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1. Baldige Veröffentlichung des Winograd – Berichts

Am 30. Januar, nach dem Besuch von US-Präsident George W. Bush wird von der unabhängigen Winograd-Kommission der endgültige Bericht der Analyse der militärischen und politischen Fehler Israels bezüglich des Libanonkrieges im Sommer 2006 veröffentlicht werden. Dieser Bericht wird vor allem ein Votum über die Politiker sein. Premierminister Ehud Olmert stellte schon im Vorfeld klar, dass er nicht zurücktreten werde. Es wird weiterhin spekuliert, ob der Vorsitzende der Arbeitspartei Ehud Barak die Drohung eines Rücktritts aus der Regierungskoalition wahr machen wird.

One last chance

"In the narrow, immediate sense, the Second Lebanon War was a war of folly; a serious instance of a failure of leadership. The leaders of summer 2006 bear responsibility for the fact that they conducted a national event of crucial importance with criminal negligence.

Almost all the leaders were forced to take responsibility for their negligence. The division commander, the head of command, the deputy chief of staff, the chief of staff, the defense minister - are gone. Only the prime minister remains. If even after the Winograd report Ehud Olmert continues to serve in his position, the concept of responsibility will be of no significance in our lives.

[...] But 2007 was not a year of healing; on the contrary. Neither 6 percent growth nor luxury towers along the Ayalon Highway can conceal that the situation remains unchanged.

The national leadership is cynical, the central government is emasculated, the army is making an effort and training, but is still plagued by draft-dodging and mediocrity. The social gaps are unprecedented, solidarity is crumbling.

[...] The main responsibility for missing out on the opportunity of 2007 lies with the prime minister.

[...] Yes, Olmert must resign. But his resignation is not an end in itself. His resignation must signal and bring about an overall change in concepts and values.

In about two weeks from now the Winograd Committee report will be published.

[...] In a sense, it will be the day of the last chance. It will give all of us a belated and final opportunity to internalize what we discovered during the Second Lebanon War, and to heal Israel."

Ari Shavit, HAA, 31.12.2007

Waiting for a Tsunami

"Monday's vague statement by Labor Chairman Ehud Barak regarding "the political leadership's responsibility" for the events of the Lebanon war sent the sleepy political establishment into frenzy. A large question mark hovered above the Knesset's corridors during the afternoon and evening hours. "What does he mean?" wondered politicians from across the political spectrum, but particularly those in the opposition. Is this a hint of what Barak will do after the publication of the Winograd Commission's final report? Is he on his way out? Will he do the unbelievable and quit the government?

For the time being, there is no clear answer for that question, although the coalition is expected to survive the report. Yet the truth is that Barak himself does not yet know what he intends do to and what will happen upon the report's publication.

[...] The Labor party chairman is waiting, just like everyone else, for some kind of development, a sign from above, maybe a great tsunami that would wash Ehud Olmert away from the Prime Minister's Office. Barak is not alone. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is also waiting for the tsunami, and so is Benjamin Netanyahu. Everyone knows that Olmert will not be going home of his own accord. Netanyahu is counting on the media and on public opinion. He

estimates that Barak won't quit and that the coalition won't collapse.

[...] At this time, it appears that the politicians are inclined to handle the publication of the report with all the required pomp and circumstance, but let it pass in relative quiet. We shall have live broadcasts, and dramas, and harsh statements. But the government won't be toppled. Maybe."

Attila Somfalvi, JED, 1.1.2008

And now, survival

"[...] After the fiasco of the Second Lebanon War, many people called for [Olmert's] head, some because he dragged the country into a botched war, and others, mainly from the far right, because he intended to continue the momentum of evacuating settlements.

Now the public wants to punish Olmert for letting the army walk over him. He is guilty for believing the army, for believing its commanders, for believing the general staff and above all, Dan Halutz. Sharon, in his place, would have chosen a quick wallop, if he chose to respond at all, in keeping with his policy that restraint is also power.

As a military man, Sharon could shrug off the generals. Olmert, as a civilian, blindly trusted the heads of the army, never bothering to consult with the National Security Council. He had no idea that the army was not prepared, or that its equipment was rusty and outdated after years of neglect and preoccupation with bullying the Palestinians around.

