

## Impressions from the Herzliya Conference 2007

*At the end of January each year the most prestigious Herzliya Conference takes place with many prominent personalities from Israel and around the world. Jörn Böhme, the director of the Israel office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation attended the conference and sent us his impressions. We appreciate his approval to publish it.*

*One of the disturbing impressions from the deliberations was the nearly complete negligence of any serious dealings with the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Instead, most attention was attracted by and devoted to the nuclear capabilities of Iran as the major threat throughout the region.*

### **Jörn Böhme, Tel Aviv, reports:**

Since six years the **Institute for Policy and Strategy** at the **Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC)** under its head **Prof. Uzi Arad** organizes the so-called Herzliya Conference. IDC is a private college founded in 1994. The conference has become famous internationally especially, because then prime minister Ariel Sharon used it on December 18, 2003 to announce his “disengagement plan.”

The conference is a four-day marathon of panels and speeches from 8:30 in the morning until 10:30 at night non-stop, including lunch and dinner sessions. This year’s conference had over 1,200 registered participants. Except ministers from the Israeli government, the speakers usually have between 5 and 15 minutes to speak. The time is shown on monitors that can be seen by the audience as well as by monitors that can be observed by the speakers. This has a mostly disciplinating effect. For those who overdraw their time this can have consequences. When Israeli defence minister **Amir Peretz** spoke, there were many photographers present, who were waiting that he overdraw his time – for the moment, the ticking clock on the monitor arrived at 0:00 seconds, because then the label “Your time is over” would appear. Of course they were all waiting for the picture of Amir Peretz standing behind the podium and this label appearing on the monitor above his head. He did not disappoint them and they all got this picture, which will probably appear in the papers sometime in the future.

The political direction of the conference is not completely monolithic, but clear. As Haaretz journalist **Uzi Benziman** writes: “At the least one can say [Uzi] Arad [the president of the Conference] is part of the Israeli political discourse’s right wing. In addition, he is one of Benjamin Netanyahu’s close advisors. The Herzliya Conference – this year at least – is not, therefore, an impartial academic summit. It is an event with a clear ideological agenda<sup>1</sup>.”

This was my impression, too. And in fact I went to the conference with that assumption. On the first day I noticed, however, that different voices could be heard. Former US Under-Secretary of State **Thomas R. Pickering** suggested new disarmament steps in the UN context; Prof. **Paul Bracken** from Yale University claimed that politics made from gutt feeling are more dangerous than additional nuclear powers. **Gary Samore** from the US-“Council on Foreign Relations” suggested that it would be unlikely that Iran would produce nuclear weapons in the next years. **Robert Einhorn** from the US-“Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)” promoted the option of putting additional pressure on the Iranian government against other options including a military strike. He advocated that the US should normalize her relationship with Iran and leave the regime change to the Iranians. Also there were two Socialdemocratic members of the German Bundestag speaking (**Gert Weisskirchen** and **Rolf Mützenich** – the Friedrich Ebert Foundation had supported the conference). Finally, there were **Richard**

**Haas, Gidi Grinstein, Kadima MK Prof. Shlomo Breznitz** and there was even an Israeli-Arab women (**Aida Touma-Suleiman** from the "Follow-Up Committee for the Arab Population in Israel"). But they didn't set the tone.

Typical for the tone was a panel with almost no differences between the participants on the issue of **The Changing Paradigm of Israeli-Palestinian Relations in the Shadow of Iran and the War Against Hizballah**. Former Israeli ambassador to the UN, **Dore Gold** chaired the panel consisting of former chief of staff **Moshe Ya'alon**, former CIA director **James Woolsey** and **Prof. Bernard Lewis** from Princeton University. **Dore Gold** explained his view of the change of paradigm with the Hamas victory. The old paradigm was that the Israeli-Palestinian: The Israeli-Arab conflict was the cause of instability in the Middle East. If this conflict would be solved, this would solve many other conflicts. But what should be done, Gold asked, if the core is not the Israeli-Arab conflict? What has been achieved then? What if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part and parcel of the conflict between the West and the global jihad? Gold said, he would not answer the questions but he wanted to have asked them. **Bernhard Lewis** talked about the triumphalist religions Islam and Christianity. Islam was twice driven out from the West, now it's Islam's third attempt. There is competition in Islam between the Sunni-Wahabi direction (Bin Laden) and the Shia version (2<sup>nd</sup> Iranian revolution). Concerning the ideas of Achmadinejad, MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) according to Lewis is not deterrence, but an inducement.

