

## **Yossi Beilin warnt vor einem „un-zionistischen Krieg“<sup>1</sup>**

*Im Gespräch mit Yossi Beilin, der zuletzt das israelische Team der „Genfer Initiative“ führte und sich vor zwei Jahren aus der aktiven Politik zurückzog – damals war er Vorsitzender der bürgerlich-liberalen Partei „Meretz (Energie)“ –, zeigt dieser sich äußerst besorgt über israelische Drohungen, Iran anzugreifen. Das Gespräch wird zufällig von „Haaretz“ an dem Tag publiziert, an dem Irans Präsident Machmud Achmadinedjad Israel als „Krebsgeschwür“ in der Region diffamiert und Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Generalsekretär der libanesischen „Hisbollah“ – der Verbündeten Irans – Israel mit Raketen droht.*

*Beilin hält Benjamin Netanjahu zugute, dass der Iran, einmal im Besitz der Atombombe, tatsächlich Israel angreifen könnte, und deshalb jede Aktion gerechtfertigt sei, diese Gefahr zu vereiteln. Gleichwohl fühlt sich Beilin unwohl, wenn sich der Ministerpräsident für seine Absichten das Münchner Abkommen von 1938<sup>2</sup> beruft, weil die Führung in Teheran „kein Haufen von Verrückten“ sei: „ja, die iranische Führung ist extremistisch, aber nicht irrational.“ Das Risiko des Atomwaffen-Einsatzes sei sehr, sehr gering. Dennoch handele Netanjahu wie ein ängstlicher Mensch, was man von einem nationalen Führer nicht erwarten sollte: „Gewöhnlich löst Angst Verantwortung aus. Aber in diesem besonderen Fall begründet Angst Unverantwortlichkeit.“*

*Beilin ruft die USA auf, mit Teheran zu einer vernünftigen Vereinbarung zu kommen, mit der Israel leben könne. Erst wenn dies nicht gelinge, sei der Einsatz von Gewalt zu erwägen. Bis dahin sei er, gegen einen Angriff, weil dieser in Israel und in der jüdischen Welt Menschenleben kosten und schweren wirtschaftlichen Schaden anrichten werde.*

*Zum anderen lehne er, Beilin, aus zionistischen Gründen einen Angriff ab: „Denn was sagt jemand, dass wir in Berlin von 1938 seien, wirklich? Er sagt – nehmt eure Koffer und geht. Wenn wir in Berlin von 1938 sind, gibt es keinen Grund, hier zu bleiben.“ Deshalb sei Netanjahus Position höchst un-zionistisch. „Wenn Netanjahu Recht hätte, hat Herzl Unrecht gehabt. Weil wir hier Juden zusammengezogen und ihnen eine sichere Zuflucht geboten haben. Doch wenn sich diese jüdische Ansammlung einer tödlichen Gefahr ausgesetzt sieht, weil einige ihrer Nachbarn die ultimative*

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<sup>1</sup> Ari Shavit: Yossi Beilin warns against an ‚un-Zionist war‘ (Gespräch mit Beilin), in „Haaretz“ 16.08.2012.

<sup>2</sup> Das von Hitler betriebene Münchner Abkommen vom 30.09.1938, von Mussolini, Chamberlain und Daladier mitgetragen, verfügte den Anschluss des Sudetenlandes an das Deutsche Reich.

*Vernichtungswaffe haben, gibt es nur eine Schlussfolgerung:  
Zerstret euch. Zerstret euch sofort.“*

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**Intellectual architect of the peace movement says Netanyahu's fear of Iran puts us all in danger, and calls for a public campaign against an Israeli attack.**

Yossi Beilin is one of the quiet people who have defined our lives. Although never a senior minister, he has had more impact on the Israeli experience than any prime minister. As the intellectual architect, diplomatic entrepreneur and responsible adult of the peace movement, he brought the world the Oslo Accords, the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement and the Geneva Initiative. But after the Middle East reality and the Israeli public rejected the peace path he proposed, Beilin retired from the political arena. For the past few years he has been running a business group that makes economic peace deals throughout the Middle East.

But in recent months, Beilin has been worried. Very worried. What worries this former cabinet secretary, deputy foreign minister and justice minister is not the Iranian nuclear bomb. What worries him is the possible Israeli bombing of Iran. In his air-conditioned office in Herzliya Pituah, the black-clad Beilin gives me his answers to what was said in this column last week by a senior decision maker. The first argument now leading us toward war is that Iran is an existential threat, I say to Beilin. True or not? Do you accept this argument?

