

Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu

Research Doc

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Outline

Background

- Netanyahu was PM from 1996-1999, 2009-2021, and now from December 2022-present. His current government is noted as the most right-wing in the country's history.
- Judicial Reforms
 - Bills were first proposed in [January 2023](#). In [July 2023](#) the first bill on the "reasonableness doctrine" was passed. In [March 2023](#), another law was passed making it harder for courts to remove a leader deemed unfit for office.
 - The bills were proposed by Justice Minister Yariv Levin and strongly backed by PM Netanyahu, who appointed Levin.
 - Biden spoke publicly about his opposition to the judicial reforms, deeming the passing of the reasonableness bill "unfortunate" in a [WH statement](#) and stressing that his administration believes major changes should be decided by "consensus."
 - Huge weekly protests have been ongoing since the beginning of the year. Protests have been supported by Netanyahu's political rivals, former top military officials, and other prominent legal and business figures.
 - More than 10,000 military reservists [threatened to resign](#) when the bills were proposed; in July 2023 after they were passed, many kept good on their promise, leading to worries about weakening Israel's military capabilities.
 - The main bill seeks to abolish the "reasonableness doctrine," where the court has the power to determine whether a government policy is sensible and sound. It is widely known as a form of checks and balances, and utilized in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, among other countries.
 - Example: when PM Netanyahu appointed Shas party leader Aryeh Deri as minister of finance, the Supreme Court used their power under the reasonableness doctrine to determine that he was not eligible to serve in the position due to previous convictions of bribery, fraud, breach of trust, money laundering, and various tax offenses. Deri was dismissed from office in January 2023 before the bills went into effect, but now that type of judicial oversight would not be allowed.
 - Other bills:

- Allow the gov a simple majority of one in the Knesset to overrule when the Supreme Court seeks to review or throw out laws (Netanyahu has said he will not proceed with this particular reform)
 - Gov will have a decisive say over who becomes a judge, including in the Supreme Court, by increasing its representation on the committee which appoints them
 - Scrap the legal requirement that ministers must obey the advice of their legal advisers, who are guided by the attorney general.
- [What do both sides say?](#)
 - Critics: say the reforms will severely undermine the country's democracy by weakening the judicial system, the only tool for keeping the government's use of its powers in check. Underlying this is strong opposition to the current gov - the most right-wing in Israel's history - and to Mr Netanyahu himself who is currently on trial for alleged corruption (he denies the charges).
 - Supporters: say that the judiciary interferes too much with legislation, is biased in support of liberal issues, and is undemocratic in the way judges are selected. Netanyahu has said that the reforms seek to bring the judiciary back to the level it was before it gained too much unchecked power. He maintains that the protestors are a minority and a majority of Israelis support him and judicial reform.
- Iran-Israel Relations
 - In general, Israel views Iran and its nuclear weapons program as a danger to Israel's very survival. Iran's backing and funding of Palestinian terrorist groups furthers this notion.
 - Before Iran's 1979 revolution, Israel and Iran's gov's [were quite close](#). That changed after the revolution and the rise of the current theocratic Muslim government.
 - Israel grew closer to the US, who also sees Iran as a threat.
 - [In the 1980s](#), Iran backed the creation of Hezbollah, a Lebanese political party and militant group that has had continued conflicts with Israel in the Palestine regions and which the US and Israel (amongst others) consider a terrorist org.
 - Iran [continues](#) to provide Hezbollah with military training, weapons, and financial assistance.
 - [Since the 1990s](#), Iran has also funded Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist, militant, and nationalist organization also considered a terrorist group by many nations.
 - Israel has tried to circumvent issues with Iran and Palestine by forging their own bilateral agreements between other Arab countries, such as with the Abraham Accords.
 - The Abraham Accords were signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on [September 15, 2020](#), a huge step in normalizing Arab-Israel relations.

- Per the agreement, both the UAE and Bahrain recognized Israel's sovereignty, establishing full diplomatic relations.
- Later that year, a normalization agreement between Israel and Morocco was also signed. Netanyahu has continued to push for similar agreements between Israel and more Arab nations.

Latest

- Judicial Reforms
 - [Last week](#), the Supreme Court held its first hearings on petitions challenging the “reasonableness” bill.
 - The session was held in front of all 15 members of the Supreme Court, for the first time in Israel’s history. The court eventually decided to give the lawyers in court 21 days to add to their argument. Experts say the whole court case could take weeks or even months.
 - [In August](#), the court also heard a petition against the law protecting PM Benjamin Netanyahu from being removed from office.
- Iran-Israel Relations
 - In [April 2022](#), President Raisi told a military parade that Iran's armed forces will target Israel's heart if it makes "the slightest move" against the Islamic Republic.
 - This came amidst talks to revive the JCPOA, with Israel saying it will not be bound by an Iran nuclear deal and could eventually take unilateral action against Iranian nuclear sites.
 - In [March 2023](#), news of a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia was met with surprise and anxiety in Israel.
 - It seemed to catch Netanyahu — who has long presented himself as the Israeli leader best qualified to fight Iran and most able to charm Saudi Arabia — off guard. The announcement undermined Israeli hopes of forming a regional security alliance against Iran.
 - On [Monday \(9/18\)](#), Raisi warned against normalization with Israel and decried the US for “interfering” in the Middle East. He warned other countries in the region not to get too close with Israel, saying “The normalization of relations with the Zionist regime does not create security.”
 - This comes amidst the US trying to broker a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
 - Israel has already normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco.
 - He also denied sending military support to Russia in the Russia-Ukraine War and reiterated offers to mediate.
 - [Today \(9/20\)](#), Biden and Netanyahu met for the first time since Netanyahu returned to power in December.
 - They pledged to work together to forge diplomatic relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.
 - Biden also made clear he was determined to discuss his opposition to Netanyahu’s judicial overhaul plan as well as concerns about Israel’s hard

line toward the Palestinians. A White House statement issued after the meeting said Biden "reiterated his concern about any fundamental changes to Israel's democratic system, absent the broadest possible consensus."

Transcripts

[Bloomberg with Francine Lacqua | August 6, 2023](#)

[Video link](#)

Francine Lacqua (00:00): Prime Minister, thank you so much for speaking to Bloomberg. Now you've said that you will seek some broad consensus in your next changes for the judicial. What are those?

Benjamin Netanyahu (00:09): Well, I think that we've already done quite a bit. I've stopped the judicial legislation for three months, seeking consensus from the other side, unfortunately, not getting it. Then brought in a relatively minor part of the reform, passed it and then said I'm still going to give it several months to try to get another consensus. What is it? It would probably be about the composition of the committee that elects judges.

Francine Lacqua (00:35): With the selection of the judges, how they're selected?

Benjamin Netanyahu (00:37): Right. That's basically what's left because other things, I think we should not legislate. I don't think we should move from one extreme where we have perhaps the most activist judicial court on the planet to getting to a point where the legislature or Knesset can just knock out any decision that the court makes. There has to be a balance. That's what we're trying to restore.

Francine Lacqua (01:00): So Prime Minister, when you look at the change in selection for the judges, how quickly could that come?

Benjamin Netanyahu (01:06): Well, if we get a compromise, it could come immediately. If we can't get a buy-in from the opposition in the parliament, there's always a buy-in from the public, what is the thing that the public accepts. I'm giving it my best shot. I'm spending, I would say 24 hours a day on it. I'd say about 12 hours a day.

Francine Lacqua (01:30): And if the public is not behind it, what do you do? Do you [inaudible 00:01:30]?

Benjamin Netanyahu (01:30): I think you should choose something-

Francine Lacqua (01:30): Do you stop?

Benjamin Netanyahu (01:30): I think you should choose something that has broad acceptance.

Francine Lacqua (01:32): Which looks like what?

Benjamin Netanyahu (01:34): Which looks like something that I'd like to negotiate not even on Bloomberg.

Francine Lacqua (01:38): Okay, but give me a flavor of is it walking back some of the things that have been said by certain ministers around you?

Benjamin Netanyahu (01:45): Oh, ministers can say anything. I don't control words in our parliamentary system. I control deeds and that has to be understood. But since you know the European system, you know that unlike a presidential system, you don't control what is said by members of your cabinet.

Francine Lacqua (02:04): But you can ask them to tone it down. Have you asked them to tone it down?

Benjamin Netanyahu (02:07): A hundred times.

Francine Lacqua (02:09): And they're listening?

Benjamin Netanyahu (02:09): I succeeded 50 times.

Francine Lacqua (02:11): And you'll continue to do so?

Benjamin Netanyahu (02:12): You don't always succeed. You don't always succeed. **But what's important to understand is when the dust settles, are we going to have Israel that is stronger democratically or is it weaker democratically?** Is it something where you're going to have the balance that you need between the will of the majority and the rights of the minority or individual rights? Has that been strengthened, that balance, or has it been weakened? **I maintain it'll be strengthened. It certainly will not be weakened.**

Francine Lacqua (02:40): Prime Minister, there are a lot of questions, especially from investors, especially from businesses because you always need a body that makes sure that anything that the government passes is legal. There's maybe a perception problem, but this is weakened. So what is the message to business investors and to markets right now?

Benjamin Netanyahu (02:56): I don't think it's weakened. Actually, I think the ultimate regulator in democracies are not courts, but are the public choice. I think that's a fundamental misconception of how democracies work.

Francine Lacqua (03:07): But you always need someone to overlook them.

Benjamin Netanyahu (03:09): But if you have a lousy government, then they're not reelected. That's the most important thing. The most important regulator is the political markets, but I don't think that we should, in any way, weaken the courts. There's a difference between an independent court and an all powerful court. I think what we're trying to do is bring back to Israel where it was in his first 50 years, where there was an adequate balance between the courts, the legislature, and the executive.

Francine Lacqua (03:35): But Prime Minister, there's a perception problem, maybe if that's what you think, but there's certainly a division in this country with hundreds of thousands of people protesting and market participants worried about what happens next. What's your message to them?

Benjamin Netanyahu (03:48): When the dust settles, Israel not only will remain a democracy, it'll be even a stronger democracy, but more importantly, it will not, in any way, impair the enormous business and economic capabilities of Israel in the new technological age.

Francine Lacqua (04:06): But Prime Minister, when does this dust settle? So far, you haven't even been prepared to say that you will follow what the Supreme Court decides come October.

Benjamin Netanyahu (04:13): Now we follow what the Supreme Court decides and the Supreme Court so far has also followed the basic rule of not striking down basic laws, which they themselves deem are the basis of the Constitution. Both things have to be maintained.

Francine Lacqua (04:27): So would you tell markets and investors today that whatever they decide, there's something big that's going to be decided in the next couple of months? You will abide by that?

Benjamin Netanyahu (04:36): I hope that we don't get into a constitutional crisis. I think we won't. I think there's a way of reaching an equitable compromise, which is what I'm trying to do now.

Francine Lacqua (04:46): Right.

Benjamin Netanyahu (04:46): If I reveal to you everything that I'm trying to do, I won't be able to do it.

Francine Lacqua (04:50): But the market wants to understand. There's nothing worse for the markets or investors to actually be in the limbo where you're not sure exactly what will happen or how the government will react. Will you abide-

Benjamin Netanyahu (05:01): I'm absolutely sure.

Francine Lacqua (05:02): ... by the ruling?

Benjamin Netanyahu (05:02): I'm absolutely sure that Israel will come out stable and successful and democratic, at least as democratic, in my view, more democratic. I don't think we're going to tear the country apart. I don't think you're going to have civil war. I think right now, what you're seeing is the natural conflict between two opposing views that have not yet meshed, but they will mesh.

Francine Lacqua (05:27): Do you support your central bank governor who is very well respected internationally?

Benjamin Netanyahu (05:31): Sure. I appointed him.

Francine Lacqua (05:34): Will you back him for another term? He has to decide, I think, by next month.

Benjamin Netanyahu (05:38): Well, I haven't talked to him yet, but I will. But I've guarded, I would say, rigorously his independence and the independence of the central bank and that will continue to be the policy. I will talk to him, but you wouldn't believe this, but we just not had the opportunity to discuss that.

Francine Lacqua (05:56): But Prime Minister, when you talk to him, will you ask him to stay on?

Benjamin Netanyahu (05:59): Possibly. I want to think about it. I haven't had time.

Francine Lacqua (06:02): What are you thinking now?

Benjamin Netanyahu (06:03): I think he's been an exceptional central bank director and I think that's a possibility that I'll have to talk to him about.

Francine Lacqua (06:10): One of your ministers I think called him a savage for-

Benjamin Netanyahu (06:12): [inaudible 00:06:13].

Francine Lacqua (06:12): ... raising interest rates.

Benjamin Netanyahu (06:13): Yeah. Well, my ministers in our hectic parliamentary system could say anything, but it's a fact that we've never intervened with the independence of the central bank and we won't.

Francine Lacqua (06:25): And so you-

Benjamin Netanyahu (06:25): In fact, I think I passed some laws or corrective additional laws that safeguarded the independence of the central bank. I do not want the government broaching in on what the central bank has to do.

Francine Lacqua (06:39): So do you support the interest rate hikes?

Benjamin Netanyahu (06:43): I leave that decision to the central bank. I've had several central bank directors because I've been in government a long time. I think in a few months, I'll be probably more time in as Prime Minister than anybody in the Western world for the last half century, so I've had a lot of central bank directors to talk to. I always talk to them in a padded room, absolutely soundproof that we could hurl at each other whatever we want, but when I come out, I always give backing to the central bank director.

Francine Lacqua (07:15): But Prime Minister, it would be a pretty powerful message to the markets given the divisions and given the turmoil if you were to ask him to stay on.

Benjamin Netanyahu (07:24): Could be. That's a consideration. I'll consider it.

Francine Lacqua (07:28): But do you agree, will that be a powerful message?

Benjamin Netanyahu (07:30): I think the powerful message is the independence of the central bank and I think the choices that I've made in bringing in central bank directors, whether it was Stanley Fischer and after him, the current central bank director, I think people see that we choose and choose well.

Francine Lacqua (07:48): And that will not-

Benjamin Netanyahu (07:50): And some others in between. I don't want to-

Francine Lacqua (07:52): And that will not change?

Benjamin Netanyahu (07:53): No, it will.

Francine Lacqua (07:54): You're overhauling judiciary, but the central bank won't be [inaudible 00:07:57].

Benjamin Netanyahu (07:57): I'm not overhauling the judiciary. I'm correcting the judiciary to where it was, I don't think we'll get there, but to where it was at Israel's first 50 years before the judicial imbalance was created and I'm trying to bring it back modestly into line. This is described as the end of democracy. Why? Why is it described as the end of democracy? Because we say that the judiciary in Israel and in Israel alone cannot say, "I'm striking down a government decision or a parliamentary law simply because I think it's unreasonable." That doesn't exist to that extent in any of the democracies.

Francine Lacqua (08:37): Prime Minister, no, but it's a check and balance and again, this is what investors are worried about.

Benjamin Netanyahu (08:41): There are plenty of checks.

Francine Lacqua (08:44): I was going to ask you, what's your message today for a business that wants to come here that's a little bit nervous about what they can do longer term?

Benjamin Netanyahu (08:52): There is no absence of checks. In Israel, the courts have all the checks, but they have no balance. So if you're concerned that the court will not be able to intervene in certain decisions, they've got a hundred different checks on that. But one thing that we want to have is not to be able to have the court intervene on anything, on any matter without any reference to any statute or any law. That is not democracy.

Francine Lacqua (09:19): Prime Minister, it's my understanding they've only done that a handful of times. But if you're an investor today, right, and you look at Israel that has to deal with Saudi, that has to deal with Iran, why are you falling on the sword about the judiciary?

Benjamin Netanyahu (09:31): I'm not falling on the sword. I'm trying to correct an imbalance because millions of Israelis vote time and again for governments who want to have certain government policies. The governments are elected and they want to enact their policies and the Supreme Court often intervenes in ways that nullifies the will of the majority without any reference to a law. For example, I'll give you an example. We have foreign workers. Israel has been able to prevent the entry of foreign workers.

Francine Lacqua (10:02): And Prime Minister, we're fully aware, but were you upset by hundreds of thousands of people in the street?

Benjamin Netanyahu (10:07): Well, there've been hundreds of thousands of the others. That's a reflection of democracy.

Francine Lacqua (10:12): No, but you've-

Benjamin Netanyahu (10:13): Nobody describes the other side. We had a quarter of a million people in the street the other day supporting the judicial reform. You didn't hear a word about it.

Francine Lacqua (10:21): But Prime Minister, you were the one that brought people together that build bridges. What's happened?

Benjamin Netanyahu (10:27): Well, because A, it didn't happen overnight. When I did the economic reforms that made Israel an economic juggernaut, a free market economy, technological economy, I had huge demonstrations. I had a five months national strike, three months and two months from the labor union. When I tried to take the gas out of the seabed, I had the same people who are organizing the strikes now saying, "This is the end of democracy. This will destroy our environment." Mind you, substituting gas for coal, destroying the environment. But it's the same thing. Now they're saying we're destroying the democracy. That's nonsense. But I understand it's nonsense in my view, it's not nonsense in their view. They're generally concerned. I think there's a happy middle ground there. I've always found it in other

matters, whether it was in defense or Iran or free market economies or taking gas out of the seabed. I'll find it here as well.

