

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #389 - Benjamin Netanyahu: Israel, Palestine, Power, Corruption, Hate, and Peace

The following is a conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, currently serving his sixth term in office.

He's one of the most influential, powerful, and controversial men in the world, leading a right-wing coalition government at the center of one of the most intense and long-lasting conflicts and crises in human history.

As we spoke, and as I speak now, large-scale protests are breaking out all over Israel over this government's proposed judicial reform that seeks to weaken the Supreme Court in a bold accumulation of power. Given the current intense political battles in Israel, our previous intention to speak for three hours was adjusted to one hour, for the time being, but we agreed to speak again for much longer in the future.

I will also interview people who harshly disagree with the words spoken in this conversation. I will speak with other world leaders, with religious leaders, with historians and activists, and with people who have lived and have suffered through the pain of war, destruction, and loss that stoke the fires of anger and hate in their heart.

For this, I will travel anywhere, no matter how dangerous.

If there's any chance, it may help add to understanding and love in the world.

I believe in the power of conversation, to do just this, to remind us of our common humanity.

I know I'm underqualified and underskilled for these conversations, so I will often fall short and I will certainly get attacked, derided, and slandered. But I will always turn the other cheek and use these attacks to learn, to improve, and no matter what, never give into cynicism.

This life, this world of ours, is too beautiful not to keep trying, trying to do some good, in whatever way each of us know how. I love you all.

And now, a quick few second mention of each sponsor. Check them out in the description, it's the best way to support this podcast. We got Numeri for the world's hardest data science tournament, BetterHelp for mental health, Netsuite for business, management, software, and Shopify for e-commerce, just as well as my friends. Also, if you want to work with our amazing team or always hiring, go to lexfreedman.com slash hiring. And now, onto the full ad reads, as always, no ads in the middle. I try to make this interesting, but if you must skip them, please still check out the sponsors, I enjoy their stuff, maybe you will too. This show is brought to you by Numeri, a hedge fund that uses machine learning to make investment decisions. It's basically a really difficult data set, a really difficult competitions with real world testing, with a test set, with the highest of stakes. As I talk about in this conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu, he's a big believer in the power and the efficiency of the market. That's the cleanest signal you can get in the interaction of a very large number of people competing purely with good information. And to step into that world as a machine learning algorithm to see what you can do with past data and how to make predictions such that you can outperform other humans or other algorithms, that's super interesting. I'm just a big fan of real world data sets and large scale real world machine learning benchmarks. Both as a way to learn of what works and what doesn't, and just the fun, the fun of competing. The fun of competition is a good catalyst for learning and taking steps on the long journey towards mastery. Head over to [numeri slash lex](https://numeri.com), that's n-u-m-e-r dot a-i slash lex to sign up for a tournament and hone your machine learning skills. That's [numeri dot a-i slash lex](https://numeri.com) for a chance to play against me and win a share of the tournament's prize pool. This episode is also brought to you by BetterHelp,