“Iran is a state with a problematic regime that promotes an extreme ideology by means of violence and terror,” replies the Oslo architect. “If it obtains nuclear weapons, its standing in the Middle East will be vastly strengthened. It could fill part of the void left by the Americans’ departure from Afghanistan and Iraq. It will become a center of power, and some Arab countries will wish to identify with it because of its power, and because it stood up to the West and succeeded. It’s even possible that Iran would become a non-Arab member of the

Arab League. The result will be a bolstering of the extreme elements in the Arab world and the prevention of peace agreements with Israel. There may also be instances of threats to use nuclear weapons. So a nuclear Iran is a very serious matter. A nuclear Iran is a great danger. But I do not and cannot accept that this danger is an existential danger. A nuclear Iran is not an existential danger. It must be prevented – just as Palestinian terrorism must be prevented – but it mustn't be seen as spelling the end of the Zionist project."

*But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says that the year is 1938. The combination of an unconventional regime with unconventional weapons will prove catastrophic. If we don't stop the Iranians now and they arm themselves with nuclear weapons, they could use these weapons directly against Israel. One fine morning, an atom bomb could explode in the skies over Tel Aviv.*

"Netanyahu and I have been discussing this subject for years," the veteran statesman tells me. "I can tell you that he is being completely genuine. This is no ploy designed to shunt aside other issues. This is not some kind of clever game. Netanyahu truly believes that if the Iranians obtain a nuclear bomb, they will launch it at us. Therefore, as he sees it, there is justification for nearly any action that will avert this danger. There is also justification for nearly any cost of any action. From the point of view of a leader who thinks the way Netanyahu does, it would be irresponsible not to attack. The danger is so great that it negates any opposing consideration.

"I must say that the 1938 argument makes me queasy. I think it's baseless. The risk that the Iranians will drop an atom bomb on Israel is negligible. Negligible. The risk of the use of nuclear weapons is very, very low. When it comes down to it, those people in Tehran are not a bunch of lunatics. Yes, the Iranian leadership is extreme, but it's not irrational. It is aware of what implications such an act, which hasn't been committed by any country since 1945, would have. It would be the end for them. They would be wiped off the face of the

earth. A nation with an ancient culture that has existed for thousands of years would cease to exist.

“Why has Israel spent decades building up its deterrent image? Just so that it can stand up to such a threat without being forced to take extreme action against it. But Netanyahu is acting as if Israeli deterrence is non-existent. I’m not belittling him. He is not incapable and he is not crazy or messianic. But the prime minister is evidently an anxious person. His anxiety level is much higher than one would expect from a national leader. Usually, anxiety brings responsibility. But in this particular case, anxiety is causing irresponsibility. It could even cause war.”

The second argument leading us toward war, I say to the peacenik, is that America will not halt Iran. Everyone agrees that it would have been preferable for the world’s superpower to take on the Shi’ite nuclear challenge. But the assessment of the prime minister and maybe also Defense Minister Ehud Barak is that the superpower will not do this. The likelihood of an American military operation is practically nil. Therefore, Israel has no choice but to save itself by means of a blue-and-white strike on Iran.

“This anxiety of Bibi’s is also greatly overblown,” says my cool and eloquent conversation partner. “He’s saying that our biggest ally is deceiving us. He thinks the American president’s explicit commitment to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons isn’t worth much. I disagree with him. First of all, the Americans have made a commitment and the commitment is binding. Beyond that, they have an interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and radicalization in the Middle East and in defending their allies in the Gulf and Israel. I expect that what they will try to do in the coming year is to reach a reasonable agreement with the Iranians that we can live with. But if the Iranians reject the offer, the likelihood that the United States will use force against Iran’s nuclear sites is quite high. I believe it far exceeds 50-50 odds. So there is no justification for a

rash and hasty Israeli operation now. It is not a near certainty that the Iranians are beginning to manufacture nuclear weapons, and there is no basis for saying that the Americans will not use force against them.”

The third argument leading us toward war is the Zionist argument, I say. Both Netanyahu and Barak say that a sovereign state cannot place its future in another country’s hands. Therefore, they feel it is Israel’s duty to attack while it still can. Why did Jews gather in this country in the first place? So that Jews would not be dependent upon others, but rather determine their fate with their own hands. Therefore, the default choice is action and not inaction.”