Francine Lacqua (11:23): Again, there's so much nervousness right out there when you speak to investors and when you speak to the markets. Give me a sense of what you would be able to do or to give to normalize relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Benjamin Netanyahu (11:35): Well, Saudi Arabia, I think, is one of the exceptional things that tells you why I'm very optimistic about Israel, really one of two reasons, one of two main reasons. One is that, well, I'll start with Saudi Arabia, but then I'll get with the other one. I think that we are about to witness a pivot of history, maybe. I can't guarantee that it'll happen. But first, there is an economic corridor of energy, transport, and communications that naturally goes through our geography from Asia to the Arabian Peninsula to Europe. We're going to realize that. By the way, my sense is we're going to realize that despite whether we have formal peace or not.

Francine Lacqua (12:22): But do you have to give concessions? We understand-

Benjamin Netanyahu (12:24): Probably.

Francine Lacqua (12:24): ... Saudi Arabia-

Benjamin Netanyahu (12:25): Some. Some, but I think-

Francine Lacqua (12:26): So what would you give? Would you limit, for example, Jewish settlements in the West Bank?

Benjamin Netanyahu (12:31): Well, again, you have a good penchant as a good journalist to try to eke out for me my negotiation stance. Of course, you're not going to succeed, but you could keep on trying. But do I think it's feasible to have that and do I think that political questions will block it? I doubt it. If there's political will, there'll be a political way to achieve normalization and a formal peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Francine Lacqua (12:58): But Prime Minister, I'm-

Benjamin Netanyahu (12:59): That has enormous economic consequences for your investors. And if they have to bet on it right now, I'd bet on it, but I can't guarantee it.

Francine Lacqua (13:08): And Prime Minister, this is why. I'm not trying to ink out negotiation taxes.

Benjamin Netanyahu (13:11): Of course, you are.

Francine Lacqua (13:11): I'm trying to understand what you're willing to give because this is such an important partnership for Israel.

Benjamin Netanyahu (13:18): Well, I'll tell you what I'm not willing to give. I'm not willing to give anything that will endanger Israel's security. That, I will not do, but I think there's enough room to discuss possibilities.

Francine Lacqua (13:28): Will that look like-

Benjamin Netanyahu (13:29): I don't think the Palestinian thing is brought in all the time. It was always brought in and it's sort of a checkbox. You have to check it to say that you're doing it. Is that what is being said in corridors? Is that what is being said in discreet negotiations?

Francine Lacqua (13:48): I don't know. You tell me. What's being said?

Benjamin Netanyahu (13:51): The answer is a lot less than you think.

Francine Lacqua (13:52): Okay. So if you look at, for example, giving the Palestinians their own state, is that a red line?

Benjamin Netanyahu (13:59): It won't be their own state. It'll be an Iranian-controlled state in an area that is about the width of the Washington Beltway. If you take Israel and the Palestinian areas in [inaudible 00:14:13] and the West Bank together, it's a little more than the width of the Washington Beltway. You put Palestinian state, which will be controlled by Iran, in half of that or in the middle of that, you won't have a Palestinian state. You'll have an Iranian terror state and that's-

Francine Lacqua (14:31): So that's a no?

Benjamin Netanyahu (14:32): Of course, it's a no, yes.

Francine Lacqua (14:33): So under no circumstances would you allow that?

Benjamin Netanyahu (14:36): No. What I said often is that the way that I would have a solution is two things about that. One, that the Palestinians should have all the powers to govern themselves and none of the powers to threaten Israel. This means that in whatever final settlement, peace settlement we have with the Palestinians, I would say Israel has the overriding security power in the entire area, ours and theirs. Otherwise, we collapse. They collapse.

Francine Lacqua (15:06): Prime minister, you're going to UNGA in New York, I believe, second week or third week of September.

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:11): Yes.

Francine Lacqua (15:11): Will you meet with Donald Trump?

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:13): I don't know.

Francine Lacqua (15:17): Have you spoken to him on the phone?

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:18): You're the first to have suggested it. No, I haven't.

Francine Lacqua (15:22): Are you expecting an invitation to the White House from President Biden?

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:23): Well, he said that we are going to be, so I'll leave it up to him.

Francine Lacqua (15:27): What are you most excited for going to UNGA?

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:31): Well, I've been there many years.

Francine Lacqua (15:33): I know, many times.

Benjamin Netanyahu (15:34): What am I most excited about? **The possibility of broadening the already historic Abraham Accords. I think this will change history. I think it'll not only end the Arab-Israeli conflict, not the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but our conflict with 98% of the Arab world.** It'll also, I think, create a new peace between the Jewish state and the Muslim world.

Francine Lacqua (15:58): But Prime Minister, the countries of the Abraham Accord, some of them have been frustrated about some of the noise that's been coming out of your government. Will you meet with them to try and reassure them?

Benjamin Netanyahu (16:08): Well, we meet with them all the time and we reassure them all the time, but I think some of them are habituated to the fact that noise is noise. I think that's true of the markets too. There's a lot of noise in the market. But if you look at the fundamentals of Israel, if you look at the growth rate, which is double the United States expected now, you look at the deficit, which is 1.5 at most percent compared to 5.5% in the US, if you look at the debt-to-GDP, which is 60%, which is less than 100% in the US, and you know what it's like in the EU, and if you look at the investments, I mean, Nvidia builds here the supercomputer. Intel just puts \$25 billion for a chip plant.

Francine Lacqua (16:49): These are prospects longer term, but you're right, they are committed.

Benjamin Netanyahu (16:51): That's my point, that there's noise in the short-term markets. There's clarity in the long-term markets. Now, Amazon just invests seven billion in cloud services here. Why are they doing that? Because they know something I'm going to do and those thing that I'm going to do and I'd like to bring it to your investors' attention. A few years

ago, 10 years ago, I decided that Israel would be one of the 10 cyber powers in the world, one of the five. We'll become one of the more than five, higher than that. Now I think that what we're going to do and what I'm organizing is a government policy and a government board with money to make Israel one of the three top AI powers in the world.

Francine Lacqua (17:38): Prime Minister, what do you say to investors that worry that you've changed in terms of priorities?

Benjamin Netanyahu (17:41): I haven't. **My priorities are peace, prosperity, and security.** I think that they're all dependent on prosperity to have the ability to fund the defense needs that we have and to expand the peace. The prosperity is based on Israel's supreme technological prowess. People rated us seventh on the AI list. You know why? Because of the absence of government policy. I'm changing that and I'm going to announce in about six weeks the government policy, the organization, the project leader for a host of civilian and military AI that will thrust Israel right up there. If you're an investor and you are not seeing that the added value that is going to accrue to national economies is based on their ability to generate AI-

Francine Lacqua (18:37): But they're worried. I-

Benjamin Netanyahu (18:38): ... and use that. This is not hype. This is Israel and we have done that.

Francine Lacqua (18:42): I know, but they're worried about the shorter term, but thank you so much for your time, Prime Minister.

Benjamin Netanyahu (18:45): Oh, but remember this. Here's a good one. This is recorded today. Now we should look at one year from now. That's pretty short term. And we'll see, was I right in telling you that Israel right now is undervalued? You should invest in Israel. Smart money is coming into Israel now like these big firms because they understand that we're going to a good place.

[Lex Fridman Podcast | July 12, 2023 \(this episode is sectioned by topic\)](#)

[Video link](#)

Hate

(00:02:35) You're loved by many people here in Israel and in the world, but you're also hated by many. In fact, I think you may be one of the most hated men in the world. So if there's a young man or a young woman listening to this right now who have such hate in their heart, what can you say to them to one day turn that hate into love?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:02:58) I disagree with the premise of your question. I think I've enjoyed a very broad support around the world. There are certain corners in which we have this animosity that you describe,

and it sort of permeates in some of the newspapers and the news organs and so on in the United States, but it certainly doesn't reflect the broad support that I have. I just gave an interview on an Iranian channel, 60 million viewers. I gave another one, just did a little video a few years ago, 25 million viewers from Iran. Certainly no hate there I have to tell you, not from the regime.

(00:03:45) And when I go around the world and I've been around the world, people want to hear what we have to say. What I have to say as a leader of Israel whom they respect increasingly as a rising power in the world. So I disagree with that. And the most important thing that goes against what you said is the respect that we receive from the Arab world and the fact that we've made four historic peace agreements with Arab countries. And they made it with me, they didn't make it with anyone else. And I respect them and they respect me and probably more to come. So I think the premise is wrong, that's all.

Lex Fridman

(00:04:24) Well, there's a lot of love, yes. A lot of leaders are collaborating are – Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:04:32) Respect, I said not love.

Lex Fridman

(00:04:34) Okay. All right. Well, it's a spectrum, but there is people who don't have good things to say about Israel, who do have hate in their heart for Israel.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:04:45) Yeah.

Lex Fridman

(00:04:46) And what can you say to those people?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:04:49) Well, I think they don't know very much. I think they're guided by a lot of ignorance. They don't know about Israel. They don't know that Israel is a stellar democracy, that it happens to be one of the most advanced societies on the planet. That what Israel develops helps humanity in every field, in medicine, in agriculture and in the environment and telecoms and talk about AI in a minute. But changing the world for the better and spreading this among six continents.

(00:05:21) We've sent rescue teams more than any other country in the world, and we're one 10th of 1% of the world's population. But when there's an earthquake or a devastation in Haiti or in the Philippines, Israel is there. When there's an devastating earthquake in Turkey, Israel was there. When there's something in Nepal, Israel is there, and it's the second country. It's the second country after, in one case, India or after another case, the United States, Israel is there. Tiny Israel is a benefactor to all of humanity.

Lex Fridman

(00:05:57) So you're a student of history. If I can just linger on that philosophical notion of hate, that part of human nature. If you look at World War II, what do you learn from human nature, from the rise of the Third Reich and the rise of somebody like Hitler and the hate that permeates that?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:06:19) Well, what I've learned is that you have to nip bad things in the bud. There's a Latin term that says [foreign language 00:06:29], stop bad things when they're small. And the

deliberate hatred, the incitement of hatred against one community, its demonization, delegitimization that goes with it is a very dangerous thing.

(00:06:48) And that happened in the case of the Jews. What started with the Jews soon spread to all of humanity. So what we've learned is that we should never, and I never sit aside and say, "Oh, they're just threatening to destroy us. They won't do it." **If somebody threatens to eliminate you as Iran is doing today, and as Hitler did then, and people discounted it, well, if somebody threatens to annihilate us, take them seriously and act to prevent it early on. Don't let them have the means to do so because that may be too late.**

Lex Fridman

(00:07:21) So in those threats underlying that hatred, how much of it is anti-Zionism, and how much of it is anti-Semitism?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:07:31) I don't distinguish between the two. You can't say, "Well, I'm, I'm okay with Jews, but I just don't think there should be a Jewish state." It's like saying, "I'm not anti-American, I just don't think there should be an America." That's basically what people are saying vis-a-vis anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

(00:07:49) When you're saying anti-Zionism you're saying that Jewish people don't have a right to have a state of their own. And that is a denial of a basic principle that I think completely un.masks what is involved here. Today anti-Semitism is anti-Zionism. Those who oppose the Jewish people oppose the Jewish state.

Judicial reform and protests

Lex Fridman

(00:08:15) If we jump from human history to the current particular moment, there's protests in Israel now about the proposed judicial reform that gives power to your government to override the Supreme Court. So the critics say that this gives too much power to you, virtually making you a dictator.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:08:35) Yeah. Well, that's ridiculous. **The mere fact that you have so many demonstrations and protests, some dictatorship, huh? There's a lot of democracy here, more rambunctious and more robust than just anywhere on the planet.**

Lex Fridman

(00:08:52) Can you still make the case that this may give too much power to the coalition government, to the prime minister, not just to you, but to those who follow?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:09:04) No, I think that's complete hogwash because **I think there's very few people who are demonstrating against this. Quite a few, quite many, don't have an idea what is being discussed. They're basically being sloganized.** You can sloganize, you know something about not mass media right now, but the social network, you can basically feed deliberately with big data and big money, you can just feed slogans and get into people's minds. I'm sure you don't think I exaggerate, because you can tell me more about that.

(00:09:38) And you can create mass mobilization based on these absurd slogans. So here's where I come from and what we're doing, what we're trying to do, and what we've changed in what we're trying to do. I'm a 19th century democrat in my, small D yes, in my views. That is I

ask the question, "What is democracy?" So democracy is the will of the majority and the protection of the rights of, they call it the rights of the minority, but I say the rights of the individual.

(00:10:11) So how do you balance the two? How do you avoid mobocracy? And how do you avoid dictatorship? The opposite side. The way you avoid it is something that was built essentially by British philosophers and French philosophers, but was encapsulated by the Founding Fathers of the United States. You create a balance between the three branches of government, the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary.

(00:10:41) And this balance is what assures the balance between majority rights and individual rights. And you have to balance all of them. That balance was maintained in Israel in its first 50 years, and was gradually overtaken and basically broken by the most activist judicial court on the planet. That's what happened here. And gradually over the last two, three decades, the court aggregated for itself the powers of the parliament and the executive. So we're trying to bring it back into line. Bringing it back into line, into what is common in all parliamentary democracies and in the United States, doesn't mean taking the pendulum from one side and bringing it to the other side.

(00:11:29) We want checks and balances, not unrivaled power. Just as we said, we want an independent judiciary, but not an all powerful judiciary. That balance does not mean, bringing it back into line, doesn't mean that you can have the parliament, our Knesset, override any decision that the Supreme Court does. So I pretty much early on said, after the judicial reform was introduced, "Get rid of the idea of sweeping override clause that would have, with 61 votes, that's a majority of one, you can just nullify any Supreme Court decision, so let's move it back into the center." So that's gone. And most of the criticism on the judicial reform was based on an unlimited override clause, which I've said is simply not going to happen. People are discussing something that already for six months does not exist.

(00:12:20) The second point that we received criticism on was the structure of how do you choose Supreme Court judges? Okay, how do you choose them? And the critics of the reform are saying that the idea that elected officials should choose Supreme Court judges is the end of democracy. If that's the case, the United States is not a democracy. Neither is France and neither are just, I don't know, just about every democracy on the planet. So there is a view here that you can't have the sordid hands of elected officials involved in the choosing of judges.

(00:12:59) And in the Israeli system, the judicial activism went so far that effectively the sitting judges have an effective veto on choosing judges, which means that this is a self-selecting court that just perpetrates itself. And we want to correct that. Again, we want to correct it in a balanced way. And that's basically what we're trying to do. So I think there's a lot of misinformation about that. We're trying to bring Israeli democracy to where it was in its first 50 years. And it was a stellar democracy. It still is. Israel is a democracy, will remain a democracy, a vibrant democracy. And believe me, the fact that people are arguing and demonstrating in the streets and protesting is the best proof of that, and that's how it'll remain.

Lex Fridman

(00:13:49) We spoke about tech companies offline, there's a lot of tech companies nervous about this judicial reform. Can you speak to why large and small companies have a future in Israel?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:14:03) Because Israel is a free market economy. I had something to do with that. I introduced dozens and dozens of free market reforms that made Israel move from \$17,000 per capita income within very short time to \$54,000. That's nominal GDP per capita according to the IMF. And we've overtaken in that Japan, France, Britain, Germany.

(00:14:29) And how did that happen? Because we unleashed the genius that we have and the initiative and the entrepreneurship that is latent in our population. And to do that, we had to create free markets. So we created that. So Israel has one of the most vibrant free market economies in the world. And the second thing we have is a permanent investment in conceptual products because we have a permanent investment in the military, in our security services, creating basically knowledge workers who then become knowledge entrepreneurs. And so we create this structure, and that's not going to go away.

(00:15:09) There's been a decline in investments in high-tech globally. I think that's driven by many factors. But the most important one is the interest rate, which I think will, it'll fluctuate up and down. But Israel will remain a very attractive country because it produces so many knowledge workers in a knowledge based economy. And it's changing so rapidly. The world is changing. You're looking for the places that have innovation. The future belongs to those who innovate.

(00:15:41) Israel is the preeminent innovation nation. It has few competitors. And if we would say, "All right, where do you have this close cross-disciplinary fermentation of various skills in areas?" I would say "It's in Israel." And I'll tell you why. We used to be just telecoms because people went out of the military intelligence, RNSA, but that's been now broad based. So you find it in medicine, you find it in biology, you find it in agritech, you find it everywhere. Everything is becoming technologized.

(00:16:17) And in Israel, everybody is dealing in everything, and that's a potent reservoir of talent that the world is not going to pass up. And in fact, it's coming to us. We just had Nvidia coming here, and they decided to build a supercomputer in Israel. Wonder why? We've had Intel coming here and deciding now to invest \$25 billion, just now, in a new plant in Israel. I wonder why? I don't wonder why. They know why. Because the talent is here and the freedom is here. And it will remain so.

AI

Lex Fridman

(00:16:52) You had a conversation about AI with Sam Altman of Open AI and with Elon Musk. Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:16:57) Yeah.

Lex Fridman

(00:16:57) What was the content of that conversation? What's your vision for this very highest of tech, which is artificial intelligence?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:17:09) Well, first of all, I have a high regard for the people I talked to. And I understand that they understand things I don't understand, and I don't pretend to understand everything. But I do understand one thing. I understand that AI is developing at a geometric rate and mostly in political life and in life in general people don't have an intuitive grasp of geometric growth. You understand things basically in linear increments. And the idea that you're coming up a ski slope

is very foreign to people. So they don't understand it, and they're naturally also sort of taken aback by it. Because what do you do? So I think there's several conclusions from my conversations with them and from my other observations that I've been talking about for many years. I'm talking about the need-

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:18:00) ... observations that I've been talking about for many years. I'm talking about the need to do this. Well, the first thing is this. There is no possibility of not entering AI with full force. Secondly, there is a need for regulation. Third, it's not clear there will be global regulation. Fourth, it's not clear where it ends up. I certainly cannot say that. Now, you might say, "Does it come to control us?" Okay, that's a question. Does it come to control us? I don't know the answer to that. I think that, as one observation that I had from these conversations is if it does come to control us, that's probably the only chance of having universal regulation, because I don't see anyone deciding to avoid the race and cooperate unless you have that threat. Doesn't mean you can't regulate AI within countries even without that understanding, but it does mean that there's a limit to regulation because every country will want to make sure that it doesn't give up competitive advantage if there is no universal regulation.