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spelled H-E-L-P Help. In my early teenage years, when I first started reading the writings of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, I dreamed of becoming a psychotherapist, a psychiatrist, because I thought that is a way to explore the human mind. In some funny kind of way, the journey I took through computer science and the development of robots and machine learning systems, artificial intelligence systems, all of that took me to a podcast called Artificial Intelligence that was then renamed to just my name. And now I am finally doing psychotherapy on microphones with other people. But if you want to do the same kind of process and you don't want to start your own podcast, then maybe you want to sign up for BetterHelp because it's super easy to get started, it's affordable, it's accessible, discreet, all of that. Available worldwide, super easy. I'm a big believer in talk therapy and so you should try out BetterHelp because it's the easiest way to try out and integrate talk therapy into your life. Check them out at [betterhelp dot com slash lex](https://www.betterhelp.com/lex) and save on your first month that's [betterhelp dot com slash lex](https://www.betterhelp.com/lex). This show is also brought to you by Netsuite, an all-in-one cloud business management system that manages all kinds of stuff, financials, human resources, inventory, e-commerce, all that kind of messy stuff that nobody really thinks about when they launch a company I certainly don't think about when I'm thinking about launching a company. I'm thinking about big design decisions, big engineering decisions. I'm thinking about how to hire a team of amazing people, a team that is diverse in their background and the way they see the world in their approaches to problem solving, all of that. That's what excites me. All the messy stuff that's as a center, if not more, for running a business I don't think about. That's why you should use the best tools to the job to at least help you out on that part. You can start now with no payment or interest for six months go to [Netsuite dot com slash lex](https://www.netsuite.com/lex) to access their one-of-a-kind financing program [Netsuite dot com slash lex](https://www.netsuite.com/lex) that's [Netsuite dot com slash lex](https://www.netsuite.com/lex). This show is also brought to you by Shopify, a platform designed for anyone to sell anywhere with a great looking online store that brings your ideas to life and tools to manage day-to-day operations. I've been wanting to put out some merch out there because I'm working with an amazing artist that helped me out, create some awesome stuff and I've been so lazy about it. When I say lazy I just mean my plate is so full and I've been doing some extremely difficult travel but also taking on these difficult projects and trying to figure out my life but through all of that a source of excitement, a source of opportunity for me is just how fun and easy it is to use Shopify to create your own store. So if that's the thing that's exciting to you you should definitely do it. Go sell some cool stuff. It has thousands of integrations and third-party apps. It's basically so anything you want to do you can get done from on-demand printing to accounting to advanced chatbots all that kind of stuff. Again, highly highly highly recommend. You try out Shopify. Sign up for a \$1 per month trial period at [Shopify.com slash Lex](https://www.shopify.com/lex). That's all lowercase. Go to [Shopify.com slash Lex](https://www.shopify.com/lex) to take your business to the next level today. This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it please check out our sponsors in the description and now dear friends here's Benjamin Netanyahu. 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

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to one day turn that hate into love? I disagree with the premise of your question.

I think I have 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 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. 16 million viewers. I gave another one. I 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. Okay 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 is the leader of Israel whom they respect increasingly is 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. 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. Well there's a lot of love. Yes a lot of leaders are collaborating.

Respect I said. 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.

And what can you say to those people? 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 and medicine and agriculture and the environment

and telecoms and talk about AI in a minute but changing the world for the better and spreading this among six continents. We've sent rescue teams more than any other country in the world and we're one tenth of one percent 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 earthquake devastating earthquake in Turkey, Turkey Israel was there. When there's something in Nepal Israel is there and it's a second country. It's the second country after in one case India or after in other case the United States Israel is there tiny Israel is a benefactor to all of humanity.

So your 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. Well what I've learned is that you have to nip

bad things in the bud. You have to there's a Latin term that says

upstop pinkie stop bad things when they're small and the deliberate hatred the the incitement of hatred against one community. It's demonization deligitization that goes with it is a very dangerous thing 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's what we should 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.

So in those threats underlying that hatred how much of it is anti Zionism and how much of it is anti-Semitism. I don't distinguish between the two. You can't say well I'm okay with Jews

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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 these of the anti anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. When you say anti-Zionism you're saying the Jewish people don't have a right to have a state of their own and that that is a denial of 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.

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. Well that's ridiculous the mere fact that you have so many demonstrations and protests some some dictatorship. There's a lot of democracy here more more unbunctious and more robust than just anywhere on the planet.

Can you still man the case that this gives this may give too much power to the coalition government to the prime minister not just to you but to those who follow?

No I think that's complete hogwash because I think there's a very few people who are demonstrating against this quite a few quite many don't have an idea what is being discussed 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 and you can create mass mobilization based on these absurd slogans. 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 ds in my views that is I view I ask the question what is democracy okay so democracy is 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 okay so how do you balance the two okay how do you get the how do you avoid mobocracy okay and how do you avoid dictatorship the opposite side the way you avoided 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 okay the legislative executive and the judiciary and this balance is what assures the balance between majority rights and individual rights and you have to balance all of them okay 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 uh two three decades the the court aggregated for itself the powers of the parliament and the executive so we're trying to bring it back into line bring 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 we want checks and balances not unrivalled power just as we said we want an independent judiciary but not in all powerful judiciary that balance does not mean bringing it back into line doesn't mean that you can have the the parliament arcness that override any decision that the supreme court does so i've pretty much early on said after the judicial reform was introduced get rid of the idea of a sweeping override clause that would have with 61 votes that's