Yossi Beilin loses his famous cool. Now he gets worked up. “I’m opposed to an attack on Iran now because it could cost human lives in Israel and could cost human lives in the Jewish world and could cause very heavy economic damage. But my main objection derives from Zionist reasons. For what is someone who says we’re in Berlin in 1938 really saying? He’s saying – Take your suitcases and go. If we’re in Berlin in 1938, there’s no point in staying here. I have no reason to raise my grandchildren here. This is something I cannot accept. This kind of statement gives me chills.

“Netanyahu apparently doesn’t understand this, but his position is the most un-Zionist position that could possibly be. If Netanyahu is right, Herzl was wrong. Because we massed Jews together here to give them a safe refuge. But if this Jewish mass will be in mortal danger because a few of its neighbors have the ultimate destructive weapon, there is only one conclusion: Disperse. Disperse immediately.

“Because I was born here and because my parents made me a Zionist, I cannot accept this argument. I find it inconceivable that the whole thing was a mistake. I believe in this country and I don’t think we need to live here like a rapid response unit that’s dispatched all

over the place at the drop of a hat in order to prevent some far-off danger. Yes, there are dangers and there are threats. But we have to contend with them intelligently and with moderation and with self-confidence. To me, that's Zionism. It's the total antithesis of what Netanyahu is proposing."

I understand that, I say. But it's quite possible that war is in the offing anyway. Netanyahu and Barak will read what you say, but they won't agree. What will you do? Don't you think it's your duty and the duty of other Israelis with international standing to appeal to U.S. President Barack Obama to prevent a disaster? Don't you agree that only an immediate, strong American commitment to stop Iran will prevent the outbreak of war?

"The lack of trust between Netanyahu and Obama will remain even if the president gives the prime minister a commitment face to face," says the former deputy foreign minister. "So what is needed is public diplomacy. The Americans need to take it up an octave and use words that haven't been spoken yet in addressing the Israeli public. They need to be clearer and sound more steadfast than they have up to now. Since the United States fears an imminent Israeli operation, it must make a statement that commits it to taking action against Iran when the time comes and leaves no room for doubt."

*Do you support a public campaign against an attack on Iran<sup>3</sup>?*

"For generations we've been saying that the army is there to defend the citizenry and therefore the price it is required to pay in wartime is legitimate," says Beilin, the former minister. "But today Netanyahu and Barak are saying something new. They're saying they will send civilians to the battlefield now in order to prevent the deaths of other civilians in the future. The public must react to this statement. Israeli

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<sup>3</sup> Vgl. den Aufruf „Israelische Petition gegen die Bombardierung Irans“ in der Menüleiste „Berichte aus Nahost“ dieser Homepage.

civilians have the right to say: Don't sacrifice us for the sake of other civilians. Where is the justice here? Where is the logic? There is no historical legitimacy for such a move. Out of fear that something will occur in the future, you commit an act that will hurt Israel economically, diplomatically and strategically and maybe also cost hundreds of lives. As long as the whole thing was far-off and seemed more like a game, fine. But now it all seems more and more real. If it is real, it's awful. What Netanyahu and Barak are talking about is clearly a war of choice.

"I won't stand at the head of protests. That's not my nature and today I am not in a political role that would require it. But I think it's right for people to be saying: Wait a minute, you're talking about our lives here. We're the ones who will be killed. So I think there is justification for demonstrations but they mustn't be fringe demonstrations by Hadash<sup>4</sup>. They need to be very large demonstrations by the mainstream. I would expect Shaul Mofaz<sup>5</sup> and Shelly Yachimovich<sup>6</sup> to lead a public campaign against an attack on Iran. Zahava Gal-On and Meretz and Peace Now should be part of the struggle, but Kadima and Labor should initiate it. This has nothing to do with peace or the peace camp. It's a matter of preventing war. Today there is certainly good reason to hold mass demonstrations to prevent a war."

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<sup>4</sup> „Hadash“: Kommunistische Partei Israels. Bei den Parlamentswahlen 2009 erhielt sie drei Mandate.

<sup>5</sup> Shaul Mofaz ist Vorsitzender von „Kadima“.

<sup>6</sup> Shelly Yachimovich ist Vorsitzende der Arbeitspartei.