(00:19:19) I think that right now, just as 10 years ago, I read a novel. I don't read novels, but I was forced to read one by a scientific advisor. I read history, I read about economics, I read about technology. I just don't read novels. In this, I follow Churchill. He said, "Fact is better than fiction." Well, this fiction would become fact. It was a book, it was a novel about a Chinese/American future cyber war. I read the book in one sitting, called in a team of experts, and I said, "All right, let's turn Israel into one of the world's five cyber powers and let's do it very quickly." And we did actually. We did exactly that. I think AI is bigger than that and related to that, because it'll affect ... Well, cyber affects everything, but AI will affect it even more fundamentally. And the joining of the two could be very powerful.

(00:20:19) So I think in Israel, we have to do it anyway for security reasons and we're doing it. But I think, what about our databases that are already very robust on the medical records of 98% of our population? Why don't we stick a genetic database on that? Why don't we do other things that could bring what are seemingly magical cures and drugs and medical instruments for that? That's one possibility. We have it, as I said, in every single field. The conclusion is this. We have to move on AI. We are moving on AI, just as we moved on cyber, and I think Israel will be one of the leading AI powers in the world. The questions I don't have an answer to is, where does it go? How much does it chew up on jobs?

(00:21:19) There's an assumption that I'm not sure is true, that the two big previous revolutions in the human condition, namely the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution, definitely produced more jobs than they consumed. That is not obvious to me at all. I mean, I could see new jobs creating, and yes, I have that comforting statement, but it's not quite true, because I think on balance, they'll probably consume more jobs, many more jobs than they'll create.

Lex Fridman

(00:21:58) At least in the short term. And we don't know about the long term.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:22:01) No, I don't know about the long term, but I used to have the comfort being a free market guy. I always said, "We're going to produce more jobs by, I don't know, limiting certain government jobs." We're actually putting out in the market, will create more jobs, which

obviously happened. We had one telecom company, a government company. When I said, "We're going to create competition," they said, "You're going to run us out. We're not going to have more workers." They had 13,000 workers. They went down to seven, but we created another 40,000 in the other companies. So, that was a comforting thought. I always knew that was true.

(00:22:36) Not only that. I also knew that wealth would spread by opening up the markets, completely opposite to the socialist and semi-socialist creed that they had here. They said, "You're going to make the rich richer and the poor poorer." No. And made everyone richer, and actually the people who entered the job market because of the reforms we did, actually became a lot richer on the lower ladders of the socioeconomic measure.

(00:23:05) But here's the point, I don't know. I don't know that we will not have what Elon Musk calls the end of scarcity. So you'll have the end of scarcity. You'll have enormous productivity. Very few people are producing enormous added value. You're going to have to tax that to pass it to the others. You're going to have to do that. That's a political question. I'm not sure how we answer that. What if you tax and somebody else doesn't tax? You're going to get everybody to go there. That's an international issue that we constantly have to deal with.

(00:23:42) And the second question you have is, suppose you solve that problem and you deliver money to those who are not involved in the AI economy, what do they do? The first question you ask somebody whom you just met after the polite exchanges is, what do you do? Well, people define themselves by their profession. It's going to be difficult if you don't have a profession. People will spend more time self-searching, more time in the arts, more time in leisure. I understand that. If I have to bet, it will annihilate many more jobs than it will create and it'll force a structural change in our economics, in our economic models, and in our politics. And I'm not sure where it's going to go.

Lex Fridman

(00:24:40) And that's something we have to respond to at the nation level and just as a human civilization, both the threat of AI to just us as a human species and then the effect on the jobs. And like you said, cybersecurity.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:24:55) What do you think? You think we're going to lose control?

Lex Fridman

(00:25:00) No, first of all, I do believe, maybe naively, that it will create more jobs than it takes.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:25:05) Write that down and we'll check it.

Lex Fridman

(00:25:07) It's on record.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:25:09) We don't say, "We'll check it after our lifetime." No, we'll see it in a few years.

Lex Fridman

(00:25:12) We'll see it in a few years. I'm really concerned about cybersecurity and the nature of how that changes with the power of AI. In terms of existential threats, I think there will be so much threats that aren't existential along the way that that's the thing I'm mostly concerned about, versus AI taking complete control and superseding the human species. Although that is something you should consider seriously because of the exponential growth of its capabilities.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:25:43) Yeah, it's exactly the exponential growth, which we understand is before us, but we don't really ... It's very hard to project forward.

Lex Fridman

(00:25:51) To really understand.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:25:52) That's right. Exactly right. So I deal with what I can and where I can affect something. I tend not to worry about things I don't control, because there's at a certain point, there's no point. I mean, you have to decide what you're spending your time on. So in practical terms, I think we'll make Israel a formidable AI power. We understand the limitation of skill, computing power and other things. But I think within those limits, I think we can make here this miracle that we did in many other things. We do more with less. I don't care if it's the production of water or the production of energy or the production of knowledge or the production of cyber capabilities, defense and other, we just do more with less. And I think in AI, we're going to do a lot more with a relatively small but highly gifted population. Very gifted.

Competition

Lex Fridman

(00:26:53) So taking a small tangent, as we talked about offline, you have a background in TaeKwonDo?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:27:00) Oh, yeah.

Lex Fridman

(00:27:01) We mentioned Elon Musk. I've trained with both. Just as a quick question, who are you betting on in a fight?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:27:08) Well, I refuse to answer that. I will say this.

Lex Fridman

(00:27:13) Such a politician, you are.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:27:14) Yeah, of course. Here, I'm a politician. I'm openly telling you that I'm dodging the question. But I'll say this. Actually, I spent five years in our special forces in the military, and we barely spent a minute on martial arts. I actually learned TaeKwonDo later when I came to ... It wasn't even at MIT. At MIT, I think I did karate. But when I came to the UN, I had a martial arts expert who taught me TaeKwonDo, which was interesting. Now, the question you really have to ask is, why did we learn martial arts in this special elite unit? And the answer is, there's no point. If you saw Indiana Jones, there's no point. You just pull the trigger. That's simple. Now, I don't expect anyone to pull the trigger on this combat, and I'm sure you'll make sure that doesn't happen.

Lex Fridman

(00:28:15) Yeah. I mean, martial arts is bigger than just combat. It's this journey of humility.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:28:21) Oh, sure.

Lex Fridman

(00:28:23) It's an art form. It truly is an art. But it's fascinating that these two figures in tech are facing each other. I won't ask the question of who you would face and how you would do, but ...

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:28:34) Well, I'm facing opponents all the time.

Lex Fridman

(00:28:36) All the time?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:28:37) Yeah, that's part of life.

Lex Fridman

(00:28:41) Not yet.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:28:41) I'm not sure about that.

Lex Fridman

(00:28:42) Are you announcing any fights?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:28:44) No, no. Part of life is competition. The only time competition ends is death. But political life, economic life, cultural life is engaged continuously in creativity and competition. The problem I have with that is, as I mentioned earlier just before we began the podcast, is that at a certain point, you want to put barriers to monopoly. And if you're a really able competitor, you're going to create a monopoly. That's what Peter Till says is a natural course of things. It's what I learned basically in the Boston Consulting Group. If you are a very able competitor, you'll create scale advantages that gives you the ability to lock out your competition. And as a prime minister, I want to assure that there is competition in the markets, so you have to limit this competitive power at a certain point, and that becomes increasingly hard in a world where everything is intermixed.

(00:29:49) Where do you define market segments? Where do you define monopoly? How do you do that? That, actually conceptually, I find very challenging, because of all the dozens of economic reforms that I've made, the most difficult part is the conceptual part. Once you've ironed it out and you say, "Here's what I want to do. Here's the right thing to do," then you have a practical problem of overcoming union resistance, political resistance, press calumny, opponents from this or that corner. That's a practical matter. But if you have it conceptually defined, you can move ahead to reform economies or reform education or reform transportation. Fine.

(00:30:38) In the question of the growing power of large companies, big tech companies to monopolize the markets because they're better at it, they provide a service, they provide it at a lower cost, at rapidly declining cost. Where do you stop? Where do you stop monopoly power is a crucial question because it also becomes now a political question. If you amass enormous amount of economic power, which is information power, that also monopolizes the political process. These are real questions that are not obvious. I don't have an obvious answer because as I said, as a 19th century Democrat, these are questions of the 21st century, which people should begin to think. Do you have a solution to that?

Lex Fridman

(00:31:27) The solution of monopolies growing arbitrarily-

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:31:30) Yeah.

Lex Fridman

(00:31:31) ... unstoppably in power?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:31:33) In economic power, and therefore in political power.

Lex Fridman

(00:31:36) I mean, some of that is regulation, some of that is competition.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:31:40) Do you know where to draw the line? It's not breaking up AT&T. It's not that simple.

Lex Fridman

(00:31:49) Well, I believe in the power of competition, that there will always be somebody that challenges the big guys, especially in the space of AI. The more open source movements are taking hold, the more the little guy can become the big guy.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:32:02) So you're saying basically the regulatory instrument is the market?

Lex Fridman

(00:32:09) In large part, in most part, that's the hope. Maybe I'm a dreamer.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:32:13) That's been in many ways my policy up to now, that the best regulator is the market.

The best regulator in economic activity is the market and the best regulator in political matters is the political market. That's called elections. That's what regulates. You have a lousy government and people make lousy decisions, well, you don't need the wise men raised above the masses to decide what is good and what is bad. Let the masses decide. Let them vote every four years or whatever, and they throw you out.

(00:32:54) By the way, it happened to me. There's life after political death. There's actually political life. I was reelected five or six times, and this is my sixth term. So I believe in that. I'm not sure that in economic matters, in the geometric growth of tech companies, that you'll always have the little guy, the nimble mammal, that will come out and slay the dinosaurs or overcome the dinosaurs, which is essentially what you said.

Lex Fridman

(00:33:25) Yeah, I wouldn't count out the little guy.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:33:27) You wouldn't count out the little?

Lex Fridman

(00:33:28) No.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:33:29) Well, I hope you're right.

Power and corruption

Lex Fridman

(00:33:31) Well, let me ask you about this market of politics. So you have served six terms as prime minister over 15 years in power. Let me ask you again, human nature. Do you worry about the corrupting nature of power on you as a leader, on you as a man?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:33:48) Not at all. Because I think that, again, **the thing that drives me is nothing but the mission that I took to assure the survival and thriving of the Jewish state. That is, its economic prosperity, but its security and its ability to achieve peace with our neighbors.** And I'm committed to it. I think there are many things that have been done. There are a few big things that I can still do, but it doesn't only depend on my sense of mission. It depends on the market, as we say. It depends really on the will of the Israeli voters. And the Israeli voters have decided to vote for me again and again, even though I wield no power in the press, no power in many quarters here and so on, nothing. I mean, probably, I'm going to be very soon the longest serving prime minister in the last half century in the Western democracies. But that's not because I amassed great political power in any of the institutions.

(00:34:56) I remember I had a conversation with Silvio Berlusconi, who recently died, and he said to me about, I don't know, 15 years ago, something like that, he said, "So Bibi, how many of Israel's television stations do you have?" And I said, "None." He said, "You have none?"

Lex Fridman

(00:35:23) Do you have?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:35:24) "Do you have?" I said, "None. I have two." He said, "No, no. What, you mean you don't have any that you control?" I said, "Not only do I have none that I control, they're all against me." So he says, "So how do you win elections with both hands tied behind your back?" And I said, "The hard way." That's why I have the largest party, but I don't have many more seats than I would have if I had a sympathetic voice in the media. And Israel until recently, was dominated completely by one side of the political spectrum that often vilified me, not me, because they viewed-

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:36:01) ... vilified me, not me, because they viewed me as representing basically the conservative voices in Israel that are majority. **And so the idea that I'm an omnipotent, authoritarian dictator is ridiculous. I would say I'm not merely a champion of democracy and democratization. I believe ultimately the decision is with the voters and the voters, even though they have constant press attacks, they've chosen to put me back in.** So I don't believe in this thing of amassing the corrupting power of if you don't have elections. If you control the means of influencing the voters, I understand what you're saying, but in my case, it's exact opposite. I have to constantly go in elections, constantly with a disadvantage that the major media outlets are very violently sometimes against me, but it's fine. And I keep on winning. So I don't know what you're talking about. I would say the concentration of power lies elsewhere, not here.

Lex Fridman

(00:37:15) Well, you have been involved in several corruption cases. How much corruption is there in Israel and how do you fight it in your own party and in Israel?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:37:24) Well, you should ask a different question. What's happened to these cases? **These cases basically are collapsing before our eyes,** there was recently an event in which the three judges in my case, called in the prosecution and said, "Your flagship, the so-called bribery charges is gone, doesn't exist," before a single defense witness was called. And it sort of tells you that this thing is evaporating. It's quite astounding even that I have to say, was covered even by the mainstream press in Israel because it's such an earthquake. So a lot of these

charges are not a lot. **These charges will prove to be nothing.** I always said, "Listen, I stand before the legal process." I don't claim that I'm exempt from it in any way. On the contrary, I think the truth will come out and it's coming out. And we see that not only that, but with other things.

(00:38:28) **So I think it's kind of instructive that no politician has been more vilified.** None has been put to such a, what is it? About a quarter of a billion shekels were used to scrutinize me, scour my bank accounts, sending people to the Philippines, into Mexico, into Europe, into America, and everybody using spyware, the most advanced spyware on the planet against my associates, blackmailing witnesses, telling them, "Think about your family, think about your wife. You better tell us what you want." All that is coming out of the trial. So I would say that most people now are not asking, are no longer asking, including my opponents. It's sort of trickling in as the stuff comes out. People are not saying, "What did Netanyahu do, because apparently he did nothing?" "What was done to him?" is something that people ask.

(00:39:31) "What was done to him? What was done to our democracy, what was done in the attempt to put down somebody who keeps winning elections, despite the handicaps that I described? Maybe we can nail him by framing him." And the one thing I can say about this court trial is that things are coming up and that's very good, just objective things are coming out and changing the picture. So I would say the attempt to brand me as corrupt is falling on its face. But the thing that is being uncovered in the trial, such as the use of spyware on a politician, a politician's surroundings to try to shake them down in investigations, put them in flea-ridden cells for 21 days. Invite their 84 year old mother to investigations without cause, bringing in their mistresses in the corridor, shaking them down, that's what people are asking. That corruption is what they want corrected.

Peace

Lex Fridman

(00:40:46) What is the top obstacle to peaceful coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians? Let's talk about the big question of peace in this part of the world.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:40:55) **Well, I think the reason you have the persistence of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, which goes back about a century, is the persistent Palestinian refusal to recognize a Jewish state, a nation state for the Jewish people in any boundary.** That's why they opposed the establishment of the state of Israel before we had a state. Now that's why they've opposed it after we had a state. They opposed it when we didn't have Judea and Samaria, the West Bank in our hands and Gaza, and they oppose it after we have it. It doesn't make a difference. It's basically their persistent refusal to recognize a Jewish state in any boundaries. And I think that their tragedy is that they've been commandeered for a century by leadership that refused to compromise with the idea of Zionism, namely that the Jews deserve a state in this part of the world.

(00:41:49) The territorial dispute is something else. You have a territorial dispute if you say, "Okay, you are living on this side, we're living on that side. Let's decide where the border is and so on." That's not what the argument is. **The Palestinian society, which is itself fragmented, but all the factions agree, there shouldn't be a Jewish state anywhere.** They just disagree between

Hamas that says, “Oh, well you should have it. We should get rid of it with terror.” And the others who say, “We know we should also use political means to dissolve it.” So that is the problem.

Lex Fridman

(00:42:28) So even as part of a two-state solution, they’re still against the idea.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:42:33) Well, they don’t want a state next to Israel. They want a state instead of Israel. And they say, “If we get a state, we’ll use it as a springboard to destroy the smaller Israeli state.” Which is what happened when Israel unilaterally walked out of Gaza and effectively established a Hamas state there. They didn’t say, “Oh good, now we have our own territory, our own state. Israel is no longer there. Let’s build peace. Let’s build economic projects. Let’s enfranchise our people.” No, they turned it basically into a terror bastion from which they fired 10,000 rockets into Israel. When Israel left Lebanon because we had terrorist attacks from there, then we had Lebanon taken over by Hezbollah, a terrorist organization that seeks to destroy Israel. And therefore every time we just walked out, what we got was not peace, we didn’t give territory for peace, we got territory for terror. That’s what we had.

(00:43:35) And that’s what would happen as long as the reigning ideology says, “We don’t want Israel in any border.” So the idea of two states assumes that you’d have on the other side a state that wants to live in peace and not one that will be overtaken by Iran in its proxies in two seconds and become a base to destroy Israel. And therefore, I think that most Israelis today, if you ask them, they’d say it’s not going to work in that concept, so what do you do with the Palestinians? They’re still there. And unlike them, I don’t want to throw them out. They’re going to be living here and we’re going to be living here in an area, which is by the way, just to understand the area, the entire area of so-called West Bank and Israel is the width of the Washington Beltway, more or less.