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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 the second point that we receive criticism on was the the structure of how do you choose supreme court judges okay how do you how do you choose them and the critics of the reform are saying that the idea that elected officials to 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 other are just i don't know just about every uh every democracy on the planet so there is a view here that uh you can't have the sorted hands of elected officials uh involved in the choosing of judges and in the israeli system the judicial activism went so far that effectively the sitting judges have an effective veto on the on the uh on choosing uh judges which means that this is a self-selecting court that just perpetrates itself and we want to correct that again 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 uh a vibrant democracy and believe me the fact that people are arguing and demonstrating uh in the streets and protesting is just uh is the best uh proof of that and that's how it'll remain we spoke about uh tech companies offline there's a lot of tech companies nervous about this judicial reform can you speak to why a large and small companies have a future in israel 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 to within a very short time to 54 000 that's nominal GDP per capita according to the IMF and we've uh overtaken in that uh japan france britain germany and how did that happen because we unleashed the the genius that we have in 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 uh conceptual products because we have a permanent investment in in the military in our security services creating uh basically knowledge workers who then become knowledge entrepreneurs and so we create this this structure and that's not going to go away there's been a decline in investments in the high tech globally i think that's driven by many factors but the most important one is the interest rate which which i think will it'll fluctuate up and down but israel will remain a very attractive country because it produces so many 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 uh innovation the future belongs to this to those innovate israel is the uh pre-eminent innovation nation it has few competitors and if we would say all right where do you have this close cross-disciplinary uh fermentation of various skills and areas i would say it's in israel i'll tell you why we used to be just telecoms because people went out of the you know military intelligence our NSA but that's been now broad base so you find it in medicine you find it in biology you find it in agri tech you find it everywhere everything is becoming technologizing in israel everybody is dealing in everything

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and that's that that's a potent reservoir of talent that the 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 super computer in israel wonder why we've had intel coming here and deciding now to invest 25 billion dollars just now uh 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 then it'll remain so so you had a conversation about ai with sam altman of open ai and with ilan musk yeah what was the content of that conversation what's your vision for sort of this very highest of tech uh which is artificial intelligence well first of all i have a high regard for the people i talk to okay 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 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 um sort of taking a back about it because what do you do okay so i i think the there's several conclusions from my conversations with with them and from my other 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 though be global regulation fourth it's not clear where it ends up i 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 is 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 anyone deciding to you know 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's not uh doesn't give up competitive advantage if there is no universal regulation i think that right now just as you know 10 years ago i read um 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 okay on this i'm a fellow Churchill you know he said fact is better than fiction well this fiction would become fact and it was a book it was a novel about a chinese americans a future cyber war and i read the book one sitting called in a team of experts and i said all right let's 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 we did exactly that uh 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 so i think in in israel we have to we have to do it anyway for security reasons and we're doing it but i think what about what about our databases that are already very robust on on the medical records of 98 percent of our population why don't we stick a genetic database on that why don't we do other things that could bring magical what seem are seemingly magical cures and drugs and medical instruments for that that's one possibility we have it in 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 one of the leading ai powers in the world the questions i don't have an answer to is

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what is it go how much does it eat chew up on on jobs there's an assumption that i'm not sure is true that all previous the two big uh previous revolutions in the human condition namely the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution definitely produce more jobs than they than they consumed okay that is not obvious to me at all i mean i could see new jobs creating and yes i have that you know 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 at least in the short term and we don't know about the long term no i don't know about the long term but i used to have the comfort being a free market guy always said you know we're going to produce more jobs and you know by uh i don't know limiting certain government jobs we're actually putting out in the market will create more jobs which obviously happened you know we had one telecom company a government company when i said we're going to you know we're going to create competition

they said you're going to run us out we're not going to have more workers yeah 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 okay 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 you're going to make the rich richer and the poor poor 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 the lowest the lower ladders of the socio-economic

measure 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 you know very few people are producing enormous added value you're going to

have to tax that to pass it to the others okay 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 issue an international issue that we constantly have to deal with and the second question you have is suppose you solve that problem and you deliver money okay 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 you know the polite exchanges what do you do right well people define themselves by their profession and it's going to be difficult if you don't have a profession and you know people will spend more time self-searching they'll more time in the in the arts more time in leisure understand that if i have to bet it will annihilate many more jobs than it will create and enforce 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 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 cyber security and what do you think you think you think it's gonna we're gonna lose control no i first of all i do believe maybe naively that it will create more jobs than it takes write that down we'll check it it's on record and you know we don't have we don't say we'll check it after our lifetime no we'll see it in a few years we'll see it in a few years i'm really concerned about cyber security and the nature of how that changes with the power of ai and in terms of existential threats i think there will be so much

