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1. Israel hält weltweit den Impfrekord

Schon Mitte Dezember gab Israels Ministerpräsident Benjamin Netanyahu den Startschuss zu den Impfungen gegen das Coronavirus und hielt als erster seinen nackten Oberarm für die Spritze bereit. Binnen zweier Wochen bekamen mehr als eine Million Bürger_innen die erste Dosis verabreicht, rund 100,000 Menschen pro Tag. Damit hält Israel weltweit den Impfrekord. Anders als in Deutschland sollen nach Planung der Regierung Geimpfte einen „grünen Pass“ erhalten und damit Vorteile haben, wie Veranstaltungen und Restaurants besuchen zu dürfen sowie von Quarantänemaßnahmen verschont zu bleiben. Parallel zu den neuen Impfungen geht die Regierung mit einem dritten Lockdown gegen die Ausbreitung von Covid-19 vor. So bleibt Ausländer_innen die Einreise verboten. Es gebe allerdings Ausnahmen, hieß es. Angehörige der Botschaften dürften weiterhin einreisen.

Vaccines for both peoples

(...) The size of the population, the existence of a suitable logistical infrastructure for storing and transporting the vaccines at the requisite low temperatures, and an effective HMO system put Israel in a better position to conduct a broad, speedy national vaccination campaign compared to other countries – and even more so compared to territories like the West Bank and Gaza. (...) Even if the PA's talks with Pfizer bear fruit, it will supply only a limited number of doses, since the PA can't store

large quantities of vaccines under the necessary conditions. (...) Israel has the legal, moral and humanitarian responsibility to vaccinate the Palestinian population, which lives in distress under its control and whose lives intertwine with the lives of many Israelis. Israelis and Palestinians live in very close proximity to each other, so it really isn't possible to eliminate the pandemic in Israel proper while it is still raging in the other territories it is responsible for.
 Editorial, HAA, 16.12.20

Israeli vaccine dodgers are demonstrating sheer ignorance and selfishness

(...) refusing to get inoculated is a quintessential act of anti-social selfishness. It's a refusal to fulfill a civic obligation, an immoral act that harms others, an act committed at the public's expense. The only way to stop the epidemic is through the development of a vaccine (...). There is no rational person who has an interest in letting the virus continue infecting people, which is why every person has an obligation to voluntarily get the vaccine as soon as possible. (...) The notion that the vaccine is dangerous is also irrational. The transparency of the clinical trials and the vaccine's approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration make such concerns absurd. Perhaps these concerns are a result of general ignorance among the population regarding scientific methods. (...)

Rogel Alpher, HAA, 18.12.20

Coronavirus, your deadly rampage is almost over

The past 10 chaotic and turbulent months have felt more like 10 years. (...) With a novel disease, there are no experts. (...) I found myself treating patients in complete contravention of the most fundamental rule taught to medical students and young doctors: always use treatment that is based on research. I found myself using Twitter and WhatsApp messages from colleagues overseas talking about their experience in treating coronavirus, which was essentially nothing more than hearsay. But what can you do when you are left with no other choice and people are dying in your arms? There was also a constant worry for the medical staff. Each worker infected added to the sense of failure. (...) I struggle constantly to find treatment solutions, some sort of research paper that can help patients, diagnose the pathogen as quickly as possible and even now, almost a year later, try to find out what this disease even is. Now a new type of patient has arrived, the post-coronavirus kind. They arrive in clinics tired and dazed, struggling to breathe. Some have even been hospitalized for all kinds of ailments. I feel the virus is always waiting around the corner for me to slip up. (...) On Sunday, my dream came true when I was vaccinated. Coronavirus, my dear old friend, your time is done! No longer will your proteins attach to our cells. Go find other hosts and leave us in peace without mutations or new tricks. (...)