The audience the day before used to applaud the speakers after their presentation. Not so, when Dore Gold announced **James Woolsey**, the former director of the CIA. Directly after the announcement he got the applause of part of the audience. He criticised US Under-Secretary of State **Nicholas Burns** who according to Woolsey had painted a much too rosy picture the day before. According to Woolsey the partnership with Europe is deteriorating. With the demographic trends there, the Europeans are losing control of their own societies. The world faces now Islamic totalitarianism, which is as great a challenge as Nazism and Communism. The essence of the Iranian regime is the destruction of Israel and the US (as anti-Semitism was the essence of Adolf Hitler). 1979 was the key year of the explosion of fanaticism. Wahabi oil money is a big part of the problem. Those who would say that the different radical Islamic groups would never work together are as right as those who said that the Nazis and the Communists would never work together. There is a need for clarity, for being theocratophobic. If there is a need for force, it should be applied strongly. It was a mistake, not to confront Syria in the summer of 2006. There is a need to decisively move away from the use of oil.

After the long applause for Woolsey, former Israeli chief of staff **Moshe Ya'alon** explained that it was a mistaken perception that the occupation was the core of the Israeli-Palestinian problem. Arafat's refusal in Camp David in the year 2000 was the third Palestinian refusal for partition of the land. The root cause of the conflict is not the occupation of territory, but the clash of civilizations. There is the need for a leadership that speaks the truth, even if that means blood, sweat and tears. There is the need for internal education to strengthen the belief in our cause, Ya'alon said. There is a need to fight back the Palestinians without conceding and retreating and to extract a price from the other side. There is a need to start thinking outside the box of the two-state-solution. Unfortunately the outgoing and the incoming UN Secretary General supports the notion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root of instability. Instead it is necessary to erase the concept of the borders of 1967 and the Green Line and strengthen defensible borders. The Iranian regime needs to be defeated, there will be no

internal change without a shock coming from the outside. There is a clash of civilizations also inside Moslem societies. Democratization starts with education and ends with election, Ya'alon said.

In the discussion James Woolsey complained that the media is not taking the Islamist ideology serious. For them any religiously motivated person is crazy. He clarified his remarks concerning Iran saying that the point has not been reached yet, where force is needed. He would support the opposition with the aim of a general strike. He also said that the Arabs in Israel live freely and that if the Palestinians in the Westbank would live by the same standards, it would be no problem for 500.000 Jews to live there freely.

Some other aspects from the meetings that I attended:

- During the panel on **Geostrategic Shifts in the Global Arena**, **Horst Teltschik**, National Security Advisor of former German chancellor Kohl, asked why Russia should not be part of NATO and said that the Europeans have no idea how to cope with the Middle East.
- Labour MK **Matan Vilnai** spoke on the panel on **Bolstering Israel's Defence Forces** about the need to extricate politics from the army and the need to understand the limitations of power and force.
- US Under-Secretary of State **Nicholas Burns** said that the US and Israel are well-positioned to succeed in the global perspective. Concerning Europe the US had rebuild the bridges. The most important challenge in the Middle East according to Burns is Iran, which plays a negative role in all of the crisis there. For US-President Bush all options are on the table, but he is seeking a diplomatic solution.
- In the same session on **Reviewing the American-Israeli Strategic Dialogue**, Israeli minister of transportation and former minister of defence **Shaul Mofaz** claimed that Iran is the core of the problem in the Middle East: an existential threat to Israel and for peace in the whole world. As many others at the conference he considered the radical forces on one side (Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas) against the forces of stability on the other side (among them the moderate Arab countries and the Siniora government in Lebanon).
- In the session on **Strategic Implications of the Changing Global Nuclear Order**, **Paul Bracken** from Yale University advocated the US declaring no first use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, but at the same time guarantee second use.
- **Richard Perle** did not disappoint – neither the people who like him nor the people who dislike him. He said that concerning Iran, regime change is the only effective way. He criticized the US, the EU and Israel for not doing enough to support the opposition. We also failed to do this in Iraq, he said and then there was only the military option left. According to Perle, precision air-strikes with conventional weapons could deal with the Iranian nuclear program. He said that he doesn't know, if Israel could do this alone, but that if Israel would take military action the US would deem it vital to succeed. He was also convinced that if US-President Bush would be told that Iran is on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, he would order military action.
- Likud MK **Yuval Steinitz** claimed that the Iranian nuclear installations are vulnerable, otherwise the Iranians would not spend so much money on air defense systems. Iran is a threat to world peace and the mistakes of the 1930s should not be repeated. He ended by saying that one should imagine, if the US would fail to save the world from the real nuclear threat that