(00:44:26) Just a little more, not much more. You can’t really divide it up. You can’t say, “Well, you’re going to fly in. Who controls the airspace?” Well, it takes you about two and a half minutes to cross it with a regular 747. With a fighter plane it takes you a minute and a half, okay? So how are you going to divide the airspace? Well, you’re not going to divide it. Israel’s going to control that airspace and the electromagnetic space and so on. So security has to be in the hands of Israel. My view of how you solve this problem is a simple principle. The Palestinians should have all the powers to govern themselves and none of the powers to threaten Israel, which basically means that the responsibility for overall security remains with Israel. And from a practical point of view, we’ve seen that every time that Israel leaves a territory and takes its security forces out of an area, it immediately is overtaken by Hamas or Hezbollah or Jihadist who basically are committed to the destruction of Israel and also bring misery to the Palestinians or Arab subjects.

(00:45:40) So I think that principle is less than perfect sovereignty because you’re taking a certain amount of sovereign powers, especially security away. But I think it’s the only practical solution. So people say, “Ah, but it’s not a perfect state.” I say, “Okay, call it what you will. Call it, I don’t know, limited sovereignty. Call it the autonomy plus. Call it whatever you want to call it.” But that’s the reality. And right now, if you ask Israelis across the political spectrum, except the very hard left, most Israelis agree with that. They don’t really debate it.

Lex Fridman

(00:46:14) So a two-state solution where Israel controls the security of the entire region.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:46:18) We don't call it quite that. I mean there are different names, but the idea is yes, Israel controls security in the, is the entire area. It's this tiny area between the Jordan River and the sea. I mean it's like, you can walk it in not one afternoon. If you're really fit, you can do it in a day, less than a day. I did.

Lex Fridman

(00:46:39) So the expansion of settlements in the West Bank has been a top priority for this new government. So people may harshly criticize this as contributing to escalating the Israel-Palestine tensions. Can you understand that perspective, that this expansion of settlements is not good for this two-state solution?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:46:59) Yeah, I can understand what they're saying, and they don't understand why they're wrong. First, most Israelis who live in Judea, Samaria live in urban blocks, and that accounts for about 90% of the population. And everybody recognizes that those urban blocks are going to be part of Israel in any future arrangement. So they're really arguing about something that has already been decided and agreed upon, really by Americans, even by Arabs, many Arabs, they don't think that Israel is going to dismantle these blocks. You look outside the window here, and within about a kilometer or a mile from here, as you have Jerusalem, **half of Jerusalem grew naturally beyond the old 1967 border. So you're not going to dismantle half of Jerusalem. That's not going to happen.** And most people don't expect that. Then you have the other 10% scattered in tiny, small communities, and people say, "Well, you're going to have to take them out." Why?

(00:48:05) Remember that in pre-1967 Israel, we have over a million and a half Arabs here. We don't say, "Oh, Israel has to be ethnically cleansed from its Arab citizens in order to have peace." Of course not. Jews can live among Arabs, and Arabs can live among Jews. And what is being advanced by those people who say that we can't live in our ancestral homeland in these disputed areas. **Nobody says that this is Palestinian areas and nobody says that these are Israeli areas. We claim them, they claim them. We've only been attached to this land for oh, 3,500 years. But it's a dispute, I agree. But I don't agree that we should throw out the Arabs. And I don't think that they should throw out the Jews. And if somebody said to you, "The only way we're going to have peace with Israel is to have an ethnically cleansed Palestinian entity," that's outrageous.**

(00:49:00) If you said you shouldn't have Jews living in, I don't know, in suburbs of London or New York and so on, I don't think that will play too well. The world is actually advancing a solution that says that Jews cannot live among Arabs, and Arabs cannot live among Jews. I don't think that's the right way to do it. And I think there's a solution out there, but I don't think we're going to get to it, which is less than perfect sovereignty, which involves Israeli security, maintained for the entire territory by Israel, which involves not rooting out anybody. **Not kicking out, uprooting Arabs or Palestinians. They're going to live in enclaves in sovereign Israel and we're going to live in probably in enclaves there, probably through transportation continuity as opposed to territorial continuity.** For example, you can have tunnels and overpasses and so on that connect the various communities.

(00:49:57) We're doing that right now, and it actually works. I think there is a solution to this. It's not the perfect world that people think of because that model I think doesn't apply here. If it

applies elsewhere, it's a question. I don't think so. But I think there's one other thing, and that's the main thing that I've been involved in. People said, "If you don't solve the Palestinian problem, you're not going to get to the Arab world. You're not going to have peace with the Arab world." Remember, the Palestinians are about 2% of the Arab world, and the other 98%, you're not going to make peace with them. And that's our goal.

(00:50:39) And for a long time, people accepted that. After the initial peace treaties with Egypt, with Prime Minister Begin of the Likud and President Sadat of Egypt, and then with Jordan between Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein. For a quarter of a century we didn't have any more peace treaties because people said, "You got to go through the Palestinians" and the Palestinians, they don't want a solution of the kind that I described or any kind except the one that involved the dissolution of the state of Israel.

(00:51:08) So we could wait another half century. And I said, "No, I don't think that we should accept the premise that we have to wait for the Palestinians because we'll have to wait forever." So I decided to do it differently. I decided to go directly to the Arab capitals and to make the historic Abraham Accords and essentially reversing the equation, not a peace process that goes inside out, but outside in. And we went directly to these countries and forged these breakthrough peace accords with the United Arab Emirates, with Bahrain, with Morocco and with Sudan. And we're now trying to expand that in a quantum leap with Saudi Arabia.

Lex Fridman

(00:51:56) What does it take to do that with Saudi Arabia, with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:52:01) I'm a student of history, and I read a lot of history, and I read that in the Versailles discussions after World War I, President Woodrow Wilson said, "I believe in open covenants openly arrived at." I have my correction. I believed in open covenants secretly arrived at so we're not going to advance a Saudi-Israeli peace by having it publicly discussed. And in any case, it's a decision of the Saudis if they want to do it, but there's obviously a mutual interest. So here's my view, if we try to wait for the 2% in order to get to the 98%, we're going to fail and we have failed. If we go to the 98%, we have a much greater chance of persuading the 2%. You know why? Because the 2% the Palestinian hope to vanquish the state of Israel and not make peace with it, is based, among other things, on the assumption that eventually the 98%, the rest of the Arab world, will kick in and destroy the Jewish state, help them dissolve or destroy the Jewish state.

(00:53:08) When that hope is taken away, then you begin to have a turn to the realistic solutions of coexistence. By the way, they'll require compromise on the Israeli side too. And then I'm perfectly cognizant of that and willing to do that. But I think a realistic compromise will be struck much more readily when the conflict between Israel and the Arab states, the Arab world, is effectively solved. And I think we're on that path. It was a conceptual change just like I've been involved in a few, I told you the conceptual battle is always the most difficult one. And I had to fight this battle to convert a semi-socialist state into a free market capitalist state. And I have to say that most people today recognize the power of competition and the benefits of free markets. So we also had to fight this battle-

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:54:00) ... free markets. So we also had to fight this battle that said you have to go through the Palestinian straight, S-T-R-A-I-T, to get to the other places. There's no way to avoid this, you have to go through this impassable pass. And I think that now people are recognizing that we'll go around it and probably circle back. And that, I think, actually gives hope not only to have an Arab-Israeli peace, but circling back in Israeli-Palestinian peace. And obviously this is not something that you find in the soundbites and so on, but in the popular discussion of the press. But that idea is permeating and I think it's the right idea, because I think it's the only one that will work.

Lex Fridman

(00:54:50) So expanding the circle of peace, just to linger on that requires what? Secretly talking man-to-man, human-to-human, to leaders of other nations and-

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:55:03) Theoretically, you're right.

War in Ukraine

Lex Fridman

(00:55:04) Theoretically. Okay. Well, let me ask you another theoretical question on this circle of peace. As a student of history, looking at the ideas of war and peace, what do you think can achieve peace in the war in Ukraine looking at another part of the world? If you consider the fight for peace in this part of the world, how can you apply that to that other part of the world between Russia and Ukraine now?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:55:38) I think it's one of the savage horrors of history and one of the great tragedies that is occurring. Let me say in advance that if I have any opportunity to use my contacts to help bring about an end to this tragedy, I'll do so. I know both leaders, but I don't just jump in and assume if there's be a desire at a certain point because the conditions have created the possibility of helping stop this carnage, then I'll do it. And that's why I choose my words carefully, because I think that may be the best thing that I could do. Look, I think what you see in Ukraine is what happens if you have territorial designs on a territory by a country that has nuclear weapons. And that, to me, you see the change in the equation. Now, I think that people are loathed to use nuclear weapons, and I'm not sure that I would think that the Russian side would use them with happy abandon.

(00:56:59) I don't think that's the question, but you see how the whole configuration changes when that happens. So you have to be very careful on how you resolve this conflict. So it doesn't... well, it doesn't go off the rails, so to speak. That's, by the way, the corollaries here. We don't want Iran, which is an aggressive force with just aggressive ideology of dominating first the Muslim world, and then eliminating Israel, and then becoming a global force, having nuclear weapons. It's totally different when they don't have it than when they do have it. And that's why one of my main goals has been to prevent Iran from having the means of mass destruction, which will be used, atomic bombs, which they openly say will be used against us. And you can understand that. How to bring about an end to Ukraine? I have my ideas. I don't think that's worthwhile discussing them now because they might be required later on.

Lex Fridman

(00:58:06) Do you believe in the power of conversation? Since you have contacts with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin, just leaders sitting in a room and discussing how the end of war can be brought about?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:58:19) I think it's a combination of that, but I think it's the question of interest and whether you have to get both sides to a point where they think that that conversation would lead to something useful. I don't think they're there right now.

Lex Fridman

(00:58:37) What part of this is just basic human ego, stubbornness all of this between leaders, which is why I bring up the power of conversation, of sitting in a room realizing we're human beings, and then there's a history that connects Ukraine and Russia?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:58:52) I don't think they're in a position to enter a room right now, realistically. I mean, you can posit that it would be good if that could happen, but entering the room is sometimes more complicated than what happens in the room. And there's a lot of pre-negotiations on the negotiation, then you negotiate endlessly on the negotiation. They're not even there.

Lex Fridman

(00:59:11) It took a lot of work for you to get to a handshake in the past.

Abraham Accords

Benjamin Netanyahu

(00:59:15) It's an interesting question. How did the peace, the Abraham Accords, how did that begin? We had decades. We had 70 years or 65 years where these people would not meet openly or even secretly with an Israeli leader. Yeah, we had the Mossad making contacts with him all the time, and so on, but how do we break the ice to the top level of leadership? Well, we broke the ice because I took a very strong stance against Iran, and the Gulf states understood that Iran is a formidable danger to them, so we had a common interest. And the second thing is that because of the economic reforms that we had produced in Israel, Israel became a technological powerhouse. And that could help their nations, not only... in terms of anything, of just bettering the life of their peoples.

(01:00:12) And the combination of the desire to have some kind of protection against Iran or some kind of cooperation against Iran and civilian economic cooperation came to a head when I gave a speech in the American Congress, which I didn't do lightheartedly, I had to decide to challenge a sitting American president and on the so-called Iranian deal, which I thought would pave Iran's path with gold to be an effective nuclear power. That's what would happen. So I went there. And in the course of giving that speech before the joint session of Congress, our delegation received calls from Gulf states who said, "We can't believe what your prime minister is doing. He's challenging the President of the United States." Well, I had no choice because I thought my country's own existence was imperiled. And remember, we always understand through changing administrations that America under... no matter what leadership is always the irreplaceable and indispensable ally of Israel and will always remain that we can have arguments as we have, but in the family, as we say in [foreign language 01:01:32], it's the family.

(01:01:35) But nevertheless, I was forced to take a stand. That produced calls from Gulf states that ultimately led to clandestine meetings that ultimately flowered into the Abraham Accords then. And I think we're at a point where the idea of ending the Arab-Israeli conflict, not the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict can happen. I'm not sure it will. It depends on quite a few things, but it could happen. And if it happens, it might open up the ending of the Israeli-Islamic conflict. Remember, the Arab world is a small part, it's an important part, but it's small. There are large Islamic populations and it could bring about an end to an historic enmity between Islam and Judaism. It could be a great thing.

(01:02:31) So I'm looking at this larger thing. You can be hobbled by saying, "Oh, well, you've had this hiccup in Gaza or this or that thing happening in the Palestinians." It's important for us because we want security. But I think the larger question is can we break out into a much wider peace and ultimately come back and make the peace between Israel and the Palestinians rather than waiting to solve that and never getting to paint on the larger canvas? I want to paint on the larger canvas and come back to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

History

Lex Fridman

(01:03:16) As you write about in your book, what have you learned about life from your father? Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:03:21) My father was a great historian and well, he taught me several things. He said that the first condition for a living organism is to identify danger in time, because if you don't, you could be devoured. You could be destroyed very quickly. And that's the nature of human conflict. In fact, for the Jewish people, we lost the capacity to identify danger in time, and we were almost devoured and destroyed by the Nazi threat. So when I see somebody parroting the Nazi goal of destroying the Jewish state, I try to mobilize the country and the world in time because I think Iran is a global threat, not only a threat to Israel. That's the first thing.

(01:04:17) The second thing is I once asked him, before I got elected, I said, "Well, what do you think is the most important quality for a prime minister of Israel?" And he came back with a question, "What do you think?" And I said, "Well, you have to have vision and you have to have the flexibility of navigating and working towards that vision. Be flexible, but understand where you're heading." And he said, "Well, you need that for anything. You need it if you're a university president or if you're a leader of a corporation or anything, anybody would've to have that." I said, "All right, so what do you need to be the leader of Israel?" He came back to me with a word that stunned me. He said, "Education. You need a broad and deep education, or you'll be at the mercy of your clerks or the press or whatever. You have to be able to do that." Now, as I spend time in government, being reelected by the people of Israel, I recognize more and more how right he was.

(01:05:37) You need to constantly ask yourself, "Where's the direction we want to take the country? How do we achieve that goal?" But also understand that new disciplines are being added. You have to learn all the time. You have to add to your intellectual capital all the time. Kissinger said that he wrote that once you enter public life, you begin to draw on your intellectual capital and it'll be depleted very quickly if you stay a long time. I disagree with that. I think you have to constantly increase your understanding of things as they change, because my father was right. You need to broaden and deepen your education as you go along. You can't

just sit back and say, "Well, I studied some things in university, or in college, or in Boston, or at MIT, and that's enough. I've done it." No, learn, learn, learn, learn. Never stop.

Lex Fridman

(01:06:34) And if I may suggest as part of the education, I would add in a little literature, maybe Dostoevsky, in the plentiful of time you have as a prime minister to read.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:06:44) Well, I read him, but I'll tell you what I think is bigger than Dostoevsky.

Lex Fridman

(01:06:47) Oh, no. Who's that?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:06:49) Not who's that, but what's that? Dan Rather came to see me with his grandson a few years ago. And the grandson asked me, he was a student in Ivy League college. He's 18 years old and he wants to study to enter politics. And he said, "What's the most important thing that I have to study to enter a political life?" And I said, "You have three things you have to study. Okay? History, history and history." That's the fundamental discipline for political life. But then you have to study other things, study economics, study politics and so on, and study the military if you have... I had an advantage because I spent some years there, so I learned a lot of that, but I had to acquire the other disciplines. And you never acquire enough. So read, read, read. And by the way, if I have to choose, I read history, history and history. Good works of history, not lousy books.

Survival

Lex Fridman

(01:08:02) Last question. You've talked about a survival of a nation. You, yourself, are a mortal being. Do you contemplate your mortality? Do you contemplate your death? Are you afraid of death?

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:08:15) Aren't you?

Lex Fridman

(01:08:16) Yes.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:08:16) Who is not? I mean, if you're a conscience, if you're a being with conscience, I mean, one of the unhappy things about the human brain is that it can contemplate its own demise. And so, we all make our compromises with this, but I think the question is what lives on? What lives on beyond us? And I think that you have to define how much of posterity do you want to influence. I cannot influence the course of humanity. We all are specs, little specs. So that's not the issue. But in my case, I've devoted my life to a very defined purpose. And that is to assure the future and security, and I would say permanence, but that is obviously a limited thing, of the Jewish state and the Jewish people. I don't think one can exist without the other. So I've devoted my life to that. And I hope that in my time on this Earth and in my years in office, I'd have contributed to that.

Lex Fridman

(01:09:29) Well, you had one heck of a life, starting from MIT to six terms as prime minister. Thank you for this stroll through human history and for this conversation. It was an honor.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:09:44) Thank you. And I hope you come back to Israel many times. Remember it's the innovation nation. It's a robust democracy. Don't believe all the stuff that you are being told. It'll remain that. It cannot be any other way. I'll tell you the other thing, it's the best ally of the United States, and its importance is growing by the day because our capacities in the information world are growing by the day. We need a coalition of the like-minded smarts. This is a smart nation. And we share the basic values of freedom and liberty with the United States. So the coalition of the smarts means Israel is the sixth eye and America has no better ally.

Lex Fridman

(01:10:33) All right. Now off mic, I'm going to force you to finally tell me who is going to win. Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg? But it's a good time that we ran out of time here.

Benjamin Netanyahu

(01:10:41) I'll tell you outside.

Lex Fridman

(01:10:44) Thanks for listening to this conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me leave you with some words from Mahatma Gandhi, "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind." Thank you for listening and I hope to see you next time.