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threats that aren't existential along the way that that's the thing i'm mostly concerned about versus ai taking complete control and becoming sort of superseding the human species although that is something you should consider seriously because of the exponential growth of its capability it's exactly the exponential growth which we understand is before us but we don't really it's very hard to project forward to really understand that's right exactly right so you know i'm so i deal with what i can and where i can affect something i tend not to worry about things i don't control uh because at a certain point you know there's no point i mean you have to decide what you're spending your time on so i think in practical terms i think

we'll make we'll make israeli a formidable ai power we understand the limitation of scale computing power and other things but i think within those limits i think we can make here this miracle that we we did in many other things you know we do more with less i don't care if it's water the production of water or the production of energy or the production of knowledge or the production of cyber capabilities defense and other uh we just do more well with less and i think in ai we're going to do a lot more uh with a relatively small but highly gifted population very gifted so taking a small tangent as we talked about offline uh you have a uh a background in taekwondo oh yeah yeah we mentioned you on musk i've uh trained with both this is a quick question

who do you have uh who are you betting on in a fight well uh i refuse to answer that uh i will say this such a politician you are yeah of course here i'm a politician i'm openly telling you then i'm dodging the question okay but i'll say this uh you know i i actually i spent five years in our special forces in the military and we barely spent a minute uh on martial arts i actually learned taekwondo later when i came to uh 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 and taught me taekwondo which was kind of interesting now the question you really have to ask is why didn't we learn martial arts in this special elite unit and the answer is there's no point if you saw indiana jones you know there's no point you just you know pull the trigger that's simple now i don't expect anyone to pull the trigger on this combat and i'm i'm sure you'll you'll make sure that doesn't happen yeah i mean martial arts is it's kind of it's bigger than just combat it's this kind of journey of humility and it has uh it's an art form it truly is an art but it's fascinating that these two figures in taekw are facing each other and uh i won't ask a question of who you would face and how you would do but um well i'm i'm facing opponents all the time all the time yeah that's part of life but not a part of life part of life is not yet i'm not sure about that you're announcing in whites okay part of life is competition you know you know the only time competition ends is death but you know political life economic life uh cultural life is engaged continuously in creativity in competition and uh the the problem i have with that as as i mentioned earlier just before we began the podcast is that uh at a certain point you want to put barriers to monopoly barriers to monopoly and if you're in a really able competitor you're going to create a monopoly that's what peter teal says is a natural course of things it's what i learned and uh basically in the boston consulting group if you're a very able competitor you'll create scale advantages that give you the ability to lock out your competition and as a prime minister i want to assure that there is competition in the markets you have to limit limit this competitive power at a certain point and that becomes increasingly hard uh in the in a world where everything is intermiss where

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do
you define market segments where do you define monopoly how do you do that that is very that that actually conceptually i find very challenging because of all the dozens of political of economic reforms that i've made the most difficult part is the conceptual part once you have you've ironed it out 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 calamity you know 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 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 provided lower cost rapidly declining cost where do you stop where do you uh where do you stop in a 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 you know that also monopolizes the political process which creates 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 uh should begin to think do you have a solution to that the solution of monopolies growing arbitrarily yeah unstoppable in power economic power and therefore in political power means some of that is regulation some of that is competition you know where to put to draw the line it's not breaking up at and to you know it's not that simple 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 so you're saying basically the regulatory the the regulatory uh instrument is the market in large part in most part that's the hope maybe i'm a dreamer that's been in many ways by policy up to now okay the best regulator uh is the market the best regulator in economic uh in economic activity is the market and the best regulator in political matters is the political market that's called elections that's what that's what regulates you know you have a lousy government uh and people make lousy decisions well you don't need uh you know the wise men raised above the you know the the masses to decide what is good what is bad let the masses decide let them vote every four years or whatever and they throw you up 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 you know that i believe in that i'm not sure i'm not sure that in economic matters in the geometric growth of uh 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 uh which is essentially what you said yeah i wouldn't count out the little guy you wouldn't count out the little i hope you're right uh well let me ask you about this uh market of politics so you have uh served six terms as prime minister over 15 years in power let me ask you again human nature uh do you worry about the corrupting nature of power on you as a leader on you as a man not at all um because i i think that the again the the thing that drives me is not uh is nothing but the mission that i took to assure the uh the survival and thriving of the state the jewish state that is its economic prosperity uh but its security and its ability to achieve peace with our neighbors and i'm committed to it i think there's still there are many things that have been done there are a few big things that i can still do but it