[...] Now that Olmert has promised Bush to dismantle the unauthorized outposts and discuss the core issues of the conflict, I wouldn't be surprised if the final report of the Winograd Committee, instead of serving justice, propels Netanyahu and the right-wing extremists into power."

Yoel Marcus, HAA, 12.1.2008

Now's not the time

"The Winograd Committee's final report on the performance of decision-makers in the Second Lebanon War has not yet been released, but already some are calling for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's resignation.

But anger is not a good compass for practical politics, and the main question is whether removing Olmert at this point would be beneficial or counterproductive for the country.

Olmert has achieved impressive success since the war with the goal that he had set for himself: "Focusing on running the country." According to any

yardstick, Israel is faring better under Olmert than all of his predecessors.

The economy is booming, terrorism has declined, the political system enjoys stability, and the IDF is rebuilding its strength under an experienced defense minister. Olmert has renewed peace talks with the Palestinians, and is acting to freeze settlements - while avoiding internal conflicts.

[...] "The world" is friendlier to Israel than before, and the president of the United States is on his way to Jerusalem, for the first time in his term.

In such a situation, replacing the prime minister would only make noise and put the country in an unnecessary elections campaign whose outcome would change nothing."

Aluf Benn, HAA, 3.1.2008

2. Israelische Grenzgebiete unter Beschuss

Nach dem Abzug der israelischen Streitkräfte aus dem Gazastreifen im Sommer 2005 und der Übernahme der Hamas im Gazastreifen befinden sich grenznahe Ortschaften in Israel fast täglich unter Beschuss aus diesem Gebiet. Hier landeten im Jahr 2007 1.263 Raketen und 1.511 Mörsergranaten, die zwei Todesopfer forderten. Durch den Einschlag einer Rakete des Typs "Grad" mit einer Reichweite von 16 km nördlich der Stadt Ashkelon bekam die Bedrohung durch den Raketenbeschuss aus dem Gazastreifen eine neue Qualität.

Als Reaktion hierauf haben die israelischen Streitkräfte in den letzten Wochen ihre Luftangriffe sowie Militärationen im Gazastreifen verstärkt. Gleichzeitig hat Israel Sanktionen verhängt und die Öl- und Stromversorgung des Gazastreifens gedrosselt, was auch Auswirkungen auf die Wasserversorgung hat. Die Option einer Wiederbesetzung des Gazastreifens wurde bisher immer wieder verworfen.

Auch im Norden des Landes gab es einen erneuten Raketenangriff, den zweiten seit dem Krieg gegen die Hisbollah-Miliz im Sommer 2006 aus dem Südlibanon.

In praise of missile defenses

"On Sunday, the security cabinet authorized NIS 811 million for "Iron Dome," a defense system against short-range rockets, such as those that have been terrorizing Sderot for the past seven years. If produced according to schedule, the system should be able to start shooting down missiles in about 30 months.

The only shame about this decision is that it was not taken years ago. According to Uzi Rubin, the former head of Israel's Arrow missile defense program, the system that Raphael hopes to deliver in 2010 could have been deployed in 2003 if a decision to fund the program had been made in 2000. The obstacles were not technological but judgmental, based on the notion that such defenses are "too expensive."

[...] Rubin suggests, however, that this is the wrong way to calculate cost effectiveness. What matters is that the alternatives are either much more expensive or unacceptable: "hardening" entire cities, a massive ground incursion into Gaza, evacuating Sderot and other towns, or allowing the status quo to continue.

[...] It simply makes no sense for a country, particularly one in Israel's situation, to leave its population literally defenseless against missile attack. Missile defenses - combined with other measures - are critical to making Kassams, Scuds and Katyushas obsolete, just as the security fence was to defeating suicide bombers.

The dichotomy between military measures and the peace process is a false one. The goal is peace, but removing military options from our enemies is critical to getting there. The less vulnerable Israel is, the greater the potential that diplomacy can lead to a sustainable peace.

Editorial, JPO, 24.12.2007

Sderot left out of party

"Wednesday was a festive day, no doubt. It was also a beautiful day, as the President of the United States aptly noted. But what can we say, it was not Sderot's day.