[CNN with Fareed Zakaria | April 30, 2023](#)

ZAKARIA: Prime Minister, you have been prime minister many, many years. Many times. You have never brought up these kind of judicial changes before. Your critics say that the reason you're bringing them up is that you need the support of a couple of minority parties, tiny parties. Is it worth the stability of the nation, the constitutional framework of the nation being altered so much just to placate these few -- these really two tiny parties?

[10:10:04] NETANYAHU: I think that's completely not only wrong, but also misinformed. **There is a very broad segment of the Israeli public, 2.5 million people, the majority who voted for me and my government, who are eager to see a restoration of the balance between the three branches of government.**

In Israel, you know, all democracies are based on the balance between the will of the majority and the rights of the minority and individual rights. That balance is assured by the balance between the three branches of government, the executive, the legislative and the judicial.

In Israel, over the last 20 years, the judiciary has become increasingly powerful and has dominated, both -- well, actually overriding decisions by the democratically elected legislature and executive. So people want to bring it back in line.

On the other side, hundreds of thousands of people showed up in a demonstration, a day after Independence Day, hundreds of thousands, who are supporting this reform. On the other side, people are saying, well, if you tilt the pendulum to the other side and have the legislator have overriding -- unrestricted overriding power over the Supreme Court, you will impinge on his individual rights.

So there has to be a happy middle here. And what I decided to do about a month ago is to, well, press the pause button and allow for an attempt to reach a consensus on something that I think is important for Israeli democracy. But one thing I guarantee you, at the end of this process, Israel was democracy, is a democracy, will remain as robust a democracy, and you could see that by the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are demonstrating for or against this -- and against this judicial reform in peaceful demonstrations in ways that are not possible within an enormous radius.

And when you have that, as you have in France or protests in France or protests in the United States, it's not a sign of the collapse of the democracy, it's a sign of the robustness of the public debate which I'm sure, and I hope, and I'm working to resolve by as broad a consensus as I can.

ZAKARIA: But, Prime Minister, the issue is not a democracy, it is what kind of a democracy Israel will have. Will it have a kind of liberal democracy or an ill-liberal democracy? And, you know, you talk about three branches of government. But in Israel, you have a parliament democracy so the executive branch and the legislative branch are fused, you control both, you don't have a constitution, you don't have an upper house of parliament, you have no Senate.

You don't have state governments so when you look at American system there are all those checks and balances. The Supreme Court is the only check on an elected government in Israel. And that is why so many constitutional scholars around both in Israel and the United States, diehard supporters like Alan Dershowitz are all opposed to this plan. Are you willing to compromise and withdraw those elements of the proposal?

NETANYAHU: Well, first of all, Alan Dershowitz has said that if Israel actually went with the original proposal, as proposed by the justice minister, it wouldn't be an ill-liberal democracy. Instead it would resemble New Zealand, Canada and the United States. So understand that there is a lot of hype and a lot of exaggeration.

But I'll tell you one thing that I've already said, and I think people now understand it and accept it on my side of the spectrum, that we cannot move the pendulum from one side of the most activist judicial branch on the planet that arrogates the will of the majority, again overriding the decisions of the elected government to the other side, where you'll have the parliament essentially overriding with a simple majority the will of the -- or the decisions of the Supreme Court.

Israel has been thrown off balance. The big challenge, it's a big one, is to bring it back to a balance that is accepted in most democracies between the three branches of government without going to a side that would indeed remove checks and balances on the part of the majority. I have no problem with that. And as you know, I was educated in the United States. I am fully conversant with the "Federalist" papers. I actually read them more than once. And I think that what we're trying to do is put this system into balance.

And by the way, in most parliamentary democracies the executive and the legislative are mixed. So you really have two polls. And if it swung to one side, bring it back to the center, don't swing it to the other side, and I'm going to ensure that that's not going to happen. **By the way, most of the supporters of judicial reform that are now encompassing the vast majority of the public.**

[10:15:04] Not the details, but the need for judicial reform agree that it should be somewhere in the middle, which is always a hard task. You know, it's hard to achieve that balance but that's what democracies are about. You argue, you fight verbally, you negotiate, and hopefully you find a consensus.

ZAKARIA: Do you worry that some of the most prominent Israeli citizens, people who are the heart of the tech industry, the heart of start-up nation, are saying that they would actually move their companies and move themselves if the changes go ahead?

NETANYAHU: Truthfully, no. I'm not worried. Because Israel is a fount of technology, is a fount of innovation. Some of them who said they'd move the money out lost the money. I don't know if they put it in the Silicon Valley Bank, but Israel is a safe place. It's got a -- I think we're very proud of the fact that we've built here a real robust and responsible free market economy.

And because Israel -- the worry that I think was reflected in the beginning and is hyped up as though the independence of the judicial will any way be compromised, that's false. It's not going to happen, there is a difference between an independent judiciary, which Israel must always have, and an all-powerful judiciary, and I think that people are beginning to recognize, when I look at the -- what is happening, they recognize that Israel's future economically, including in the high-tech sector, is going to be secure.

[10:20:59] ZAKARIA: Three weeks ago, Israeli forces stormed one of Islam's holiest sites, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The raid came during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Israeli police said they took the action after, quote, "hundreds of rioters and mosque desecrators barricaded themselves," unquote, inside. The raids prompted a major uptick in violence including rocket fire from Lebanon, Gaza and Syria, and Israeli airstrikes in response.

Back now with more of my interview earlier today with Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Prime Minister, when we last talked before you were prime minister just a few months ago, you had hinted that you thought there was going to be some movement on relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. You of course managed to normalize relations with the United Arab Emirates, with Bahrain. But we are hearing reports here that the Saudis, the Emiratis, are all concerned about the rising level of violence between Israeli government and Palestinians.

Is that going to put a freeze on your plans which were, I think, to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia?

NETANYAHU: Well, first, we're doing everything to make sure that the forces that are basically financed and equipped and pushed by Iran, that are trying to foment this violence around our borders and within our borders, do not succeed. But what we hear from -- what we hear from our Arab neighbors, of course, is something else. I think they have no illusions about the danger of Iran and Iran sponsored terrorism and aggression in the region and they also have no illusion about the fact that Israel is a force for stability, for peace and for security.

And that's why the relations are actually, well, they're improving. We just signed a free trade agreement with the UAE. We've just expanded the semi-normalization, well, the baby steps normalization that we've had with Saudi Arabia. You know, we've been flying over Saudi airspace, hundreds of thousands of Israelis, actually that began two years before the historic Abraham Accords. That was done obviously with Saudi acquiescence to say the least.

Now recently, under my government, we opened up the route to fly to India and Asia through Oman, again going through Saudi airspace. So I think that there is -- I'm very hopeful and I believe this is not pie in the sky, that we will actually expand the historic Abraham Accords to -- in a quantum leap because I think that peace with Saudi Arabia, normalization with Saudi Arabia is in the interest of peace in the Middle East, is in the interest of both of our countries.

And I think it's possible. When I spoke about the Abraham Accords, and you may remember this because we've been talking to each other many years. But when I spoke about it a lot of people poo-pooed it. They didn't think it was possible. And they said they raised the Palestinian issue, and they raised other issues, and I said, no, no, it's not only possible, it's going to happen. And people had a problem seeing the impossible turn into the inevitable.

Well, I'm saying now that peace with the major Arab countries is not only possible, I think it's likely and I'm doing everything that I can, not everything above surface, to advance it because I think it will change history. It will be a pivot of history. It will end the Arab-Israeli conflict and will advance the solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

ZAKARIA: Let me ask you about your relations with another ally. President Biden has publicly criticized the proposals that your government is making for judicial changes. He pointedly and said he was not going to have you at the White House at a point where it seemed as though he was going to.

[10:25:04] What is the state of your relations with Joe Biden?

NETANYAHU: Well, he's been a friend of Israel and a friend of mine for 40 years. Doesn't mean we don't have our occasional disagreements. We've spoken on the phone several times including a few weeks ago. His main -- the main figures in his security administration, the secretary of Defense, the National Security adviser, Secretary Blinken have all been here, and we've had important conversations about our common concern with Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

I think the alliance between the United States and Israel is strong. It has strong bipartisan support. You know, the two leaders of the Senate, Chuck Schumer, majority leader, and Mitch McConnell, minority leader, were here within a few days. A few days later we had Hakeem Jeffries, the minority Democratic leader in the House, and tomorrow we're going to have Kevin McCarthy, the majority speaker in the House.

I don't know of many countries that have within a few days the leaders, the Democratic and Republican leaders of both sides of the aisle coming to Jerusalem. And I think -- and supporting Israel. And 400 and more congressmen, congressmen and congresswomen, signed a legislation strongly supporting the Jewish state on its 75th anniversary. So I'm confident about the strength of our alliance.

Yes, President Biden did say that he had hoped we'd have a consensus, seeking a consensus here on judicial reform. It's an internal matter but I happen to agree with him and that's what we're trying to do right now.

ZAKARIA: Prime Minister, you very famously oppose the Iran nuclear deal. When it was put in place, the IAEA and almost all intelligence agencies I know have said Iran was more than a year away from having the fissile material to produce a bomb.

Now with the Iran agreement abrogated, Iran is by most intelligence agencies accounts two weeks away from having the fissile material to produce a bomb. Isn't that prima facie evidence that your opposition to the Iran deal was misguided that it was -- it was keeping Iran much farther away from nuclear weapons status than it is currently?

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER: According to our estimates, Fared, the efforts that we made, which are many folds, some in the operational side, some in the economic and the political side, have made Iran basically lagged, lagged behind its original plans. They thought they would be where they are now about 10 years ago. But we were able to slow them down. But not able to stop them completely.

To complete a weapon, they have to make a decision to cross the line into 90 percent enrichment. And the second thing they need is a weapon, the bomb itself, which is different from the fissile material at the heart -- at the core of the bomb. And the third thing they need are missiles.

The deal that is being discussed would have paved their way with gold to achieving all three because it doesn't stop the development of the missiles. It doesn't stop the development of the weapons. It doesn't even address these two things. And it doesn't enable them to continue developing the centrifuges that would have brought them to a point where in two years -- in one year they would have the approved ability, approved by the international community to enrich uranium at an unlimited rate.

What this means is this. If you want to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power, the only way -- a military nuclear power -- the only way that you can stop them is with a credible military threat. This is what worked against Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapon program in Iraq. That was done by us.

This is what worked against Bashar al-Assad's nuclear military plans in Syria. That was done by us. This is what worked against Gaddafi's Libya's military nuclear plan. It was stopped by a credible military threat on your part. It didn't work in the case of North Korea and now they have a nuclear arsenal which threatens half of Asia and perhaps the West Coast of the United States, and perhaps soon all of the United States.

Iran has been slowed down because of a credible military threat. And I can tell you that it hasn't stopped. I'd grant you that. But we have a job to do. The jury is still out on all of this to prevent Iran from having nuclear weapons.

Because if it does, all of the Middle East will go nuclear. And I think that we cannot assure that Iran will act as a nuclear power with this Islamist -- Islamist I would call it theological thuggery that controls it. We don't know that they will act in an irrational way and this could change history in a negative way.

[10:35:00] I think we -- the onus is on all of us, Israel, the United States, the free world and many of our Arab neighbors to do everything in our power to prevent Iran from becoming a military nuclear power, and this is certainly something I'm committed to. And in many ways this is why I came back and was reelected.

You know, there have to be other reasons to join the -- you know, the rosy path of Israeli politics. This is the most important one.

ZAKARIA: Prime Minister, it is always a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you very much. I hope we can continue this conversation soon.

NETANYAHU: I hope so too. Thank you.

[Face the Nation with Margaret Brennan | April 23, 2023](#)

MARGARET BRENNAN: We turn now to Israel where tens of thousands of protesters marched through Tel Aviv last night in opposition to the government's plans to overhaul the judicial system. This is just days ahead of Israel's 75th anniversary celebrating its independence. For more we go now to the country's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Good morning to you, Mr. Prime Minister. It has been--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Good morning. Good to be with you.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Well, we're glad you're here, you know, it has been a month since you hit pause on those judicial reforms. At this moment in time when you need national unity, why not withdraw them?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, I think there's a broad consensus that we have to make corrections in our judicial system. There's a- obviously a dramatic difference between the views of how, to what extent, and so on. But I think they should not cloud the fact that we're celebrating here a modern miracle, Israel's 75th anniversary, is the change that happened to the Jewish people who were decimated in the Holocaust, a third of our people were lost to this independent nation that has become a power in the world. And I think everybody unites around that. The fact that we have demonstrations, I think that's a sign of our democracy. Just as you have demonstrations in France--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: You have demonstrations in the United States. I don't think anybody should have any doubts that Israel is and will remain a vibrant democracy, boisterous and vibrant.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Certainly boisterous because you had to cancel a Monday appearance at the largest gathering of North American Jewish leaders in years because of these protests concerns. Again, why not withdraw the proposal to overhaul the judicial system, which would give Parliament, which is controlled by your allies, authority to overturn Supreme Court decisions?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, I've actually said that I will not accept a blanket ability of the Parliament to overcome judicial Supreme Court decisions, just as we don't accept that the Supreme Court can abrogate any decision by the parliament or the government. Both sides, both of these extremes, actually hinder the balance between the three branches of government, which is exactly what we're trying to bring into balance now. Now, I did say this, and I acted upon it as Prime Minister, I said, alright, let's take time out and let's try to see how we can balance the two opposing sides. One says, you know, we don't have democracy, because we don't have majority rule, because we elect with a majority of Parliament and a government and executive, and then they're overturned. Every decision can be overturned by the Supreme Court. And on the other side, people say, well, okay, if you protect the rights of the majority, you might be hindering the rights of the minority or individual rights by having the Parliament overrule the Supreme Court. There is I think--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Sir, you're making this sound like it's just a debate--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: a difficult and happy middle.

MARGARET BRENNAN: You're making it sound like this is just a simple debate--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: It is.

MARGARET BRENNAN: like any other country, but you yourself, use the phrase that you are pausing because you wanted to stop the possibility of civil war. That was a phrase you use when you hit pause. I want to- I want to just lay out for you here what it has done here in the United States. Those judicial plans led President Biden to say he won't be inviting you to Washington anytime soon. Listen.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: I'm very concerned. And I'm concerned that they get this straight. They cannot continue down this road. Hopefully, the prime minister will act in a way that he can try to work out some genuine compromise.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Biden told you to walk away, you seem to be--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Yes.

MARGARET BRENNAN: betting that there won't be consequences to alienating your closest ally?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, I value the alliance with the United States. And I value the friendship I've had over 40 years with President Biden. I don't think anything will get in that way. But it's an internal matter that we have to resolve. And we're doing it. And the way we're doing it is by seeking a consensus as we speak right now, Margaret, as we speak, right now, there are teams of my own party, the Likud, and the coalition with teams from the opposition, speaking in the president's house, this is now the fifth or sixth meeting they've had seeking that compromise that I think is the mark of democracies. You don't walk away from a problem, you try to solve it, but you try to solve it, --

MARGARET BRENNAN: No, walk away from your proposal.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: through as broad a consensus as you can.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Walk away from your proposal, which will--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, we've already changed--

MARGARET BRENNAN: allow Parliament with a simple majority--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: We've already changed--

MARGARET BRENNAN: to override any decision by the Supreme Court. That is your one check and balance on power--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I've already said--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Very different from the American system.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I've already- you're absolutely right. And there are things in the American system that are very different from what is proposed--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: here, for example, only elected officials in the United States choose Supreme Court justices, and here, they're saying that can't be that won't be a democracy. Well, America is a democracy. So actually, I've said that I don't want a blanket overrule of- of the Knesset over the Supreme Court, and I stand by that, and in fact, it's not going to happen. So we have a way to go. I think that what has changed is this and you won't hear about it because there is a lot of contentious reporting, to say the least. But I think right now in the three months since the establishment of my government--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: there has been a majority that now believe that we need to have judicial reform. I think there is recognition--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: on both sides right now that the extreme positions of keeping what we have exactly as it is, is unacceptable. And people on my side of the aisle--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: who believe that the original proposal is not going to happen, either--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: there is a middle way, and I'm going to do my damndest to find it, because I think it's the right thing to do for the country.

MARGARET BRENNAN: We will track it then. I want to ask you about the makeup of your government, because it is impacting US relations. Your finance minister calls himself a homophobe, he said a Palestinian village should be erased. You did say that was inappropriate. Your Public Security Minister was rejected from Army service because of past ties to an extremist group designated by the US as a terrorist organization. I know you need to keep your coalition together to prevent a collapse, but are you confident you can rein in people like this?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I think a lot of them have changed over time. And they themselves say that. But the important thing to understand is they joined me, I didn't join them. We have by far the largest party in the Knesset, and certainly in the coalition. They're smaller parties. The mainstream policies are decided by me. And that's what I'm doing. By the way, that's true of- the main things that are important for our country, continuing our free market economy--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: pursuing peace through strength, and peace through responsibility, applying strength--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Doesn't-

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: responsibly--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Doesn't this complicate your plans to--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: you know a lot of people said about me over the years that I will be--

MARGARET BRENNAN: to make peace though?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I'm sorry, I just want to say that this is no the first time--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Doesn't this complicate your plans to make peace with the Arab world?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Does this complicate, my what?

MARGARET BRENNAN: Having individuals like this--

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Can you repeat that?