- Iran poses because of its involvement in Iraq because of the non-existent nuclear threat there.
- Contrary to the majority of the speakers, Israeli defence minister **Amir Peretz** advocated an emphasis on the Israel-Palestinian track. He spoke about his new diplomatic plan and in the end got polite and weak applause.
  - In the session on **Israeli Arabs and the Jewish State**, the treasurer of the Jewish Agency, **Hagai Merom** said that the Arab population in Israel 60 years after the establishment of the state doesn't get what it deserves and advocated a moderate solution of living together. **Aida Toma-Suleiman** from the "Follow-Up Committee for the Arab Population in Israel" explained that the paper "The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel" was an attempt to open a dialogue. It advocates a consensual democracy, rather than an arrangement democracy. She urged the audience not to attack the vision of the paper, before reading it. **Dan Schueftan** from the University of Haifa interpreted the paper of the Follow-Up Committee differently. In his view it expresses that nothing less than the destruction of the Jewish enterprise will fulfil the needs of the Arab population of Israel. According to him Jews will not even start a dialogue about this document, there will be no solution and not even room to think about a solution. Former MK (Shinui) **Eti Livni** welcomed the fact that contrary to the original plans this discussion is taking place with the participation of a member from the Follow-Up Committee. She differentiated between Arab intellectuals and the general Arab population in Israel. Its majority is ready to live in a Jewish state. A large portion of the Jewish population on the other side is ready to get into a dialogue. The paper helped to open a new dialogue.
  - In the session **Upgrading Israel's Strategic Partnership with the Atlantic Community**: The US, NATO and the EU, **Craig Kennedy**, President of the "German Marshall Fund" doubted that after the presidential elections in the US the EU-US relationship would improve considerably. The differences are too deep, for example concerning the use of force and the agreement between Republicans and Democrats on many issues too great. **Josef Joffe**, publisher of the German weekly DIE ZEIT claimed that Israel deserves to be a member of NATO and the EU, but that this would not happen and Israel should not want it to happen. It would not be in Israel's interest to join NATO – and put its fate to 25 others, with veto power and partly not in sympathy with Israel. The explicit alliance with the US serves Israeli interests better than a membership in NATO. Contrary to this position former prime minister of Spain, **José María Aznar** claimed that Israel is located in the Middle East, but not a Middle Eastern country, and must become part of NATO.
  - In the session on **European Foreign Policy under the German Presidency**, MP **Gert Weisskirchen** said that Israel should use the instruments that the EU is offering Israel. Referring to what **Shimon Peres** had said during the lunch session he emphasised that the picture concerning Iran is not just black and white. MP **Rolf Mützenich** referred to the six visits of the German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Israel since taking office and the German military presence in the region for the first time. Israel's right to exist in recognized borders is not negotiable. He spoke of the need for security for all sides and this means also to take Palestinian interests into consideration. There should not be only big plans, but also small confidence building measures. Concerning Syria, he suggested that Assad should be taken by his word. Some of the pictures of Iran that he heard during speeches at the conference seemed simplis-

tic and dangerous to him. Concerning Iran, the questions needs to be asked what lessons can be learned from dealing with Libya and North Korea. **Karl Kaiser**, former head of the German Council on Foreign Relations emphasized the reciprocal investments between the US and the EU even during times of political crisis. He demanded to anchor Turkey in the West.