That is, it was yet another day that was not Sderot's day: 25 rockets landed on the southern town. It was not a big surprise, as the security establishment warned in advance that Hamas would not be missing out on this opportunity. However, officials in Jerusalem did not let Sderot ruin their party.

[...] Children from Sderot were not invited to wave flags, sing and dance "Hava Nagila." Nobody asked them to appear before Israel's beloved friend, the president of the world's greatest power.

[...] Or in other words, if Sderot residents were waiting for news from Jerusalem, it did not come. Bush did not come either. Neither did Olmert. It is true that one of the residents suggested that "they come here so that they see how we live here"

Ariela Ringel Hoffman, JED engl., 10.1.2008

It's only the beginning

"A Katyusha rocket lands in the southern town of Ashkelon, the Air Force bombs targets in the Gaza Strip, and we stopped counting the Qassams a long time ago. Every week, another "red line" is crossed and without feeling it we are already deep inside an intensive military confrontation in the Strip.

By the time the "big" ground operation rolls around it will no longer be perceived as a dramatic move, but rather, a natural phase in the escalation.

[...] The space between one phase of escalation and another becomes shorter. Last month, the IDF killed about 60 Palestinians, most of them armed, yet this week alone almost 30 Palestinians have already been killed.

[...] Hamas is doing everything in its power to produce success stories, even symbolic ones. Hitting Ashkelon, as opposed to hitting Sderot, is considered a success story with a national message, because the town was established on the ruins of a Palestinian village.

[...] The prevailing assessment is that by springtime, April or May, Hamas will feel well prepared for coping with an Israeli offensive. By that time it will complete its fortifications and receive new arms. Those weapons apparently include large quantities of self-made Qassam rockets with a range of 15 kilometers and even more (roughly 10 miles) that would enable Hamas to fire sustained barrages at Ashkelon and dozens of other communities within Israel. [...] The rocket fired at Ashkelon is only the beginning."

Alex Fishman, JED engl., 4.1.2008

The secret's out

"The rockets fired at the northern town of Shlomi early Tuesday exposed a military secret: The IDF treats the Lebanon border as a peaceful and quiet one. Almost like the biblical end-of-days vision. As it turns out, the alert systems that are supposed to detect rockets launched at Israel and warn the civilian population are not activated regularly, because there are no warnings of impending attacks. We are dealing with a sleepy border. What a pleasure.

[...] So these systems are deployed regularly along the border, but they are turned off for part of the time. The moment the alert level changes, it is possible to activate them within a very short period of time.

There is only one small problem with this. The moment the army revealed that it does not activate

these systems regularly, there is a possibility that various groups like the one that fired the rockets the other day would attempt to check the IDF's alertness in one way or another, without taking a big risk in the process. At worst, they will run into a UN soldier.

[...] The Katyusha attack the other day has no long-term implications. On the other hand, another incident that occurred in Lebanon Tuesday should worry Israel no less, and possibly more: A bomb detonated near a UNIFIL convoy traveling from Beirut to Sidon and wounded three Spanish soldiers. This is the second time Spanish troops are hurt in southern Lebanon. Several months ago Spanish soldiers were killed in another incident.

All these incidents are meant to signal to the UN: Don't work too hard; otherwise you will mix up with us, a serious element, Hizbullah.

The Spaniards make up one of the most serious regiments in the UNIFIL force, and possibly the most significant one. Should Hizbullah target these forces repeatedly either the UN will not be doing its job, or the various countries will have to pull their forces out of Lebanon. And then, Israel will be forced to activate its alert systems 24 hours a day, as this would mark the collapse of the agreement in southern Lebanon."

Alex Fishman, JED engl., 10.1.2008

3. Besuch des US Präsidenten George W.

Bush

Am 9. und 10. Januar besuchte der amerikanische Präsident George W. Bush Israel und die Palästinensischen Gebiete als erste Stationen seiner einwöchigen Nahostreise. Gegenstand der Gespräche waren die Umsetzung der in Annapolis beschlossenen Verpflichtungen für den Nahost-Friedensprozess und die Bedrohung durch den Iran. Beide Parteien hatten sich in Annapolis auf die Rückkehr zur "Roadmap" verständigt. Als ersten Schritt auf israelischer Seite sieht diese einen Siedlungsstop vor, auf palästinensischer Seite zu die Unterbindung des Terrorismus.