Dr. Galia Rahav, YED, 21.12.20

Israel's success

Israel (...) has done an unprecedented job in obtaining vaccines, bringing them to the country and becoming one of the first countries that seems to be on track to slowing down the pandemic through inoculation. This is good news and the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz deserves credit. (...) Israel has been through a difficult year and we are not out of the shadows yet. (...) Nevertheless, we have tried to strike a balance between the need to fight the health emergency and to keep some of our services running and open. (...) We could have done better, but hindsight is always twenty-twenty. (...) The government was too often too crippled and plagued by petty politics, a problem that likely could not have been avoided with a prime minister on criminal trial. Nevertheless (...) Israel is capable of being one of the leading countries in this battle. (...) We have not let racism, rumor mongering or hate get the better of us. (...) While the beginning of the

vaccination is a blessing, we cannot become complacent. Israelis need to continue to maintain social distancing, to wear masks and to refrain from congregating at weddings or other gatherings. We need to keep up our vigilance. (...)

Editorial, JPO, 21.12.20

New coronavirus mutation, same old Israeli mistakes

It would be interesting to examine how (...) instead of closing the skies immediately until we know more about the mutation, once again we were about to witness the "orderly import" of the coronavirus. Just when we already had a real chance of overcoming the pandemic, when there are enough vaccinations in Israel to eliminate the existing virus, and we had the final opportunity to isolate Israel from the new mutation now and immediately – decisions were made that may cause us to miss the chance. (...) it's worth investigating if there's a connection between not closing the skies and the specific gravity of the workers' committees connected to the airport and the airline industry in the Likud Central Committee. A word to the wise is sufficient.

Neri Yarkoni, HAA, 22.12.20

Is the vaccine a light at the end of the coronavirus lockdown tunnel?

(...) Israel already ranks first in the world in the number of doses administered per 100 people. (...) It is quite an accomplishment, similar to the feat Israel achieved at the end of the first lockdown in March, when the rate of infection dropped to tiny levels. (...) the situation in which we now find ourselves is a dual track of massive vaccinations taking place at the same time as the country shuts down again. (...) Thankfully, even though it is late in coming, the government has correctly voted (...) to shut the country down (...). We, unfortunately, know very well what a shutdown entails. (...) The vaccine has finally shone a faint light at the end of the long, dark tunnel we've been staring into since March. But the exit from that tunnel is further away than we thought it would be. We will get there – but first, the shutdown regulations must be followed. Frustration is certainly understandable, but like much of the rest of the world, Israel needs to absorb another lockdown – hopefully the final one that we'll see during this dastardly pandemic – to stem the dangerous tide. (...)

Editorial, JPO, 24.12.20

Fighting corona with our outstretched hand

One after another, in intervals of 15 seconds, Israelis got their injections at a rapid pace and with stunning efficiency. Such vaccination centers show Israel at its best. They came in pairs and as individuals; on wheelchairs or with the help of a cane. You could occasionally see a granddaughter supporting her grandmother, adults in their sixties helping their 80-year-old parents. There were also the foreign caregivers accompanying aging Israelis, and there were women who came along with their husbands, and vice versa. Every possible variation you could think of was there: Arabs, secular Israelis, ultra-Orthodox Jews, Ashkenazi, Sephardi. The list goes on and on. In short, there was a microcosm of Israel there. (...) we are fighting back with vaccines, and those who are the most vulnerable are being inoculated first. (...) For all the flaws, failures and shortcomings on the way, we are indebted to the thousands of people who have worked tirelessly to help us get out of the woods in these difficult times. (...) This appreciation goes all the way from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu down to the health minister and the medical staff, as well as to the bureaucrats we all love to mock. They sacrificed everything to make this happen, and despite all the missteps, you can't argue with success: Here we are, with a vaccine. (...)