- **Alan M. Dershowitz** from the Harvard Law School who spoke via satellite said in view of the discussions in the US concerning Israel that Israel might lose US support diplomatically, militarily and morally.
- In the session **US Middle East Policy Following the Midterm Elections** former Israeli ambassador to the US, **Zalman Shoval** saw a contradiction between the Baker/Hamilton “Iraq Study Group”-report and people like Zbigniew Brzezinski who claims the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the moderate Arab states, which don’t do that the way anymore as they used to do it in the past. Israel has as many diplomatic plans as ministers and most of them are equally useless, he said. **Robert Satloff** of the Washington “Institute for Near East Policy” talked about the absence of the freedom agenda in the politics of the US government. His assessment was that the ideas behind the Baker/Hamilton report are dead, but not buried. He said, the Arab states are begging the US not to leave Iraq and not to let Iran acquire nuclear weapons. Israel is in the comfortable position that all Arab states want to speak to her and Israel can decide to whom she wants to speak and in what order. He didn’t see the US critics of Israel (mainly a problem of the non-Jewish, non-evangelical foreign policy elite) as the main issue. In his assessment Israel remains deeply supported by the American people. **Stephen E. Herbits** from the “World Jewish Congress” criticized the deeply insufficient relationship between the Israeli and the US defense ministries. Western civilization must have a more aggressive support in the current multi-generational war. Israel must become a much stronger player and should help the US to develop a comprehensive strategy for military confrontation and on new energy resources. He asked how a nation could adhere to the Geneva Convention in fighting terrorists that sacrifice their own children and women. **Richard N. Haass**, president of the US-“Council on Foreign Relations” suggested that in the end the military aspects of the Baker/Hamilton report would become the strategy of the US-government in Iraq. He also suggested that the US should negotiate with Iran and Syria. Both countries neither wanted refugees nor a regional war. Diplomacy either works or clarifies things. Negotiations are not a sign of weakness, but a tool according to Haass. Diplomatic possibilities should be explored, for example with Syria. The possibility to end them always exists. He also doesn’t understand all the preconditions. According to Haass it matters where you end, not where you start. The concept of reform needs to be re-thought deeply, because it has been given a bad name. Iran is for Haass a weak country, but with a sophisticated imperial policy. The era of US-dominance is over, not the era of US influence.
- The main issues the session on **Energy Security and Alternative Energy Sources** dealt with gas and hybrid cars.
- In a dinner session on **Combating the de-Legitimization of the Jewish State and Winning the Battle of Public Opinion**, **Fania Oz-Salzburger** from Haifa University said, that there is no legitimacy for denying Israel’s right to exist and there should always be an answer to such attempts. She said that there is criticism, however that one should pay attention to. The Arab citizens of Israel should be more integrated and should be given more room in the democracy of the Jewish state. **Irwin Cotler**, former

Justice Minister of Canada talked about the constant threat of genocide against Israel. It starts with the Jews, he said, but it doesn't end with the Jews. **Richard Landes** from Boston University spoke about the Muslim street in Europe and that European democracies could fall to the Islamic threat. He criticized the appeasement of the mainstream-media and its obsessive reporting about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He accused the Israeli media of appeasement towards the Western mainstream media. To underscore his point he said that this was like the two Jews standing in line before the gas chambers of Auschwitz: One sneezes and the other one tells him to be quiet, because he would only make things worse. A window of opportunity he saw in the Internet and the bloggersphere, because there does no political correctness prevail. Former Likud MK **Natan Sharansky** said that the enemies are smelling victory. The Jewish people and the state of Israel are not mobilized, he claimed. The enlightened world today is more ready for a world without Israel than the world in 1939 was ready for a world without Jews, Sharansky said if a professor in the US or in Europe would deny the Holocaust, he could end up in jail, but if he would call for a world without Israel, this could be beneficial for his career. He criticized the information policy of the Israeli government saying that Israel fights a different war than its enemies.

- US-Senator **John McCain** said via satellite that there is only one thing worse than a military option against Iran: when Iran is acquiring nuclear weapons. He called for the isolation of Hamas and the disarmament of Hezbollah and said there is a moral relationship between the USA and Israel.
- At the panel about initiatives for **Diplomacy and Statecraft in the Arab-Israeli Context** former Palestinian finance minister **Salam Fayyad** said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a security conflict, but a political conflict with security ramifications. He demanded a clear and agreed-upon definition of where to go and how to get there. Former Israeli foreign minister **Silvan Shalom** asked how it comes that someone like Fayyad could not be in power anymore. A policy of negotiating with Iran and Syria as suggested by the Baker/Hamilton report would be a stab in the back of the moderate Arab states. He said that only Iran, not Hezbollah and Hamas is an existential threat for Israel. Israel would have to fight back with moderates like Salam Fayyad. **Gidi Grinstein** from the "Reut Institute" claimed that Israeli policy against Hamas had failed and that the continuation of the Israeli occupation would lead to the implosion of Israel. Kadima MK **Shlomo Breznitz** said that Israel and the Palestinians can not solve the conflict by themselves. Because of the problems the US is involved in there is only the European Union that has a strategic first hand interest and wish to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He referred to the positive role of the EU involvement in Bosnia. **David Makovsky** from the Washington "Institute for Near East Policy" said that the Arab states are not pushing for negotiations with Syria. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia wanted to have regime change there. He said that the moderates on the Palestinian side, Fayyad, Abu-Amr, Dahlan and Abed Rabbo should be strengthened. For the future all options should be on the table including incorporating the West Bank into Israel, without Israel losing its Jewish and democratic character.

These are of course just some partial impressions, since I was not able to be at all the sessions, and also this short report could not reflect on everything that I heard from the panellists and speakers.

*Tel Aviv, January 26/27, 2007*

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<sup>1</sup> „Haaretz” January 25, 2007.