MARGARET BRENNAN: you've said that- you just said right now that you are firmly in control, but having individuals like this with this kind of track record? Doesn't this complicate your broader goals, as you just said, of broader peace in the region?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: No, I- look, as the Prime Minister of Israel, I see- you know, everybody sees things above the surface, they don't see things below the surface. And the Prime Minister of Israel sees a lot of things below the surface. And I'm telling you now something that I said 10 years ago in the UN, I said, look, we're going to move into things you haven't seen in my lifetime. And that is Arab states will recognize that Israel is not their enemy,

but their friend, even an indispensable friend, and we're going to have peace treaties and people pooh-poohed it. And it's happened--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: we had four historic peace agreements with Arab states. I'm telling you now with this coalition, things that I see under the surface that we are going to have, because of this--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: view, this interest that Arab countries have to partner with Israel, I think you're going to be surprised and maybe sooner than you think.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Well, this national security minister I just mentioned, Ben Gvir, who threatened to quit, which would have collapsed your government. You promised him a National Guard will be established under his control. The IDF and your security forces are more than strong. He's already gone out and said he wants police to remove Palestinian flags from public spaces. What exactly do you think he's going to do with this National Guard?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, the National Guard is not merely his idea. It's a wide proposal, which is by the way, recognize was actually proposed by the previous government as well, because you need Israel has a small police force relative to the size of the population. And we face unlike other police forces around the world, we face the constant threat of terror. So, you need an additional--

(CROSS TALK)

MARGARET BRENNAN: This is the same man who called for a Palestinian village to be erased.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: It's not actually, it's a different person. But that person already apologized and said that his--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: statements were taken out of context. The question you ask, there is a National Guard, it's going to be under one of our national security-- under one of our security arms. It's not going to be any individual persons or ministers, militia. That's not going to happen in Israel--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: not under me, and I suspect under anyone else--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: it's just not gonna happen.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Can you clarify this for us as well? Because it's making headlines in the US. Politician May Golan said that you are considering appointing her to be consul-general in New York. She calls herself a proud racist. She's denounced African refugees as Muslim infiltrators and criminals spreading HIV. Are you nominating her to actually serve in New York — an incredibly important post for Israel?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: It is indeed an incredibly important post and anyone I'll nominate, and I haven't done so, will have to abide and will abide by the mainstream positions that I've advocated, and I welcome the fact that the United States has a multiracial and pluralistic society, so does Israel. And as anyone I appoint will have to reflect the value that I attach to that- that quality in our democracy and in yours.

MARGARET BRENNAN: So you are not appointing her?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I haven't but –
(CROSSTALK)

MARGARET BRENNAN: And you won't?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: But I'm telling you that anyone that I will appoint, will abide stringently, stringently by that view that I've advocated throughout my lifetime. And it's not pro forma. It's not lip service. I really believe that.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay. Sounds like you're saying she's not coming to New York. I want to ask you about some of the Americans coming to Israel. Florida's governor Ron DeSantis, is visiting Israel this week, and he's presumed to be running for president here as you know. You've endorsed Republicans in the past. Do you plan to meet with him? What do you think of him?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I've never endorsed any candidate for - for any job in America. That's not true.

(CROSSTALK)

MARGARET BRENNAN: You were very supportive of Mitt Romney.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Check this record. No, I was met equally with President Obama when he was candidate Obama. And I do that, as a matter of fact, actually, I meet Margaret, with senators like Senator Schumer, who came here recently with a large Democratic delegation, or Republicans who came with, for example, Mitch McConnell, just

recently, we're talking about the last few weeks. I've met equally 50/50. I've checked the numbers 50% 50% with Republicans and Democrats, hundreds and hundreds of them, governors, senators, members of Congress.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: And let me tell you, I- I do that so regularly, and so frequently, that members of the Knesset, our parliament, complain that I meet with American lawmakers--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: and executives more than I do with them.

MARGARET BRENNAN: So, that's, that sounds like you're saying –

(CROSSTALK)

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Well, maybe that's true, but it reflects the fact that I think that the bipartisan relationship with America is vital for Israel.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Is that a "yes" you're meeting with Ron DeSantis?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Of course, I'll meet with everyone. Why not? I meet with Republican governors and Democratic governors. I'm not avoiding the question. And actually, I'm, I'm rushing right into it. I'd meet with every American representative, governor, senator, members of Congress. And I think it's- it's my job. And I think it's important for Israel's bipartisan support in the United States. I make a point of it.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Okay, because for the first time, there was a poll from Gallup last month that showed Democrats are likelier to sympathize with Palestinians than with Israelis for the first time. I know it's easy to dismiss polls, but this seems to be a reflection of public sentiment in the United States that relates directly to Israel's influence in America. 49% of Democrats sympathize with Palestinians, 38% with Israelis. Do you think that matters?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Yeah, I do think it matters. And I think we have to work harder to persuade our Democratic colleagues, or those of- those our Democratic colleagues who- who forget perhaps that Israel is the solitary democracy in the Middle East, that America has no better friend and no better ally than Israel. But I'll tell you why I think this happens. First of all, it's happening over time. It happened over time. It's not related to this or that administration in Israel, because it happened, it continued under the previous government as well. I think there's a demonization of Israel, in some of the reports, many of the reports that come out of here, and I think there's a portion of the American public that finds it hard to understand that once you- you enter the- the realm of nations, you have to act to defend

yourself. And we've constantly have to defend ourselves against- against terrorism, that is aimed against our people. And sometimes when that happens, you have what are called collateral damage, which means civilian casualties that are unfortunate. They're not deliberate. And that often enables the vilification of Israel to take place. And I think we have to work hard to persuade the both--

MARGARET BRENNAN: Democrats.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: sides of the aisle, and the independents in between. Yes, both sides of the aisle, and in this case, Democrats, because we have solid support among independents and solid support among Republicans and considerable support among Democrats, but I'm not going to give up. I'm going to do everything I can to tell the truth about Israel, that it's a vibrant democracy, that it's the only one that that keeps full civil rights in the Middle East and a very broad radius, that America has no better friend, that Israeli intelligence, cybersecurity, and defense cooperation with the United States has saved countless American and Israeli lives. I don't think America has a better ally than Israel, anywhere on the planet.

MARGARET BRENNAN: Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your time this morning.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Thank you. And happy Independence Day for us, and I hope for you too.

MARGARET BRENNAN: We'll be right back.

[Meet the Press with Chuck Todd | April 16, 2023](#)

[Full interview](#)

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. As tumultuous as the American domestic political debate is these days, the lone democracy in the Middle East may be even more divided. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to weaken the Supreme Court in Israel has triggered nationwide protests. Meanwhile, in just a week, Israel has exchanged fire with Palestinians and Palestinian-linked groups in the occupied West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, as well as with both Lebanon and Syria. The crises have only deepened the tensions between the United States and Israel that have been simmering a bit for months. And I'm joined now by the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome back to Meet the Press.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

Thank you, good to be with you.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with your judicial reform package. To say that it has gotten a negative reception might be an understatement. Your own defense minister called for a pause in it. He was concerned about it hurting Israel's security due to so many reservists being upset about it. The Israeli public, public approval for you has plummeted. The most recent Channel 13 poll has 71% disapproving of the job you are doing. Even among your own Likud Party members, more people have a negative view of your job than a positive. And late last week, the credit agency Moody's downgraded Israel's economic rating due to what it said was what "reflects a deterioration of Israel's governance, as illustrated by the recent events around the government proposal for overhauling the country's judiciary." Given all of this, have you decided to rethink and pull back on some of your reform ideas?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

Well, you loaded so many things, many of them incorrect, in your questions. And I'll try to, how do you say that, unpack that one by one. Okay. **The first thing is that I look for a broad consensus on the judiciary. Every democracy, including your own, has continuous tension between the judiciary and the executive or the legislative.** That's happening in America. It's happening in France. It's happening in Israel. It's the natural tension of trying to keep the balance between the three branches of government, and Israel is no different. And Israel, the last 30 years has been a growing arrogation by the Supreme Court of the powers of the executive and the legislative. We're trying to bring it back into a proper balance, but that obviously has concerns because democracy is based on the will of the majority, the will of the people, as reflected in the government that is elected and the legislature that is elected. And protecting individual rights, the will of the majority, and the rights of the minority. And how to balance that is something that we're working at now. It's not easy. I want to make sure the pendulum doesn't swing from an all-powerful judiciary, always independent, but not always all-powerful, that overrules the government or the Parliament. But at the same time, I don't want the Parliament overruling, automatically, every decision of the Supreme Court. So I've decided to take a time out, try to get a balance between the opposing views, and there are strongly opposing views on both sides of our society. And I hope to reach this by consensus. I think that's actually the right thing to do, and I'm doing it.

CHUCK TODD:

But do you understand why perhaps your opponents in the country just don't take you at face value about the judicial reforms because you yourself would benefit from these reforms due to your corruption trial and the ability, perhaps, to make this either corruption trial totally go away or be delayed? How can you lead this effort if you yourself may benefit from this effort? How do you make it credible to the public?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

Here's another fib, another lie. It's just not true. My – It's interesting that the hostile press stopped covering it, stopped covering the trial the minute it began because things are just crumbling one after the other. But be that as it may, it's important to understand the judges in my case have already been chosen. I've made it absolutely, abundantly clear that the reform will not affect any judge who today or tomorrow, in the future has to deal with my case. So my case is completely independent from this. And the thing that people have to understand is --

CHUCK TODD:

Well, the Knesset did change -- they did change the incapacity law --

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

– a broad swathe of the public wants judicial reform –

CHUCK TODD:

– right? They changed the incapacity law on the prime minister to make sure that if you're indicted, that that wouldn't be cause for removal.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

No, that actually is something that --

CHUCK TODD:

Or, excuse me, if you're convicted, then it wouldn't be cause for removal.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

No, actually, that's not true. The important thing is that it actually would be a cause for removal. It's the charges that are not subject. Otherwise, you can charge anyone. You can have some politically appointed prosecutor, as Justice Jackson said, a famous American jurist, he said, "The power of a politically-motivated prosecution, they can just remove anybody on anything." And therefore, in Israel, under the unanimous decision of the Israeli Supreme Court, you cannot remove a prime minister based on charges – on charges that can be politicized. So that hasn't changed, and that is actually enshrined in law and in Supreme Court decisions. Look, the whole thing is – there is an issue. It's a real issue. It affects many democracies sooner or later. It's affected Israel because of the imbalance of the three branches of government. We're trying to bring it back in balance. But I think trying to bring it back into balance requires, at least for me as prime minister of a democratic – a fiercely, a robustly-democratic country called Israel, to try to do it in as broad an agreement as possible. And I'm definitely giving it a shot. By the way, willing to take blows - absorb blows from my side in so doing.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you accept that this has taken a toll on you politically, that the public doesn't like this? Do you accept the premise that the public is upset about this?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

Well, some of it is upset. You wouldn't know about the other side that seeks -- that wants to have the judicial reform because their demonstrations are not covered.

CHUCK TODD:

You once said two terms should be enough for an Israeli prime minister. Why did you backtrack?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

Yeah, I said -- I didn't backtrack. I said if you had a presidential system, you could put term limits on the prime minister. There was no elected parliamentary democracy in which you have limitations on terms of service of the prime minister.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, I know there's not there, but you yourself said --

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

You only have that in a presidential system.

CHUCK TODD:

You yourself said you didn't think staying in power -- that if you can't accomplish your goals in your first term you might accomplish them in your second, but you don't need any more time than that.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

I was referring to a question on a presidential system. But if you want to know, I think I still have, and apparently the people of Israel think I still have, many things to do. Block Iran's quest for the bomb, expand the circle of peace with other Arab countries, forge Israel's economy to bring it to much higher levels. I've made it a free market economy. But I think we have incredible potential in all these things and perhaps arrive at a consensual judicial reform. These are four big tickets. By the way, I have another eight, but I'm not going to take your time or your audience's time to itemize them. I have big goals.

CHUCK TODD:

I hear you. Very quickly, President Biden has weighed in, concerned about the judicial reform. Do you believe this is impacting U.S.-Israeli relations?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

No, I don't. I think – I think President Biden has been a great friend of Israel. I've known him for 40 years, from the time he was a senator, through vice president, through president. I know his commitment to Israel's security. Friends can have disagreements on occasion. But I share with him the view that we should act – and not only share the view, I'm actually acting on it – to try to reach as broad consensus as possible. I want to tell you one thing, Chuck. When I compare the degree of coordination between Israel and America on security matters, on intel, on cyber, economical operations, I mean, there's just no comparison to where this was 27 years ago. Today it's, I think Israel -- I always say America is Israel's indispensable, and by far the best, ally. But I want to tell you, I don't think you have a better ally in the world than Israel. Because Israel has become a great technological power and a great asset to the United States. And our cooperation, mutual cooperation, saves a lot of American and Israeli lives.

CHUCK TODD:

Speaking of our relationship, the damaging leaks that came out of the U.S. government and the U.S. military, one of those leaked documents indicated that Mossad, the Israeli version of the CIA, advocated for its members to protest the current government. Do you believe Mossad opposes your government?

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

No. God, no. I think that was -- first of all, I value American intelligence a little more than that. And I think they probably know the truth. The truth is that the Mossad legal advisor said that under Israeli law, junior members of Mossad can participate in their demonstrations, not senior members. That's, I think, what led to this misunderstanding.

CHUCK TODD:

Gotcha.

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU:

No, I think the Mossad, the military, our internal security services, are working hand in hand with me as prime minister to assure the security of the country. And they're doing a damn good job of it, too.

Articles

[Biden and Netanyahu meet to discuss 'hard issues' as tensions simmer | Politico, September 20, 2023](#)

President Joe Biden and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu met Wednesday for the first time since the prime minister took office last December, placing the leaders face-to-face at a time of strained relations.

The location of the high-stakes bilateral, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly instead of the White House, was viewed as a signal of U.S. discontentment with Israel. The president and his White House have raised alarms about Netanyahu's efforts to weaken the power of Israel's judicial system, a move that critics say leads the country toward authoritarianism.

At the start of their discussion, the two leaders sat next to one another in a meeting room, with U.S. and Israeli flags as a backdrop. Biden said he hoped the two leaders would meet again by the end of the year, in Washington, and that their discussion Wednesday would include challenging topics, namely "upholding democratic values."

"Today, we're going to discuss some of the hard issues, that is upholding democratic values that lie at the heart of our partnership, including the checks and balances in our systems and preserving the path to a negotiated two-state solution, and ensuring that Iran never, never acquires a nuclear weapon," Biden said.

"If you and I 10 years ago were talking about normalization with Saudi Arabia, I think we'd look at each other like, 'Who's been drinking what?'" the president added.

Netanyahu said Israel shared a "commitment to democracy," while noting he sees this as a "time of great promise" but also "great danger." He also agreed with both the president's sentiment about the prospect of normalization with Riyadh.

Behind closed doors, the two leaders broached Netanyahu's court reform agenda that seeks to curb the power of judges. Biden has publicly urged the prime minister to find compromise, saying that he "cannot continue down this road" amid monthslong protests against his government. But the Israeli leader has forged ahead even as his negotiations with Israeli opposition drag, moving the first major piece of legislation through the parliament earlier this summer.

The White House, in a readout of the meeting, noted Biden addressed Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Netanyahu's hard-right government has moved to expand Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, igniting tensions with Palestinians and drawing international condemnation.

“To that end, President Biden called on all parties to fulfill their commitments made during meetings held earlier this year in Aqaba, Jordan and Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to include refraining from further unilateral measures,” according to the White House statement. “The President also reiterated his concern about any fundamental changes to Israel’s democratic system, absent the broadest possible consensus. Finally, President Biden invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to Washington D.C. before the end of the year to continue direct collaboration on this broad range of issues.”

As the U.S. discusses a potential Saudi normalization deal, the president also emphasized U.S. support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“While securing normalization of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia is a worthy goal, any such agreement must meaningfully advance resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the end of ongoing occupation — not sideline or ignore them. Diplomatic efforts should focus on advancing true peace, security and human rights in the region, and not on handing out unwarranted and regionally destabilizing gifts to PM Netanyahu or Mohammed Bin Salman,” said J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami in a statement.

The president was also scheduled later Wednesday to hold a bilateral meeting with Brazilian President Lula da Silva, with whom he will deliver remarks at a labor event. Biden will then attend two campaign receptions before returning to Washington.

[“Iran’s president warns against normalization with Israel” | The Times of Israel, September 19, 2023](#)

Iran’s president on Monday warned against normalization with Israel, denied his country had sent drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, and decried the US for “interfering” in the Middle East.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi warned other countries in the region not to get too close with Israel as he met with media executives on the sidelines of the world’s premier global conference, the high-level leaders’ meeting at the UN General Assembly.

“The normalization of relations with the Zionist regime does not create security,” Raisi said.

The US has been looking to broker a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel, a goal long sought by Jerusalem that could have a dramatic impact in the Middle East. Israel has already normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco.

Raisi also denied Iranian military support for Russia, even as the United States accuses Iran of not only providing the weapons but helping Russia build a plant to manufacture them.

“We are against the war in Ukraine,” Raisi said.

The Iranian leader spoke just hours after five Americans who had been held in Iranian custody arrived in Qatar, freed in a deal that saw US President Joe Biden agree to unlock nearly \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets.

Known as a hard-liner, Raisi seemingly sought to strike a diplomatic tone. He reiterated offers to mediate the Russia-Ukraine war despite being one of the Kremlin's strongest backers. And he suggested that the just-concluded deal with the United States that led to the prisoner exchange and assets release could "help build trust" between the longtime foes.

Raisi acknowledged that Iran and Russia have long had strong ties, including defense cooperation. But he denied sending weapons to Moscow since the war began.

Iranian officials have made a series of contradictory comments about the drones. US and European officials say the sheer number of Iranian drones being used in the war in Ukraine shows that the flow of such weapons has not only continued but intensified after hostilities began.