Ariel Kahana, IHY, 28.12.20

2. Keine Einigung über den Haushalt – Neuwahlen im März

Zum vierten Mal innerhalb von nur zwei Jahren werden Israels Bürger_innen am 23. März ein neues Parlament wählen müssen. Die Knesset in Jerusalem löste sich mit Ablauf der Frist über eine Entscheidung über den Haushalt 2020 selbst auf. Für die vorgezogenen Neuwahlen zeichnet sich eine deutlich veränderte Parteienkonstellation ab. Unverändert bleibt jedoch die Likud-Partei von Regierungschef Benjamin Netanyahu absehbar stärkste Liste. Der 71-Jährige punktet aktuell mit der erfolgreichen Impfkampagne gegen Corona. Zudem kann er sich im Wahlkampf auf außenpolitische Erfolge wie die Annäherungsabkommen mit den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten, Bahrain, dem Sudan und Marokko berufen. Was gegen ihn spricht, ist das laufende Korruptionsverfahren. Als Netanjahus stärkster Herausforderer gilt sein früherer Parteifreund Gideon Saar, der an der Spitze der neuen Partei Tikva Hadascha (Neue Hoffnung) antritt, und die Machtverhältnisse aktuell ordentlich verschiebt. Die Partei ist erst wenige Wochen alt und program-

matisch kaum vom Likud zu unterscheiden, wird aber Umfragen zufolge dem Likud wichtige Stimmenverluste zufügen. Saar schloss ein Zusammengehen mit Netanyahu aus. Düster sieht es für die Mitte und das linke Lager aus. Das Bündnis um Gantz ist inzwischen massiv geschwächt und könnte sogar an der 3,25-Prozenthürde, die für den Einzug in die Knesset vorausgesetzt wird, scheitern. Auch für die Avoda (Arbeitspartei) dürfte es knapp werden. Amir Peretz, bisheriger Chef der Arbeitspartei und Wirtschaftsminister, kündigte an, die Partei bei der kommenden Wahl nicht mehr anführen zu wollen. Bei Umfragen liegt die Avoda im Moment unter der 3,25-Prozenthürde. Ein Zusammenschluss mit der von Tel Avivs Bürgermeister Ron Huldai und Justizminister Avi Nissenkorn (bisher Blau-Weiß) gerade gegründeten neuen Partei „Halsraelim“ (die Israelis) oder erneut mit Meretz könnte die staatsgründende Partei vor dem Ausscheiden aus der Knesset retten.

Elections will end Gantz's unhappy career; wily Netanyahu strides confidently on

Israel's unconscionable decline into its fourth general election in two years (...) would appear to spell the end of the brief, unhappy career of one of the two key protagonists of the previous three rounds. Benny Gantz jettisoned most of his Blue and White alliance (...) when he agreed to partner with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an "emergency" coalition after March 2020's inconclusive vote. (...) Gantz (...) lost the support of many of his voters when he broke Blue and White's sole unifying pledge: not to sit in a government with Netanyahu so long as the Likud leader was under the cloud of corruption charges. And that support has now dwindled to almost nothing as he appeared ready to sacrifice another core commitment — to protect Israeli democracy. His compromise terms in the past few days would reportedly have seen the nomination of Israel's next state prosecutor overturned, and the process by which Israel chooses its Supreme Court justice amended. (...) Not only is Gantz heading into political oblivion, but so is much of the Israeli center-left. (...) The new icon of the "anyone but Bibi" movement is Gideon Sa'ar, a former Likud minister who stands to Netanyahu's right on matters relating to settlements and the Palestinians. (...) the next Knesset looks set to be the most right-wing in Israeli history. (...) while Netanyahu can claim personal credit for his role in securing the purchase of millions of doses of vaccines that Israel has this week begun using, he would have wanted more time for the

pandemic to hopefully recede before again facing the voters. Additionally, his trial will still be in its headline-making early stages in March. (...) David Horovitz, TOI, 21.12.20