Die Hamas, die seit 2007 im Gazastreifen regiert und das Existenzrecht Israels nicht anerkennt, bleibt weiterhin von Gesprächen ausgeschlossen.

On a divine mission

"George Bush defined his truth concerning the Holy Land on June 24, 2002. The political speech he delivered that day was the most important of all his speeches. The statement he made in that speech

was the most penetrating international statement about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was the essence of that statement: The solution to the 100-year-old conflict is a two-state solution, but before the two-state solution is implemented a Palestinian conversion must take place. Only after the Palestinian people undergo a conceptual, ideological and institutional conversion will it be possible to establish a Palestinian state that will exist alongside Israel in peace and prosperity.

[...] The right formula is the Bush vision. To act with determination in order to create Palestinian capability before precisely defining the borders of the Palestinian territory. To promote Paris before devoting ourselves to Annapolis."

Ari Shavit, HAA, 10.1.2008

Bush comes to the shtetl

"In a mass demonstration preceding Bush's visit, which was backed by the Council of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria, signs were held up saying "Bush and Olmert are bringing a Holocaust upon us." The police arrested teenage boys (why?) who hung posters showing Bush wearing a kaffiyeh.

[...] We would do well to calm down and respond to developments with a balanced mental state. It is doubtful that the American president is interested, even if he is further fawned on, in promoting the vision of the extreme left and bringing about the destruction of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria, and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the ruins of Beit El and Elon Moreh.

[...] Bush did not dream up the vision of two states for two peoples, which, if it comes about, will require abandoning Judea and Samaria, the heart of the Jewish homeland, and the establishment of a terror state within mortar range of Ben-Gurion airport and the densely populated centers along the coast. Jews are the ones who are trying to deal away parts of their homeland, including the ancient capital for which they pined throughout the long, long years of their exile."

Israel Harel, HAA, 12.1.2008

Welcome, Mr. President

"For Us, America is first among our true friends – and you, Mr. President, are first and foremost of them, even when we differ.

The State of Israel thanks you today, and through you we send our gratitude to the hundreds of

millions of citizens of your country, whose support we cherish.

[...] The fact that the American president is visiting us is an expression of honor – but let us not play dumb: He is arriving here because our region is the world's bleeding wound, and he is here to see what can be done in order to end the bloodshed.

The doctor is coming to visit his patients in Israel and in the Arab world.

But is he bringing the proper medicine? This is highly doubtful. The Islamic world around us has become more devout, more zealous, and more violent. If "Allah rules by the sword," then he has been working overtime lately."

Eitan Haber, JED engl., 9.1.2008

Analyze this: Why the Bush vision of peace is still somewhere over the rainbow

"[...] Bush has talked plenty about "vision" during this visit - in fact, it's far and away the word he's used the most.

[...] Once that final-status vision is achieved, the US president seems to believe it will also provide answers to some of the other concrete problems that pose obstacles to the implementation of that vision.

[...] US National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley was more specific, saying "When the people of Gaza are presented with this vision, they can make a choice and invite the Palestinian Authority back in to administer Gaza."

[...] Unfortunately, the problem with those Palestinians who oppose a two-state solution isn't that they lack a vision of a Palestinian state - it's that they lack a vision for a Jewish state existing alongside it.

[...] During his time in the White House, though, he has sometimes confused rhetoric with reality, and overestimated the power of simply having a vision - such as "Bringing democracy to the Middle East" - with the ability to make it actually happen. "

Calev Ben-Davidoffman, JPO, 12.1.2008

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HZO = Ha Tzofe
JED = Jedioth Ahronoth
JED engl. = www.ynetnews.com
JPO = Jerusalem Post
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Verantwortlich:

*Hermann Bünz,
Leiter der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel*

Redaktion:

*Ingrid Ross
Henrike Fischer-Brügge*

Homepage: www.fes.org.il

Email: fes@fes.org.il