Despite his remarks about trust, Raisi's tone toward the United States wasn't all conciliatory; he had harsh words at other moments.

Raisi said his country "sought good relations with all neighboring countries" in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"We believe that if the Americans stop interfering in the countries of the Persian Gulf and other regions in the world, and mind their own business... the situation of the countries and their relations will improve," Raisi said.

The United Arab Emirates first sought to reengage diplomatically with Tehran after attacks on ships off their coasts that were attributed to Iran. Saudi Arabia, with Chinese mediation, reached a détente in March to re-establish diplomatic ties after years of tensions, including over the kingdom's war on Yemen, Riyadh's opposition to Syrian President Bashar Assad and fears over Iran's nuclear program.

As a prosecutor, Raisi took part in the 1988 mass executions that killed some 5,000 dissidents in Iran.

The Iranian leader was dismissive of Western criticism of his country's treatment of women, its nuclear program and its crackdown on dissent, including over protests that began just over a year ago over the death in police custody last year of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman arrested for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory headscarf law.

He compared the protests in Iran to labor strikes and demonstrations by ethnic minorities in the United States and Western Europe. He noted that many people are killed each year in the US at the hands of police, and criticized the media for not focusing on those deaths as much as the

treatment of demonstrators in his country. The deaths of Americans at the hands of police are widely covered in US media.

Raisi has sought, without evidence, to portray the popular nationwide demonstrations in Iran as a Western plot.

“The issue of women, hijab, human rights and the nuclear issue,” he said, “are all pretexts by the Americans and Westerners to damage the Islamic republic as an independent country.”

[Opinion | This Is My Shortest Column Ever. For a Reason | NYT, September 19, 2023](#)

This is the shortest column I’ve ever written — because it doesn’t take long to get things in focus:

President Biden, you are meeting Wednesday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, for the first time since he returned to office in December. He’s formed the most extreme government in Israel’s history and yet your administration is considering forging a complex partnership with his coalition and Saudi Arabia. There are enormous potential benefits and risks for the United States. I hope you won’t proceed without getting satisfactory answers from Netanyahu on three key questions — so we know just what Israel, and just which Bibi, we’re dealing with:

1. Prime Minister Netanyahu, your government’s coalition agreement is the first in Israel’s history to define the annexation of the West Bank as one of its goals — or, as it says, applying Israeli “sovereignty in Judea and Samaria.” But you earlier supported the Trump Middle East peace plan that proposed dividing the West Bank, with Israel controlling roughly 30 percent and the Palestinian state getting roughly 70 percent, albeit with tight security guarantees and no contiguity. Do you intend to annex the West Bank, or will you negotiate its future disposition with the Palestinians? Yes or no? We need to know. Because if you intend to annex, all your normalization agreements with Arab states will collapse, and we will not be able to defend you in the United Nations from charges of building an apartheid state.

2. Bibi, you told your first cabinet meeting last December that your top priorities include stopping Iran’s nuclear program, as well as expanding Israel’s growing relations with the Arab world. But we saw you decide instead to prioritize a judicial coup to strip the Israeli Supreme Court of its ability to hold your government accountable. That, in turn, distracted your military leadership, fractured your air force and elite fighting units, bitterly divided your society and weakened your diplomatic alliances from Washington to Europe. Iran, meanwhile, moved in with a diplomatic offensive, patching up its ties with

all your Arab neighbors and eating your lunch. Why should we make confronting Iran's nuclear program our priority when you haven't?

3. Prime Minister, the Saudis are ready to do something hard — normalize relations with Israel. We are doing something hard to help facilitate that — forging a mutual defense treaty with Saudi Arabia. What hard things are you ready to do vis-à-vis the Palestinians to complete the deal? It feels to us that you don't want to take any political risks — that you want everyone to do something hard except you.

Bibi, you're out of focus for the American people. We need to know: Who are you now?

[Israel's contentious legal overhaul comes to a head as judges hear cases on their own fate | AP, September 12, 2023](#)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's judicial overhaul plan has plunged the country into nine months of unrest and exposed bitter divisions within Israeli society. On Tuesday, the country's gaze shifted from the streets to the courtroom, where Supreme Court judges began to deliberate over the very laws meant to curtail their power.

Israel's High Court is hearing the first of three flashpoint cases in the coming weeks, all dealing with the legality of the overhaul.

Netanyahu unveiled the plan early this year, saying the country's unelected judges hold too much power over parliament. He is backed by an alliance of ultranationalist and religious parties, each motivated by different grievances against the legal system.

Opponents say the plan will push the country toward authoritarian rule by concentrating power in the hands of Netanyahu and his parliamentary allies.

The court's rulings could set the stage for a constitutional crisis, casting doubt on who holds ultimate legal authority in the country — parliament or the courts.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The plan has triggered mass protests, shaken the economy, sparked mass refusals by military reservists and drawn concern from the country's top ally, the United States.

But Netanyahu's government has barreled forward. It passed the first major law in July, barring the Supreme Court from striking down decisions by parliament it deems "unreasonable."

Judges have used this legal standard in the past to prevent government decisions viewed as unsound or corrupt. Earlier this year, the court blocked the appointment of a politician with past

convictions of bribery and tax offenses as finance minister. Netanyahu's allies say parliament should have the final say over appointments.

A second case will look at a law passed early this year that makes it harder for the country's attorney general to declare a prime minister unfit and remove him from office.

The new law allows this only in cases of mental or physical incapacitation. Critics say the law was passed to protect Netanyahu while he is on trial for corruption charges.

The third case involves Justice Minister Yariv Levin's refusal to convene the committee that chooses the country's judges. Critics accuse Levin, a key architect of the overhaul, of holding up the committee until he can appoint judges sympathetic to the overhaul.

WHY DO THESE CASES MATTER?

Tuesday's case is a contest between fundamentally different interpretations of democracy.

Netanyahu and his coalition say that as the people's elected representatives, they have a democratic mandate to govern without being hobbled by the court.

"A court that sets the laws for itself and decides for itself which laws it operates under is not a court," Simcha Rothman, another key architect of the overhaul, told the Army Radio station Monday.

Opponents say with Israel's weak system of checks and balances, the court must retain the power to review and override some government decisions. They say that if the court loses the reasonability standard, Netanyahu's government could appoint convicted cronies to Cabinet posts, roll back rights for women and minorities, and annex the occupied West Bank.

"This government has already expressed a desire to fire officials like the attorney general and replace them with yes-men that will do whatever the government wants. And the reasonability bill presumably takes away our power to challenge that," said Noa Sattath, executive director of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, a group challenging the law.

On Sept. 19, the Supreme Court is set to hear arguments challenging the legality of Levin's refusal to convene the judicial appointments committee. The final case, on the attorney general's powers to declare a prime minister incapacitated, is set for Sept. 28.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES?

The laws on reasonability and removing the prime minister from office are what are known as "Basic Laws" — major pieces of legislation that serve as a sort of informal constitution, which Israel does not have. While parliament can easily amend Basic Laws with a bare majority, the

court itself has never struck down that type of legislation and doing so would thrust Israel into uncharted territory.

Rulings are likely months away, but much is at stake.

If the court strikes down the new laws, senior officials, including Levin, have hinted they won't respect the ruling. That would plunge Israel into a constitutional crisis, where citizens and the country's security forces are left to decide which set of orders to follow — the parliament's or the court's.

If, on the other hand, the court sides with the government, protesters have vowed to amp up civil disobedience. They say future measures could include strikes, walkouts, and tax evasion.

Given the controversy surrounding the case, it's possible that the court will find a way to soften its decision by limiting the implementation of the law without striking it down. It is also possible that a compromise between the coalition and the opposition will be reached, said Amichai Cohen, a constitutional law professor at Ono College and a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute.

"The court has never before faced such an extreme threat," he said.

[Israel's Supreme Court hears case against a law protecting Netanyahu from being removed from office | AP, August 3, 2023](#)

Israel's Supreme Court heard a petition on Thursday against a law that protects Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from being removed from office over claims of a conflict of interest due to his ongoing corruption trial.

Netanyahu's governing coalition passed a law in March that limits removing a prime minister from office to cases of medical and mental incapacitation. It would protect Netanyahu from being deemed unfit for office because of his ongoing corruption trial and claims of a conflict of interest. Critics say the law is tailor-made for Netanyahu and encourages corruption.

A few dozen people protested outside Israel's Supreme Court in Jerusalem as judges heard the petition by the Movement for Quality Government in Israel.

"The Knesset interfered in the Israeli constitution, changing it only for one person," Tomer Naor, chief legal officer at the organization, said outside the court.

The law that passed earlier this year would allow "Benjamin Netanyahu, who is facing charges in court today, to basically escape from review by the Supreme Court," he added.

The law stipulates that a prime minister can only be deemed unfit to rule for health or mental reasons and that only the premier or the government can make that decision, not the attorney general.

Netanyahu is on trial for charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases.

The hearing came as Netanyahu and his allies are trying to pass a series of judicial overhaul bills that aim to curtail the power of the Supreme Court and give the ruling coalition control over the appointment of judges. It remained unclear when the court would issue a decision in the matter.

The judicial overhaul plan has triggered months of mass protests in an increasingly divided Israel as opponents say the measures would concentrate power in the hands of the executive and erode the limited checks and balances.

Netanyahu and his allies, who took power in December after the country's fifth election in under four years, say that these changes are necessary to curb what they see as an overly activist court made up of unelected judges.

["Israel's Judicial Reforms: What to Know" | Council on Foreign Relations, July 26, 2023](#)

Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has passed the first part in the planned overhaul of the country's judiciary system. What does this new legislation do, and why is it so controversial?

The Knesset passed legislation that abolishes the "reasonableness doctrine," which the Supreme Court of Israel has employed to evaluate government policies. It is a practice used by high courts in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, among other countries. The doctrine operates exactly as it sounds: the court determines whether a given government policy is sensible and sound. For example, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed Shas party leader Aryeh Deri as minister of finance, the Supreme Court determined—based on the reasonableness doctrine—that he was not eligible to serve in the position due to previous convictions of bribery, fraud, breach of trust, money laundering, and various tax offenses. Now that the Knesset has made this type of judicial oversight impossible, it is conceivable that Deri could become a minister. It is also possible that the annexation of parts of the West Bank will proceed given that by dint of the legislation, the Supreme Court is limited in its ability to be a check on the government's power.

What could the broader judicial reform package mean for democracy in Israel?

Critics of the package fear that it will weaken the judicial system in favor of the government and the Knesset. Because Israel has a parliamentary system, proposed reforms such as undermining judicial oversight and changing the way judges are appointed will undermine the balance of power between Israel's branches of government. As a result, opponents argue, the changes underway will destabilize Israeli democracy. Proponents of the reforms argue the

opposite, making the case that the judiciary has become an unaccountable branch of government that has usurped the power of the Knesset and the government in setting policy.

The divisiveness of the debate over judicial reforms reflects the fact that Israelis have moved beyond debating the relative merits of technical changes to the judiciary and are now arguing over a range of difficult issues, including the role of religion in Israeli society, national identity, and the defining qualities of Israel's polity. All of these are intertwined with debates about Israel's Jewish and democratic character. In this way, the judicial reform package has spurred a high-stakes national conversation about what it means to be Israeli. The resulting divisions have raised concerns about Israeli security as military reservists have vowed not to show up for duty as a result of the changes, how the current instability will affect the Israeli economy, and the possibility of violence among Israelis.

Who is behind the plans to reform the judiciary, and what do they aim to achieve?

In addition to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Israeli officials most closely associated with the judicial reform project are Minister of Justice Yariv Levin, who is a member of the Likud Party, and Simcha Rotman, who is a member of the Religious Zionist Party and chair of the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee. Levin and Rotman are just the most high-profile of a group of right-wing and right-of-center politicians who have sought to overhaul the judiciary. They have been aided in this effort by an organization called the Kohelet Policy Forum, which is backed financially by American and Israeli citizens and states that it aims to "secure Israel's future as the nation-state of the Jewish people, to strengthen representative democracy, and to broaden individual liberty and free-market principles in Israel."

Are any challenges to the new law likely to succeed?

Given that Netanyahu and his coalition government hold a 64-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset, it is unlikely that opposition parties can do anything within the legislature to stop judicial reform. The abolition of the reasonableness doctrine prevailed in a 64-0 vote because the legislation's opponents staged a walkout. This type of action is important symbolically, but meaningless at a practical level. The composition of the Knesset and the incentives for parties in Netanyahu's coalition to remain in the government mean that the challenges to the judicial reform have moved to the streets. The images of hundreds of thousands of Israelis protesting over many months have been arresting, but despite this pressure, popular demonstrations have done nothing to prevent judicial reform from proceeding.

[What drives Israel-Iran hostility? How might it be resolved? | Stimson Center, March 22, 2023](#)

Iran-Israel relations have been in a largely downward spiral since 1979, when Iran's new Islamist regime embraced an ideology that combined radical Third-Worldism, anti-Imperialism, Arab leftist radicalism, and some Muslim antisemitism.

In this world view, Israel was seen as a Western colonial outpost and Zionism as a version of imperialism. At the time, many Arab governments also rejected Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and radicals opposed to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel formed a so-called Rejectionist Front. What Iran refers to today as the Resistance Front is a reworked and updated version of that construct.

Over the years, however, more and more Arab countries have normalized relations with Israel even as the country has failed to conclude an agreement with Palestinians for a two-state solution. This trend raises the question of what could mitigate Iran-Israel hostility—and with it, many of Iran's difficulties with the United States and other Western countries.

Iran's Islamists consider Israel an illegitimate state that has usurped Muslim/Arab lands and driven the Palestinians from their homeland. They believe Israel should be replaced by a non-denominational state in which Muslims and Jews live as equals. Some Iranian officials have expressed this view in terms that Israel has interpreted as threats to destroy it, like when former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke of wiping Israel off the pages of history, quoting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the late leader of the 1979 revolution. However, this is not the only perspective within Iranian polity. Moderate and reformist elements accept Israel's reality and its right to exist, alongside a Palestinian state.

Many of Iran's activities in the Middle East since the 1979 revolution derive from its ideological proclivities and hostility toward Israel, such as Iran's support for the creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon after Israel's 1982 invasion of that country. There have also been tit-for-tat assassinations and attacks by Iran and its proxies on Israeli and Jewish civilians. However, Israel-Iran relations are also affected by power dynamics and inter-state competition predating the revolution.

By the mid-1970s, Iran was no longer a passive proxy for US interests in the Middle East. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, buoyed by rising oil revenues, had adopted a more active and independent policy on regional affairs and relations with Arabs. In 1974, believing that the unresolved Palestinian problem was radicalizing Arabs and increasing Soviet influence in the Middle East, the Shah reached out to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and to Syria. In 1975, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad visited Tehran. The Shah hoped to persuade the PLO, then based in Lebanon, as well as Syria to cease supporting and training his domestic opponents.

Israel was not happy with these initiatives, and was particularly displeased by the Shah's signing of an agreement in 1975 with Saddam Hussein's Iraq which settled a territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iran's favor in exchange for the Shah ending support for Iraqi Kurds fighting Baghdad. (The CIA also walked away from the Kurds at the time at the Shah's insistence.) Israel, then as now a supporter of the Iraqi Kurds, felt betrayed by this act and lost faith in the Shah as an ally. Israel saw Iran's more conciliatory approach to Arab radicals as potentially shifting the balance of power against Israel. Israel has always preferred some tension between Iran and the Arabs in order to use them against each other.

Additionally, by the mid-1970s, the Shah had decided to acquire a civilian nuclear capability that could lead to ending Israel's unacknowledged nuclear weapons monopoly in the Middle East. With a vibrant economy and expanding military, Iran was emerging as an important commercial and security partner for the US in the Persian Gulf and a potential rival and competitor to Israel. US irritation at the Shah over his support for high oil prices in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab Israeli war was seen by some in Tehran as stoked by Israeli lobbying.

Iran's value for Israel and America declined in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. Israel, nevertheless, convinced the Reagan administration to covertly sell arms to Iran during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, perceiving Iraq to be a greater danger.

Soviet Collapse & Israel's Arab Option

By 1987, both Iraq and its patron, the Soviet Union, were no longer seen as major threats, while Iran was much weakened by its war with Iraq. Israel shifted its strategy from one of engaging so-called peripheral states to the so-called Arab option, seeking to build on its 1979 peace agreement with Egypt. Israel saw opposition to Iran as promoting nascent Arab-Israeli cooperation. Thus, it chose to perpetuate Iran's isolation and seek to undermine its position in the regional power equation. Israel consistently opposed any positive Western response to signs of Iranian moderation during the presidencies of Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, and later Hassan Rouhani, promoting a US strategy of "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq in the 1990s and lobbying for more and more US sanctions on Iran.

Israel focused on Iran's nuclear program, which was discovered in 2002 to be more advanced than Iran had acknowledged to the International Atomic Energy Agency. As the US geared up to attack Iraq in 2003 over what turned out to be bogus claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, some Israeli leaders favored a US military attack on Iran. Israel also engaged in fierce competition with Iran in former Soviet republics, especially Azerbaijan, and forged an alliance with Baku against Tehran.

Iran, meanwhile, expanded its influence in areas close to Israel, notably Syria, seizing the opening provided by the 2011 civil war.

Several developments could change Iran's calculus regarding Israel, notably more Arabs' acceptance of the state of Israel and normalization of relations with it. Under the so-called Abraham Accords, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco have joined Egypt and Jordan in opening formal diplomatic relations with Israel, while Saudi opposition to formal ties has softened. Momentum has stalled in part because of the advent of Israel's most right-wing government to date and a rise in unrest in the occupied West Bank. However, Iran is in no position to stop Arab-Israel reconciliation, and its response to these developments has been muted. To balance burgeoning Arab-Israel relations, Iran could feel compelled at some point to start its own dialogue with Israel.