Time for the elections Israel actually needs

It is rare when a government that disintegrates prematurely is considered to be a good thing and a country is forced into new and unscheduled elections. This is especially true when that country has already been through three elections in less than two years and the thought of another vote is not only astonishing, it smacks of gross irresponsibility. What is currently happening in Israel is one of those rare cases. The government (...) never functioned properly and never fulfilled its declared mission of steering the country responsibly through the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis that has roiled and plagued it for months. (...) The Coronavirus Cabinet was convened to make the tough decisions required to stop the spread of the virus and the rise in infections but it constantly got stuck in mudslinging and internal debates. Politics consistently came before managing the pandemic, and all Israelis have paid the price. (...) And then there was the budget. Netanyahu and Gantz had agreed when they signed their coalition agreement eight months ago, to pass a budget within 90 days of the swearing in of the government. (...) The country needed a financial vision and plan. But Netanyahu refused to pass a budget. (...) When this government was established, Gantz was forced to renege on a promise he made during three election campaigns, not to sit with Netanyahu. We supported his decision then, thinking like many Israelis, that unity was needed and that a government was better than another round of elections. We no longer think this. Another round of elections – even though it is possible that very little will change – is the preferred option over the continued tenure of this failure of a government. (...)

Editorial, JPO, 22.12.20

The Left's treatment of Gantz is shameful

As a former military man and a nationalist who holds a few liberal positions, I am amazed at what goes on in Israel's left-wing camp. One (...) cannot understand how the left-wing camp manages each time to destroy anyone who has taken a chance at serving as its leader of late, whether that be the late Prime Minister Shimon Peres; former Prime Minister Ehud Barak; former Labor leaders Amram Mitzna, Shelly Yachimovich, and Avi Gabbay; current Labor leader

Amir Peretz; and now Blue and White head Benny Gantz. (...) There's no doubt Gantz failed at the task at hand. He was unable to present a true political alternative, he's lost a lot of his political clout, his standing in the media is on shaky ground, and he is not at his best, to say the least. But why does the leftist camp insist time and again on taking out its leaders in such an incredibly brutal manner, and what can we learn from this practice? After all, it is those on the Left who repeatedly select a new "idol" to fawn over and then throw them to the wolves shortly thereafter. What does that say about your choice and about your understanding of leadership and people in general? Is there any venerable person who would be willing to lead this camp today, with the understanding they are destined to be just another victim in a long and respected list of victims of the Left? (...) I won't get into the defense minister's political talents, but one thing I will say. He's a *mentsch*. He's a good, decent, and trustworthy person. (...) So he isn't the world's greatest politician, does that justify treating him like a doormat? There can be no other explanation than the Left suffers from a chronic case of self-hatred. (...)

Ronen Itsik, IHY, 23.12.20

The real reason behind Israel's elections: The role of Israel's courts

A bizarre phenomenon of nature, known as "beaching," occurs from time to time when large pods of cetaceans – whales or dolphins – strand themselves on dry land and effectively commit suicide. Perhaps envious of whales, our Knesset members "beached" themselves when they voted to move up their expiration date even before a third of their term had passed. (...) The current Knesset coalition was formed in order to tackle a mammoth challenge, whose likes we have never experienced. Election pledges were violated, ideological lines crossed, strange alliances forged and legislative monstrosities passed, because many understood that the war against the pandemic sanctified any and all measures, however unholy. So, what change in the perception of reality led to the dissolution of the Knesset (...) ? The budget would make it possible to expand more extensive social safety nets that are absolutely essential during the crisis, to institute the reforms needed to deal with the ballooning national debt, to adapt the economy and workforce to the post-pandemic world, make the healthcare system more efficient, and help the economy recover its lost vitality. When the government refuses to pass the budget, it is in fact shirking its responsibility to serve

the country's citizens in times of crisis. Again we ask – why?! (...) But anyone living here in Israel knows the answer: The Knesset committed suicide because one man, the prime minister, finds himself, to our misfortune, in a situation in which his fate depends on the courts. (...) Even those who believe that the prime minister is innocent (...) must ask themselves whether dissolving the Knesset and preventing the government from acting on the basis of an appropriate state budget, only because the ruling party wants to settle scores with the judicial system – or even to crush it in order to protect the party leader – is the right thing to do. (...)

