, dass sie in solch einem Fall aus der Koalition austreten und die Regierung stürzen würden.

Defeating the extremists

"When it comes to the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the distance between the parties is still great. For that reason, the Annapolis conference will not be much more than a festive event accompanied, at most, by a declaration regarding hope for the future. To a large extent, both sides have been taken captive by their respective extremists, and these radicals are not allowing the negotiators to offer any meaningful concessions.

Yet despite this, we should certainly recall that the gaps between the two negotiating sides at this time are smaller than they have ever been during the 100 years of fury and suffering.

Both parties accept the principle of the two-state solution, and both recognize the fact that the border will be similar to the 1967 boundaries. Both sides recognize their duty to settle, through negotiations, the questions of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, security, and water. Both sides know, even if they have not said so, that ultimately a peace agreement will be very similar to the Clinton-Taba-

Geneva model. And both sides know that if negotiations fail, it will be time for the extremists.

Indeed, extremists on both sides are expecting the negotiations to fail and praying for a dead-end. Time is not on the side of the Israelis or Palestinians. It is mostly on the side of the radicals.

The main burden of progress is on the shoulders of the Israeli government and Israeli public opinion, because Israel is the one controlling the Palestinian territories and not the other way around. If Ehud Olmert chooses or is forced to grant his hawkish coalition partners a right to stop the entire process, the result would be that Netanyahu will come to power within a short time.

[...] Olmert's leadership will be tested not only by his ability to maneuver between coalition partners Avigdor Lieberman and Eli Yishai, but rather, by his determination to lead a historic change.

The hawkish Right in Israel argues that Mahmoud Abbas is too weak and therefore making peace is not worthwhile. This is the same rightist camp that argued that Arafat was too dangerous, and therefore it was not worthwhile making peace with him either. Yet truth be told, there is a direct link between a decline or a boost in Abbas' status and what his moderate path will or will not achieve through talks with Israel. Abbas is only weak as long as we make him weak by not granting him any substantive achievement." Amoz Oz, Ynet, 21.11.2007

Peace is not a child's play

"Foreign diplomats who meet with the prime minister get the impression that Ehud Olmert understands that reaching an agreement with the Palestinians is a vital Israeli interest. Israeli peace activists leave Olmert's residence with the feeling that if it were not for his dependence on Kadima's large contingent of ex-Likudniks and on hawkish coalition partners like Avigdor Lieberman and Eli Yishai, Olmert would be able to return from Annapolis with a framework for a peace agreement. Even those "carriers of Yitzhak Rabin's legacy" in the Labor Party, including President Shimon Peres, are not going out of their way to assist him.

But how does all this conform with the demand that the PLO recognize Israel as a Jewish state? Why has Olmert knowingly stumbled into this quagmire? Does he believe that Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas should give up this bargaining chip even before the start of negotiations over the core issues? And if Olmert does believe this, is he willing to give Abbas something of equal value in

exchange? Or does he expect Abbas to agree to this merely in exchange for Israel's willingness to pick up the talks exactly where they began over seven years ago? This demand is reminiscent of the precondition Israel made to Syria: that it commit to severing its ties with Iran and deport Hamas leader Khaled Meshal from Damascus in return for Israel's willingness to talk - while Israel would continue to encourage Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights. [...] And what will happen in another month or two, when it becomes clear that Lieberman and Yishai are serious about their threats? Has Olmert taken into account the possibility that should his government walk out of the negotiations, or collapse while conducting them, Israel would suffer two painful blows? Not only would it lose its Palestinian partner - possibly the last one - for a two-state solution, but it would also expose itself as a non-partner for a peace agreement based on the international consensus and the principles of the Arab peace initiative.

Initiating diplomatic negotiations, like going to war, is not child's play. With a nod to Carl von Clausewitz's observation that war is a continuation of diplomacy by other means, one could say that the failure of diplomacy is liable to lead to other forms of war. Just as he does in war, a leader must plan an exit strategy before launching a peace process." Akiva Eldar, HAA, 21.11.2007

3. Barak als Skeptiker des Annapolis Treffens

Der Verteidigungsminister Ehud Barak versuchte 2000 als israelischer Ministerpräsident, den Friedensprozess mit den Palästinensern in Camp David wieder in Gang zu bringen. Ein Durchbruch gelang jedoch aufgrund des Misstrauens beider Seiten nicht. Nachdem daraufhin die zweite Intifada ausbrach, war Barak mit seiner Politik gescheitert und hatte kaum mehr Rückhalt in der Bevölkerung. Bei der aktuellen Debatte über den Erfolg der Friedensgespräche in Annapolis entpuppt er sich nun als skeptischer Falke.

Barak –suspected saboteur

"Defense Minister Ehud Barak has said on a number of occasions that he is "praying for the success of the Annapolis summit." It is good to see Barak placing his trust in God. It is even better to see him wishing for the summit to succeed. However, a defense minister is expected to do much more than just pray.

For months, Barak has been silent as a monk. His performance as defense minister has hardly been felt. He seems to be finding it hard to leave his mark on the ministry, despite his wealth of experience in the field.

He recently broke his silence, but what he said did not sound like something coming from the leader of the country's second largest party - which is supposed to pursue a distinct political and security agenda that sets it apart from other parties. All the while, his office is making pessimistic noises on the chances of success the summit, which Barak will attend, has of succeeding. Barak's speech last Sunday at a party meeting strengthened the impression that Barak does not believe in its chances of success. Barak threw Annapolis only a few casual sentences.

Additionally, according to a leak from Monday's cabinet meeting, he spoke in favor of the settlers - including those living in illegal outposts.

The defense minister has the right not to believe the summit will succeed, but he is absolutely forbidden from sabotaging it while working for a government that has decided to strive toward its success." HAA, 21.11.2007

The old Barak and the new

"[...] Barak was ridiculed when he declared that he was a new man when he returned to politics, that he had learned his lesson, is correcting his mistakes and has changed so much that no one would recognize him. Now is the time to admit that Barak was right and all his revilers were wrong. He has consciously given up the Labor chairman's traditional role of leading the "peace camp." Since he joined the cabinet he has swerved sharply to the right, smashing the moderates' stone tablets. He has become one of those who say "peace, peace, but there is no peace." (Jeremiah 8:11).

You don't need to be a leftist to understand that both Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert have deliberately used the settlements as a roadblock on the way to any future arrangement. The whole world, even most Israelis, know this by now. But the new Barak went further when he said at the cabinet session this week that "it is impossible to stop the construction in the settlements," as Yedioth Ahronoth reported. He also said, "I have respect and admiration for the settlers in the territories, and we cannot strangle them in settlement blocs. I also admire the settlers in the illegal outposts; there, too, we will have to provide for their everyday needs."

[...] On second thought, perhaps there is no difference between the old and new Barak, we just didn't want to admit it." Yossi Sarid, HAA, 22.11.2007

HAA = Haaretz
HZO = Ha Tzofe
JED = Jedioth Ahronoth
JED engl. = www.ynetnews.com
JPO = Jerusalem Post
MAA = Maariv

Die Artikel aus HZO, JED und MAA wurden dem Medienspiegel der Deutschen Botschaft Israel entnommen.

Veröffentlicht am: 27. November 2007

Verantwortlich:

Hermann Bünz,
Leiter der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel

Redaktion:

Ingrid Ross
Nadine Rödel

Homepage: www.fes.org.il

Email: fes@fes.org.il