An improvement in Iran's relations with the West could also induce Iran to reconsider its hostility toward Israel, especially if accompanied by the reemergence of more moderate trends in Iran, perhaps following the death of current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Progress on the Palestine issue could also influence Iran to reconsider its position. Perhaps China, which has just facilitated a restoration of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, might broker some tacit understandings between Israel and Iran as well.

Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel all aspire to regional hegemony, but none are likely to achieve it.

A positive outcome to current Israeli-Iranian hostility is unlikely soon. But the centrality of power dynamics, in which both countries have limitations, might over time mitigate the conflictual aspects of their relations—if not openly, then at least in practice.

[“Saudi Deal With Iran Surprises Israel and Jolts Netanyahu” | NYT, March 10, 2023](#)

Israeli leaders have for years considered Iran an existential threat, viewed Saudi Arabia as a potential partner and hoped that shared fears of Tehran might help forge formal relations for the first time with Riyadh.

The news of a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia on Friday was therefore greeted in Israel with surprise, anxiety and introspection. It also compounded a sense of national peril set off by profound domestic divisions about the policies of the government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. And it seemed to catch Mr. Netanyahu — who has long presented himself as the Israeli leader best qualified to fight Iran and most able to charm Saudi Arabia — off guard.

The announcement undermined Israeli hopes of forming a regional security alliance against Iran. It suggested that while other countries in the Middle East may see Iran as a menace, they see little gain in isolating and opposing Tehran to the extent that Israel does. Israel views Iran and its nuclear weapons program as a danger to Israel's very survival. But the Saudi decision was a reminder of how Iran's neighbors in the Persian Gulf see Tehran as a troublesome neighbor that must nevertheless be engaged with.

These realizations also sparked soul-searching about Israel's internal crisis. Israelis are currently consumed and divided by a contentious government proposal to increase its control over the judiciary. To politicians in both the government and the opposition, the news underscored how that domestic turmoil risked distracting the country from more urgent concerns like the threat of Iran.

For Mr. Netanyahu, the news was perceived as particularly damaging. For years, his two chief foreign policy goals have been the isolation of Iran and the normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia, which has never recognized Israel. While analysts agreed that the timing of the Saudi decision had little to do with Mr. Netanyahu, who re-entered office in December, it still provided his opponents with a chance to present him as weak on foreign policy.

“The agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a complete and dangerous failure of the Israeli government’s foreign policy,” Yair Lapid, the leader of the opposition, said in a post on social media. “This is what happens when you deal with legal madness all day instead of doing the job.”

Mr. Netanyahu, who is currently in Italy, did not immediately issue a formal statement, and his office ignored requests for comment. But an anonymous senior Israeli official quoted in Israeli news reports and widely assumed to be Mr. Netanyahu briefed reporters traveling with the prime minister that Mr. Lapid’s administration, which left office in December, was to blame for the Iranian-Saudi thaw.

Beyond the political rhetoric, however, some Israeli experts on Iranian and Persian Gulf affairs said the news was not entirely disastrous for Israeli interests, or completely unexpected. It was long known that Riyadh was negotiating with Tehran.

Saudi Arabia and Israel have never had formal ties, because of Saudi reservations about recognizing Israel before a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel normalized relations in 2020 with three other Arab countries — Bahrain, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates — as leaders in those states appeared to calculate that the economic, technological and military benefits derived from a relationship with Israel superseded the importance of solidarity with the Palestinians.

While the announcement on Friday suggested that Riyadh was not rushing to follow suit, Saudi officials have still been quietly discussing with American counterparts about their conditions for normalization with Israel at some point in the future.

Saudi relations with Iran and Israel are not mutually exclusive, said Sima Shine, an Iran expert and former senior official in the Mossad, Israel’s foreign intelligence agency.

The Emirates also restarted formal relations with Iran last year, even as it deepened its military and trade ties with Israel. And despite the re-establishment of Saudi-Iranian ties, Iran remains a threat to Saudi Arabia. Riyadh may still see closer partnership with Israel, particularly on military and cybersecurity issues, as another way of blunting that threat.

“I don’t think it is such a terrible thing for Israel,” Ms. Shine said. “In a way, it even improves the possibility of kind of a normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia,” she added.

But to other Israeli analysts, the recasting of Saudi-Iranian ties might prevent the emergence of a more formal Saudi-Israeli relationship, even if it accelerates those relations in private.

“Iran and Saudi Arabia will continue to be rivals, and Saudi Arabia and Israel will continue to actively cooperate against Iran,” said Yoel Guzansky, an expert on the Persian Gulf at the

Institute for National Security Studies, an Israeli research group. “But it might affect the more public sides of normalization” with Israel, Mr. Guzansky said.

And in symbolic terms, the Saudi decision was undeniably a blow to Israel, Mr. Guzansky said.

“It sends a message that Israel is all alone in the region to fight Iran,” said Mr. Guzansky, who dealt with Iranian issues while a senior official on Israel’s National Security Council. “And that the Gulf countries are getting closer to Iran.”

The fact that this happened under Mr. Netanyahu’s watch left him exposed to criticism on Friday, and undermined his reputation for stability and foreign policy prowess. For years, he has presented himself as the politician best able to protect Israel from the threat of Iran and its nuclear program.

In recent months, he has also repeatedly suggested that he might oversee the normalization of Israeli-Saudi relations. Just hours before the announcement on Friday, he had spoken in Italy of the possibility of building a railway line between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

His opponents seized on the rare chance to dent his foreign policy credentials.

“Netanyahu promised: peace with Saudi Arabia,” Gideon Saar, an opposition lawmaker, posted on Twitter. “In the end they did it ... with Iran. A league of his own.”

Separately, analysts and politicians of all backgrounds said the news underscored how Israelis needed to quickly solve the domestic crisis about the future of the Israeli judiciary, in order to focus on more pressing concerns like Iran.

Fighting Iran is “complicated,” wrote Tamir Hayman, a former director of Israeli military intelligence. “It requires attentiveness. Regrettably, that attentiveness is focused at present inwardly.”

Since early January, Israelis have been locked in a bitter dispute about the government’s plans to limit the influence of the Supreme Court, and to expand government control over who gets to be a judge.

The debate has consumed both the government and its critics, setting off weekly mass protests, unrest in the military, the beginnings of capital flight and straining Israel’s relations with Washington as well as American Jews.

The news about Saudi Arabia prompted even supporters of Mr. Netanyahu to call for a shift in priorities.

“The world does not stop while we are busy here with power struggles and clashes,” said Yuli Edelstein, a senior lawmaker from Mr. Netanyahu’s party.

"The time has come to sit down, talk and resolve our differences in order to come together and unite against the existential threat to us," Mr. Edelstein added.

[Israel will do 'whatever we need to do to defend ourselves' against Iran, Netanyahu says | Sky News, June 9, 2023](#)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has told Sky News he will do "whatever we need to do to defend ourselves" against Iran - and diplomacy has failed to stop Tehran from developing its nuclear capabilities.

Speaking exclusively at the prime minister's offices in Jerusalem, Mr Netanyahu rejected US attempts to resolve the growing crisis only through dialogue.

"I don't think that diplomacy by itself will work. I think diplomacy can only work if it's coupled with a credible military threat or the willingness to apply the military option if deterrence fails," he said.

"Iran is openly committed to destroying, repeating the Holocaust and destroying the six or seven million Jews of Israel and we're not going to sit by, idly by and let them do it.

"(If) these Ayatollahs think that they could threaten us with a nuclear holocaust they're wrong. We will do whatever we need to do to defend ourselves."

During the interview, Mr Netanyahu sent a message to Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as rumours of a peace deal between the countries continue to circulate.

"Our hand is extended to all Arab States and certainly to Saudi Arabia which is vitally important," he said.

"We have great opportunities to advance the peace in our region, peace between our two countries, the wellbeing of our peoples. I think it would change history.

"I mean we have already made one historic turning point with the four peace treaties of The Abraham accords which Israel made under my leadership with UAE (United Arab Emirates), with Bahrain, with Morocco, with Sudan.

"Obviously Saudi Arabia would be a quantum leap forward because it's the most influential Arab country not only in the Arab world I think also in the Muslim world, so it would fashion I think the possibility of ending the Arab-Israeli conflict, and I think that it would also help us solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

Mr Netanyahu was also challenged on domestic issues - including the controversial judicial reforms that have divided Israel and seen 22 continuous weeks of mass protests.

He was forced to halt the process after the country came to a standstill following his sacking of the defence minister, who was later quietly reinstalled. Compromise negotiations are now taking place to find an agreement.

"It seems to me we have a situation where there is now a fairly broad majority that says we have to reform our judicial system, but the question is how much and how fast? And that is something that I decided in the wake of ensuing months to try and get a consensus," he said.

"I'm not sure we will get one. We have to bring it into a happy middle, it's going to be very hard because it's extremely politicised and often misrepresented."

The proposed reforms have attracted public criticism from international allies, including the US. President Joe Biden openly chided the Israeli leader, saying to the American media in March "they cannot continue down this road".

There has been a significant impact on Israel's economy, with investors spooked by the proposed reforms - the shekel has fallen by about 5.5% against the dollar, investment in the prided tech industry is down 70% in the first quarter of 2023 compared with 12 months ago, and the credit ratings agency Fitch recently warning Israel that its A+ rating was at risk.

Mr Netanyahu dismissed the concerns: "I don't think the economy is the problem, I think political consensus is the problem.

"There's a vast misrepresentation about what we're doing, everybody's adding to it, saying we're going to take away the independence of the court - no we're not. I'm not going to let that happen.

"It's important to understand Israel's economy is very powerful and it's going to remain powerful because it's a high tech economy in a high tech world."

2023 has been one of the most violent years between Palestinians and Israelis for decades, including a recent conflict between the Gaza-based Islamic Jihad militants and Israel that lasted five days.

Additionally, the Netanyahu government has approved the building of about 7,000 new settlement homes in the occupied West Bank since the start of the year, a practice considered illegal under international law and by most governments.

The prime minister described as "completely false" a recent statement by the US State Department condemning the building of a Jewish religious school on West Bank land as "violating Israel's commitment to the Biden administration".

"For God sake, this is the land of Israel, it's our country, so I completely disagree with that, but I think one thing is true - the Palestinians are here and we're not going to push them out, we're here and they're not going to push us out."

Mr Netanyahu did however commit to preserving the fragile 'status quo' at the holy Muslim site in Jerusalem, al Aqsa Compound, known to Jews as The Temple Mount, despite a recent visit by his far-right nationalist interior minister, Itamar Ben Gvir.

"The Temple Mount the status quo sacrosanct, we're not changing it. I don't care what anybody says, we're keeping the status quo and ultimately overtime people will judge it and they will see it hasn't changed, and won't change," he said.

[Israel swears in Netanyahu as prime minister, most right-wing government in country's history | PBS, December 29, 2022](#)

Israel on Thursday swore in Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister of the most right-wing and religiously conservative government in the country's history.

Netanyahu took the oath of office moments after Israel's parliament, or Knesset, passed a vote of confidence in his new government.

The coalition, made up of Jewish ultranationalist and religious parties, has already prompted an unprecedented uproar from Israeli society, including the country's defense establishment, businesses, LGBTQ community, secular Jews and others. The new government has promised to curb the power of the country's independent judiciary and expand illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank that will deepen the conflict with the Palestinians.

After over a year in opposition, Netanyahu secured a comeback in the latest election – the nation's fifth in less than four years – to extend his record-setting tenure as prime minister.

Netanyahu's new government has pledged to prioritize settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, extend massive subsidies to his ultra-Orthodox allies and push for sweeping reform of the judicial system that could endanger the country's democratic institutions.

Netanyahu is the country's longest serving prime minister, having held office from 2009 until 2021 and a stint in the 1990s. He was ousted from office last year after four deadlocked elections by a coalition of eight parties solely united in their opposition to his rule while on trial for corruption.

That coalition broke apart in June, and Netanyahu and his ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox allies secured a parliamentary majority in November's election.

"I hear the constant cries of the opposition about the end of the country and democracy," said Netanyahu after taking the podium in parliament ahead of the government's formal swearing-in

on Thursday afternoon. His speech was interrupted repeatedly by heckles and jeers from opposition leadership, who at times chanted “weak.”

“Opposition members: to lose in elections is not the end of democracy, this is the essence of democracy,” he said.

Netanyahu heads a government comprised of a hard-line religious ultranationalist party dominated by West Bank settlers, two ultra-Orthodox parties and his nationalist Likud party.

His allies are pushing for dramatic changes that could alienate large swaths of the Israeli public, raise the risk of conflict with the Palestinians, and put Israel on a collision course with some of its closest supporters, including the United States and the Jewish American community.

Netanyahu’s government published its platform, which stated that “the Jewish people have exclusive and indisputable rights” over the entirety of Israel and the Palestinian territories and will advance settlement construction in the occupied West Bank. That includes legalizing dozens of wildcat outposts and a commitment to annex the entire territory, a step that would draw heavy international opposition by destroying any remaining hopes for Palestinian statehood and add fuel to calls that Israel is an apartheid state if millions of Palestinians are not granted citizenship.

Netanyahu’s previous administrations have been strong proponents of Israel’s West Bank settlement enterprise, and that is only expected to be kicked into overdrive under the new government.

Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — territory the Palestinians seek for a future state. Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements that are home to around 500,000 Israelis who live alongside around 2.5 million Palestinians.

Most of the international community considers Israel’s West Bank settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. The United States already has warned the incoming government against taking steps that could further undermine hopes for an independent Palestinian state.

The new government has also raised concerns about impingement of minority and LGBTQ rights.

Outside parliament, several thousand demonstrators waved the Israeli and Pride flags and chanted “we don’t want fascists in the Knesset.” Another protest was expected in Tel Aviv later in the day.

Earlier this week, two members of the Religious Zionism party said they would advance an amendment to the country’s anti-discrimination law that would allow businesses and doctors to discriminate against the LGBTQ community on the basis of religious faith.

Those remarks, along with the ruling coalition's broadly anti-LGBTQ stance, have raised fears among the LGBTQ community that the new Netanyahu administration would roll back their limited rights. Netanyahu has tried to allay those concerns by pledging no harm to LGBTQ rights.

Yair Lapid, the outgoing prime minister who will now reassume the title of opposition leader, told parliament that he was handing the new government "a country in excellent condition, with a strong economy, with improved defensive abilities and strong deterrence, with one of the best international standings ever."

"Try not to destroy it. We'll be back soon," Lapid said.

Statements

[Readout of President Joe Biden's Meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel | September 20, 2023](#)

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. met today in New York with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to discuss a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues of mutual concern. The President wished the Prime Minister and the people of Israel a happy new year during the Jewish high holidays. President Biden reaffirmed the unbreakable bond between the two countries, which is based on the bedrock of shared democratic values, and the United States' iron-clad commitment to Israel's security. During the meeting, the two leaders reiterated their commitment to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, as well as ongoing close cooperation between Israel and the United States to counter all threats posed by Iran and its proxies. They also consulted on progress toward establishing a more integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Middle East region, including through efforts to deepen and expand normalization with countries in the region. The two leaders welcomed the historic announcement made at the G20 to develop the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, and discussed how the project can benefit the entire Middle East region with investment and new forms of collaboration across two continents. The two leaders and their teams welcomed the likely convening soon of a ministerial meeting in the Negev format to further advance regional integration initiatives, as well as deepening the ongoing U.S.-Israeli Tech Dialogue.

With regard to ongoing tension and violence in the West Bank, the President emphasized the need to take immediate measures to improve the security and economic situation, maintain the viability of a two-state solution, and promote a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. To that end, President Biden called on all parties to fulfill their commitments made during meetings held earlier this year in Aqaba, Jordan and Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to include refraining from further unilateral measures. The two leaders and their teams agreed to consult with regional partners with the aim of convening a meeting soon in this important Aqaba/Sharm format. The President also reiterated his concern about any fundamental changes to Israel's democratic system, absent the broadest possible consensus. Finally, President Biden invited

Prime Minister Netanyahu to Washington D.C. before the end of the year to continue direct collaboration on this broad range of issues.

[Readout of President Joe Biden's Call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel | July 17, 2023](#)

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to discuss a broad range of global and regional issues of mutual concern. The President underscored his iron-clad, unwavering commitment to Israel's security and condemned recent acts of terror against Israeli citizens. The two consulted on our close coordination to counter Iran, including through regular and ongoing joint military exercises. They noted that U.S.-Israel partnership remains a cornerstone in preventing Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon. The President stressed the need to take measures to maintain the viability of a two-state solution and improve the security situation in the West Bank. To that end, he welcomed Israel's willingness to consider new steps to support Palestinian livelihoods, and recognized promising steps by the Palestinian Authority to reassert security control in Jenin and other areas of the West Bank. He expressed concern about continued settlement growth and called on all parties to refrain from further unilateral measures. The two leaders agreed to consult with regional partners with the aim of convening a meeting soon in the Aqaba/Sharm format as soon as possible. They also consulted on progress towards establishing a more integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Middle East, including through efforts to deepen and expand normalization with countries in the region and beyond. Finally, President Biden reiterated, in the context of the current debate in Israel about judicial reform, the need for the broadest possible consensus, and that shared democratic values have always been and must remain a hallmark of the U.S.-Israel relationship.