Yedidia Stern JPO, 24.12.20

The Israeli left should take a time out in the upcoming election

(...) The election of Israel's 24th Knesset on March 23 will be the first in the country's history in which the two parties with the best prospects of forming a coalition and leading the next government are both right-wing. Two parties with nearly identical ideologies and platforms, whose members grew up in the same movement. (...) Just like the previous elections, this one will be all about whether Netanyahu survives or is finally forced to leave office. But the fact that the historic mission to end his long rule is now on the shoulders of his opponents on the right is a major shift. (...) Israelis are more right-wing than they were in the past, but the main reason Netanyahu has stayed prime minister for so long is that he's simply much better than anyone else at building coalitions and has an almost unbreakable alliance with the ultra-Orthodox parties. That, and the weakness of the Israeli left, which, let's face it, was never really very left. (...) In the absence of a coherent post-Oslo plan for ending the conflict with the Palestinians and without any other policies to offer voters, the center-left has lost its peace flag to Netanyahu's Likud and the leadership of the "anyone but Bibi" camp to the anti-Netanyahu Likud 2.0. With less than three months to go until the election and with the center-left hopelessly split into slivers of parties, some of which, chiefly Labor, seem to have little chance of even crossing the electoral threshold right now, there's no time to come up with that new agenda. The best that the voters of this poor, demoralized camp can hope for is that the so-called leaders of what remains of Labor and Meretz can accept that this should be a "time-out" election since they have no chance of influencing the outcome, merge their lists, and announce a period of self-reflection. (...)

Anshel Pfeffer, HAA, 25.12.20

Netanyahu, Gantz, Sa'ar and Bennett battle it out to mark their territory

(...) We have had devious, cynical prime ministers, manipulators to the bone. But a phenomenon like Netanyahu – never before. His is the face attached to the concept of "swindle" in the political lexicon. A promise is not a promise, a public commitment is not worth the airtime, an agreement isn't worth the paper on which it was signed. A handshake is no more than a slippery touch, after which the other side should check to see that his watch is still on his wrist. (...) From the very first moment, he never really imagined giving Gantz his turn as prime minister in the "rotation." His assiduous courtship of the head of Kahol Lavan last spring was accomplished with ridiculous public commitments and dubious sweet talk. His aim was to lure Gantz into the poisonous honey trap of the "unity" government, with the intention that the latter would not come out of it alive. The destruction of the value of Gantz and his party has been total. (...) Sixteen days after quitting Likud, he established a party and soared in the public opinion polls. Gideon Sa'ar is completing another successful week. To say the least. (...) Sa'ar succeed in an especially cruel move, to destroy Yamina leader Naftali Bennett's festive evening declaration that he was running for prime minister. (...) Sa'ar pushed Bennett to the margins with the truly dramatic news that Minister of Higher Education and Minister of Water Resources Zeev Elkin will be joining him, while his pawn Elkin (known as "the chess player") effectively demolished the king himself, Netanyahu. (...) The revolution Elkin has undergone is one of the most sudden ever seen here. Two days before he slaughtered Netanyahu, he was still doing his rounds of interviews. (...) he changed identities in a flash of lightening, from loyalist to hangman. (...) Bibi was in shock (...). You could see it on him. (...) Sa'ar is convinced that his right-wing cred will do what Kahol Lavan didn't do – bring in enough voters from the right but also an equal if not greater number from the center-left on the way to becoming a governing alternative. Lapid believes that the war of right against right will serve him in the end. As for the left, some interesting things are happening. (...) another nail was hammered into the Labor Party's coffin with the announcement by its executioner himself, Chairman Amir Peretz, that he won't be running for party chief (...). This story didn't interest the news shows (...). The party that built the state, that once possessed the media as a watchdog

for itself and not for the public, isn't getting a hint of a news item. Sad. (...)

