

## The world doesn't seem so worried by Netanyahu's threat to attack Iran

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*Seit Tagen mehren sich in den israelischen Medien Berichte über die Absichten von Ministerpräsident Benjamin Netanjahu und seinem Verteidigungsminister Ehud Barak, Iran anzugreifen. Hintergrund sind öffentlich genährte Spekulationen, dass die Entwicklung im iranischen Nuklearwaffenprogramm trotz mehrerer Sabotageakte, die den israelischen und den US-amerikanischen Geheimdiensten zugeschrieben werden (Stichwort „cyber-war“) zugeschrieben werden, in den vergangenen Monaten erhebliche Fortschritte gemacht habe. Trotz seiner Ablehnung eines israelischen Angriffs, so Aluf Benn, seien Barack Obama aus innenpolitischen Gründen wegen der angestrebten Wiederwahl am 06. November die Hände gebunden, während die Regierungschefs in Großbritannien, Frankreich und Deutschland den israelischen Premier genauso wenig mögen, die dies Obama tue. Obwohl es in diesen Ländern keine starke Lobby für Israel gebe, würden David Cameron, François Hollande und Angela Merkel gegenüber israelischen Absichten und die iranischen Drohungen mit Gegenangriffen schweigen, weil sie mit der Wirtschaftskrise beschäftigt seien und wegen der Sommerferien. Dabei könnten sie gegenüber Israel und Iran diplomatische Aktivitäten entfalten.*

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak are threatening to attack Iran, and the world does not seem concerned. Israel warns that its face is turned in the direction of a war that will bump up the price of oil and cause many deaths and much damage, and the world does nothing to prevent the tragedy. No emergency meetings of the UN Security Council, no dramatic diplomatic delegations, no live coverage on CNN and Al-Jazeera. There aren't even any sharp fluctuations in the price of oil and natural gas. Or in Israel's credit rating. The scene is quiet. Even Iranian counter-threats to hit Israel don't seem to worry anybody.

What's happening here? All the signs show that the "international community," meaning the Western powers and the U.S. in the lead,

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seem to have reconciled themselves with Israel's talk of a military strike – and now they are pushing Netanyahu to stand by his rhetoric and send his bombers to their targets in Iran. In general terms, the market has already accounted for the Israeli strike in its assessment of the risk of the undertaking, and it is now waiting for the expectation to be realized.

The international community created the ideological grounds for an Israeli operation against Iran. It has ceased to bother Netanyahu about issues related to the occupation, the settlements and the Palestinian state, which has made it possible for Netanyahu to focus on preparing the Israel Defense Forces and Israeli public opinion for a war with Iran. The "nuclear talks" between the powers and Iran were the epitome of diplomatic impotence. Economic sanctions on Iran did not stop the nuclear project, and maybe even caused its acceleration, but they are likely to limit Iran in a long-term war against Israel.

U.S. President Barack Obama is considered a sharp opponent to the idea of an Israeli strike against Iran. But his actions say the opposite. Obama once again is leading from behind, as he did in Libya and Syria. This is his doctrine: Instead of complicating America with a new Mideast war, he is outsourcing the fighting to an external agent. In Libya, it was the French, the British and the anti-Gadhafi rebels. In Syria, it is the Free Syrian Army. In Iran, it is the IDF.

If Israel does strike, the planes and the arms will be made in the U.S.A. The Home Front Command will receive early warnings of missile landings from the American radar in the Negev in southern Israel. The financial aid and state support for the day after the strike will probably also come from Washington.

The public position of the U.S. regime is vague. Officials talk about the "unity of the international community," "tough sanctions" and say

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things that they will use all available options to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons (as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta did on his recent visit to Israel). There is no warning here against an Israeli strike. No one is saying, "If you strike, you will put Israel-U.S. relations at risk, and you will remain isolated."

Obama was much more aggressive when he asked Netanyahu to freeze settlement construction - something that has no effect whatsoever on the well-being of Americans. And now, when regional stability and the fate of the world economy are at stake, the Obama administration makes do with a feeble request that Israel wait.

There is logic behind this apparent American weakness: Obama needs the support of America's Jews in the upcoming presidential elections, hence his reluctance to enter into a diplomatic confrontation with the Israeli Prime Minister. According to this explanation, Obama must catch up with Republican rival Mitt Romney, who came to be photographed next to Netanyahu in Jerusalem. Obama despises Netanyahu, but he has put aside his feelings at least until the elections are over in November. This is one of the reasons that Netanyahu and Barak want to attack in the coming weeks, when Obama will be forced to support Israel, because of his political needs at home.

But even if Obama is held back by the campaign, his restraints do not put his European peers under any kind of obligation. Angela Merkel, David Cameron, and Francois Hollande dislike Netanyahu as much as Obama does, but in Germany, Britain and France there is no strong lobby for Israel. And even so, the Europeans are silent. During Netanyahu's first term as Prime Minister, European leaders visited Israel often in order to protest the stalemate in the peace process and settlement expansion. And now? The two most important guests that have visited Jerusalem in the last two weeks were the Australian foreign minister and the prime minister of Tonga. Friendly nations, but ones that lack influence in matters of war and

peace. European leaders and foreign ministers are busy with the Economic crisis and holidays.

For Americans and Europeans who are leading a hard line against Iran, it is difficult to present a position that will be interpreted as a defense of the Iranian nuclear program in the face of an Israeli strike. But they can demonstrate diplomatic activity, flood Israel and Iran with visits, brief the press, and maybe even posit creative solutions to calm the crisis. Their reluctance and their silence imply their support for an attack by Netanyahu. If a war breaks out, they will do everything to minimize any ensuing damage, to reach a cease-fire, and to calm the oil market.

And maybe they just think that Netanyahu is bluffing. Maybe, much as they did not believe his pronouncements over a future Palestinian state, they think that his talk of a strike is nothing more than empty words.

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