Mr. Obama's Misunderstanding

by Reiner Bernstein, Munich

Some days after the meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan and one day before the gathering with Benjamin Netanyahu, the U.S. President has given his keynote guidelines for the relationship to the Arab world and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His principals have not been less than disappointing, even if Barack Obama, unlike his predecessor George W. Bush, pleaded for the two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders and although the Palestinian Authority paid tribute to this declaration as a political advantage. Not so long ago Mahmoud Abbas felt deceived by Washington.

Obama chose the prestigious "Benjamin Franklin Room" at the State Department to offer the American full support to the success of the demonstrations in the Arab world and to their strive for freedom and reform. Almost two years ago, on June 4, 2009 in his address in Cairo, Obama announced to open a new chapter in the U.S. relations with the Arab and Muslim world – and afterwards included the good news that in 2011 the world will be bestowed with the present of a sovereign state of Palestine.

Nothing has come across. The "Arabellion" is not the result of Obama's former promises. Instead, the peoples of Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria have concentrated on their own forces. No doubt that the sparks of self-liberation will ultimately pass over to countries like Morocco and Mauritania, and finally to the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. Only in Jordan, the transitional process seems to lead successfully to a constitutional monarchy – a stability which is basically due to the respect and the reverence the royal family enjoys as descendants of the Prophet.

Obama's promises of May 19 to the protest movements have remained rather vague. Like the political West he is missing a convincing perception, although the U.S. is insisting on the political leadership in the Middle East and despite the huge diplomatic apparatus which the Administrating is employing. Additional financial assistance that was attributed lately to Jordan and Egypt will not increase America's reputation. At home, the Republicans in Congress have expressed their reservations by looking at the huge deficit of the federal budget, and protesters in Cairo and elsewhere will reject political interferences on their way to the rule of law and democracy.

The Administration willfully ignores that its former influence was built on the alliance with autocrats and oppressors who defended Washington's geostrategic and resource-related concerns because of their own endeavor to stay in power. But the era of sovereignty among the Arab peoples has arrived at an inadvertent point of no return. Now the Administration has to adapt to changing parliamentary majorities and governments that owe their legitimacy to political participation of the citizens and their active involvement. On the other hand, the upheavals in the Arab world will exert more pressure on the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The President and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton can not help but to attach much more importance to the relationship between the two political challenges – in case they want to reject the persistent accusations of double standards.

Until then Israel's policy in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem will not be confronted with a dramatic setting of change. Although Defense Minister Ehud Barak just stressed in the "Los Angeles Times" that Israel is the strongest military power in the vicinity of one thousand miles around Jerusalem, Obama has highlighted once again the existential threat the American chief strategic partner in the region seems to be exposed to. So, Netanyahu may enter the White House today with some feelings of relaxation, and Obama's

forthcoming appearance at the annual convention of the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) will substantiate the steadfastness of Prime Minister once more.

Finally, after the newspaper "Haaretz" qualified Obama's rejection of a proclamation of a Palestinian state as "scornful" Netanyahu can proclaim accordingly that his government is ready to limit its annexation purposes to the three major settlement blocs Gush Etzion in the south, Ma'aleh Adumim in the east and Ariel in the north – and in case of a Palestinian state to confine to Israel's military persistence in the Jordan Valley, an area that constitutes no less than 18 percent of the West Bank. In the meantime the German und European preference to wait for Washington is challenged by the announcement of the Jerusalem Planning Authority to build additional 1,600 housing units east of the metropolitan area of the city.

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