Yossi Verter, HAA, 25.12.20

Forget everything you thought you knew about Israeli elections

(...) there's nothing historic about Israel going to an election. After all, that's become something of a routine over the last two years. It's because this election campaign will change everything we thought we knew about Israeli elections. Up until now, things were fairly simple. It was Right versus Left (...). All that is about to change. It will be the Right versus the Right, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu versus New Hope leader Gideon Sa'ar and Yamina party head Naftali Bennett. (...) Up until now, campaign issues focused on a series of familiar issues: a Palestinian state, the economy, religion and state. The coronavirus pandemic has altered our world, and it will transform the campaign too. Bid farewell to talk of evacuating settlements and one state for two peoples. Say goodbye to disputes over public transportation on Shabbat. Conversion and the Haredi draft will also be pushed to the back of the line. Instead let us welcome a new agenda, one that focuses on medical workers and scientists, small businesses, individual freedoms, and the fairly simple campaign promise of a return to normalcy. (...)

Yehuda Shlezinger, IHY, 25.12.20

Israel's Left is on its last legs

(...) The Left never really worked on presenting an alternative. Quite the opposite, anyone who has tried promoting a new, more relevant, more realistic agenda has been silenced. Why? Because now everyone is being asked to descend on Balfour Street in Jerusalem, where the prime minister's official residence is located. First Netanyahu must "go," and only then ideology can be discussed. (...) the way to fix inequality is through socialism. (...) in a multi-cultural society such as ours, where economic gaps are too strongly correlated to ethnic backgrounds, we must help those who have been left behind. (...) every child in Israel is entitled to nutritional security and quality education, even if he or she live in an unrecognized village in the Negev. (...) What do any of these issues have to do with the protests on Balfour Street? (...) Support for Netanyahu is decreasing, but the Right is getting stronger. The Left is coming into this election empty handed, debating whether to be a fourth or fifth fiddle in the

next symphony conducted by Netanyahu, or Gideon Sa'ar, or Naftali Bennett. The Left is dying. (...)

Dina Dayan, IHY, 29.12.20

3. Gerüchte über einen geplanten Gefangenenaustausch zwischen Israel und der Hamas

Nach gut einem Monat ohne Angriffe aus dem Gazastreifen kam es zu einem erneuten Schlagabtausch zwischen Israels Militär und islamistischen Kämpfern. Kampfflugzeuge griffen Stellungen der palästinensischen Hamas an. Dabei seien auch eine Produktionsstätte für Raketen, unterirdische Bauten sowie ein militärischer Stützpunkt beschossen worden. Dem Beschuss vorausgegangen waren Raketenangriffe aus dem Gazastreifen, die jedoch von Israels Kurzstreckenraketen-Abwehrsystem abgefangen werden konnten. Die erneute Aggression ungeachtet unterhält Israel offenbar indirekte Verhandlungen mit der Hamas über einen Gefangenenaustausch. Zwei junge Israelis, die laut Aussagen ihrer Familien geistig behindert sein sollen, und die sich aus eigenen Stücken in den Gazastreifen begeben haben, sowie die sterblichen Überreste zweier im Krieg 2014 gefallenen Soldaten stehen zur Diskussion. Der letzte Gefangenenaustausch liegt gut neun Jahre zurück. Im Oktober 2011 durfte der israelische Soldat Gilad Shalit nach fünfjähriger Geiselhaft den Gazastreifen verlassen. Im Gegenzug entließ Israel über eintausend palästinensische Gefangene auf freien Fuß.

Israel should not agree to 'outrageous' Hamas prisoner swap

Outgoing Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman Zvi Hauser confirmed (...) that Israel was negotiating indirectly with Hamas for the return of two Israeli civilians and the remains of two soldiers in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and the transfer of civilian aid to the Gaza Strip. (...) Releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, some of whom are apparently security prisoners serving time for terrorist activity, is not something the government should be contemplating. As Hauser correctly said, the proposed deal would put "hundreds of terrorists back in the cycle of terror." (...) Israel has been negotiating with Hamas through the Egyptian mediators to release two civilians, Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed, and the remains of St.-Sgt. Shaul Oron and Lt. Hadar Goldin, two soldiers believed to have been killed in action during 2014's Operation Protective Edge. Mengistu, an

Ethiopian Israeli, crossed the border into Gaza in September 2014, while al-Sayed, a Bedouin who served in the IDF for several months before being discharged, crossed the border in April 2015. Their families say they both have mental health issues, which are likely to have worsened under Hamas captivity. Israel should be doing all it can to secure their release, including humanitarian aid, but should draw the line at freeing terrorists. (...) Israel should offer only humanitarian aid as part of any deal. Vaccines save lives, while freeing terrorists endangers lives. This is the only kind of offer that is morally defensible. Israel should have learned by now that freeing prisoners convicted of terrorism will only return to inflict untold damage on the country and its people.

Editorial, JPO, 16.12.20

Bring our captives home from Gaza now

(...) The coronavirus pandemic has created a window of opportunity for a deal to return the IDF soldiers and Israeli citizens in Gaza. Israel's government should be commended for its efforts to reach such an agreement, but the six and a half years of humanitarian and civil pressure to bring the Israelis back have proven to be a resounding failure. Our boys can not return home without a release of Palestinian prisoners, which is at the heart of Hamas' narrative not only for the Gazan public, but also for the West Bank Palestinians as well. (...) An agreement for the return of the Israeli captives must include humanitarian aid – including help to fight the pandemic and meet the immediate needs of the people of Gaza - in line with Israel's interests in keeping the Strip healthy and functioning. The deal must also include release of prisoners with no security background, prisoners freed as part of the 2011 Shalit deal who have since been rearrested and other prisoners whose behavior Israel can monitor to ensure no future dangerous activity. However, MK Zvi Hauser, the departing chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, wants to prevent the release of security prisoners on the grounds that they would return to terrorism – as happened with some of the prisoners released in the Shalit deal. Hauser's sweeping and erroneous approach repeats the grave mistakes that led to the loss of captive IAF navigator Ron Arad, for whom Israel refused to release security prisoners due to the trauma of a prior exchange for three soldiers captured in the First Lebanon War. The tragic price of Israel's refusal of a "reasonable" deal for Arad with the Lebanese Amal organization is something

we all mourn to this day. As such, we should expect elected officials (...) to demonstrate leadership, avoid wrongful statements and not create public panic while making necessary policy decisions regarding missing IDF soldiers who were sent to war for us. (...) Israel's government must not miss this real opportunity to bring back Oron and the others. This might be the last real opportunity we will have for the foreseeable future.

Aviram Shaul, Avi Kalo, YED, 16.12.20

Please, don't swap me for anyone

If you think that's an easy statement to proclaim, try it. It's not easy. But what's the alternative? As the Sages rhetorically ask: Is your blood redder than anyone else's? (...)

I won't say I'm a hero. I'm not looking forward to being kidnapped. I know that if I'd survive it and am kept hostage, my prayers will improve. (...) But, I'm not going to break into prison to free a bunch of unrepented Jew-hating convicted murderers, also not under duress. If I can't be freed in my own merit, so be it. Maybe bomb the capturers to smithereens. If I die in the bombardment, know, that in their hands, I was as good as dead anyway. And that way, their friends might learn that the only price for kidnapping an Israeli Jew is death. With all the good we try to do in our lives, sometimes only our martyrdom will give us wings (...). I'll do almost anything to not die, even a martyr. But if it would happen, I can tell you, there are worse ways to die. (...)

Moshe-Mordechai van Zuiden, TOI, 17.12.20

Hamas prisoner swap talks are going nowhere

(...) There is some doubt as to whether Yahya Sinwar - the Hamas leader in Gaza who was himself freed in a 2011 prisoner swap - would be willing to advance any arrangement with Israel that did not include the release of Hamas prisoners, including those with blood on their hands. (...) Hamas insists that any deal includes a precondition to free Palestinians prisoners re-arrested by Israel following their release in the 2011 prisoner swap, which saw the return of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit after five years in Gaza captivity. They also insist sick prisoners, women and minors being held by Israel are also allowed to go home. These demands alone would not have prevented an agreement being reached with Israel, but some of the prisoners named by Hamas will not be acceptable to the Israeli government. (...) Israel seems to have been trying to soften Sinwar's resistance in recent weeks, with the Defense Ministry quietly permitting some restrictions on the Strip to be

lifted. (...) Israeli officials are concerned Hamas may lose control of the coronavirus pandemic in Gaza. Sinwar has already said that in such an eventuality, Israel would be made to pay unless medical equipment and supplies were provided. But despite Jerusalem's hope that the pandemic could be an opportunity to pressure Hamas to make a deal, the terror group's demands indicate otherwise. (...) Hamas needs an economic breakthrough and for major infrastructure projects to get underway. (...) Both sides will have to bend a little bit more, but at this stage neither seems willing to consider it.

Alex Fishman, YED, 19.12.20

4. Medienquerschnitt

Mission für 2021: Einen Krieg mit dem Iran vermeiden

Middle East gains clarity

(...) Ever since the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Middle East has become increasingly complex from the geopolitical standpoint, until very recently. It is still the playground of internal and external forces, but now, at least the situation of the Arab countries is becoming clearer. They are either on the side of Saudi Arabia/Israel/Egypt/UAE/Bahrain and the US or waiting in the wings to join that alliance, such as Oman and Kuwait, or they are part of the Iranian coalition of failed states: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and non-state actors: Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, al-Quaida and ISIS. External actors include the US, Russia, Turkey and China. (...) US policy towards the PA is about to be reversed by the incoming Biden administration in the US, but its future still looks glum unless its leadership undergoes a fundamental change, which is quite possible, with Mohamed Dahlan waiting on the sidelines, supported by the UAE. The pivotal position of Israel in the Sunni alliance will only continue to grow, unless it proves incapable of resolving its eternal political crisis. (...) The geopolitical reality determines that Turkey and Russia must continue to be in competition in the region (...). Iran, plagued by economic and social problems of significant magnitude, will look to the Biden government to save it from inevitable defeat by the Sunni-Israel alliance. Only here is there any serious likelihood of open warfare and avoiding such a disaster will be the central dilemma of the Middle East in 2021. (...)

Dr. Norman Bailey, GLO, 17.12.20

Protest gegen das Verbot gegen koscheres Schlachten

EU decision to prohibit kosher, halal slaughter must be reversed

The recent decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to uphold a prohibition on kosher and halal slaughter in Belgium is a serious affront to both Jews and Muslims and must be reversed. (...) According to kashrut and halal requirements, which are aimed at preventing animal suffering, the animal's throat must be slit quickly with a sharp knife while it is still conscious. European regulations require that animals be stunned before being killed, with the exception of religious slaughter in approved abattoirs. (...) Jews and Muslims in those nations and in Belgium must import kosher and halal meat from abroad and this has raised prices and caused shortages. (...) Jewish and Muslim religious leaders – supported by all those who believe in respecting the rights of all religions – should mount a powerful joint challenge to the court's decision. If Europe is to restore respect for its Jewish and Muslim minorities and right this wrong, the court must reverse its ruling on the Belgian ban as soon as possible.

Editorial, JPO, 19.12.20

HAA = Haaretz

YED = Yedioth Ahronoth / Ynetnews

JPO = Jerusalem Post

IHY = Israel HaYom

TOI = Times of Israel

GLO = Globes

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