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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 again even though i wield no power in the press no power in in many quarters here uh and so on nothing i mean i am probably i'm going to be very soon the longest-serving uh prime minister in the last half century in the western democracies but that's not because i uh i am mass great political power in any of the institutions i remember uh i had a conversation with uh uh silvio berlusconi who recently died and he said to me about uh i don't know 15 years ago something like that he said so bb uh how many uh how many of israel's uh television stations do you have uh and i said none he said do you have none i have do you have i said none i have two he said no no but 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 i said so how do you win elections and you know with both hands tied behind your back and i said the hard way and that's why you know i have the largest party but i don't have many more seats that i would have if i had a sympathetic voice in the media and israel is until recently was dominated completely by one side of the political spectrum that you know often vilified me not 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 uh uh dictator is ridiculous i am uh i would say i'm a not merely a champion of uh of democracy and democratization i'm uh i believe ultimately the decision is with the voters and the voters even though they've had you know they have constant constant press attacks they've chosen to put me back in so i don't believe in this thing of amassing the corrupting power if you don't have elections if you don't have if you control uh the the means of influencing the voters i'd understand what you're saying but in my case it's exact opposite i have to constantly go in elections constantly uh uh you know 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 i don't know what you're talking i would say the concentration of power lies elsewhere

not here 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 well you should ask a different question what's happened to these cases these cases have uh uh basically are collapsing and before our

eyes the uh the um you know there were uh there was recently an event in which the judges the three

judges are in in my case called in the prosecution and said you know your flagship the bribery charge so-called bribery charge you know is gone doesn't exist before a single a single defense witness was called uh and um uh 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 uh in israel because it's such an earthquake so uh you know a lot of these charges are not a lot these charges will prove to be nothing i always say 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 we see that not only that but with other things so i think it's kind of instructive that you know no no politician has been more vilified no none has been put to such uh uh you know what is it about a quarter of a billion uh shekels were used to scrutinize me and scour my bank accounts sending people to the philippines into mexico into europe into america and looking at everybody using

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spyware

the most advanced spyware on the planet against the my associates blackmailing witnesses uh uh uh telling them you know think about your family think about your wife you know you better tell us what you want all that is coming out in the trial uh so i would say that most people now are not asking are no longer asking including my opponents sort of trickling in as the as the stuff comes out people are not saying what did uh netanyahu do because he apparently did nothing what was done to him is something that people ask 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 maybe we can nail him by framing him and the one thing i can say about

the the the score trial is that um things are coming out and that's that's very good just objective things are coming out changing the picture so i would say the the attempt to brand me as corrupt is falling on its face but the thing that isn't being uncovered in the trial such as the use 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

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 well i think the reason you have uh the persistence of the uh 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 and that's why they opposed the establishment of the state of israel before we had a state and that's why they've opposed it after we had a state they opposed it when we were we didn't have judy and samaria the west bank in our heads and gaza and they oppose it after we have it doesn't make a difference it's basically the persistent refusal to recognize a jewish state in any boundaries and i think their tragedy is that they've been commandeered for a century by leadership that refuse to compromise with the idea of of zionism namely that the jews deserve a state in this part of the world the territorial dispute is something else you have a territorial dispute if you say okay you're 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 okay they just disagree between khamas that says oh well you should have it you know 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 that is the problem so even that's part of a two-state solution they're still against the idea 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 the smaller Israeli state which is what happened when israel unilaterally walked out of Gaza and effectively established a

khamas state there they didn't say oh good now we have you know our own territory our own state israel is no longer there let's build peace let's build you know economic projects let's enfranchise our people no they turned it into a basically into a terror bastion from which they

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fired 10 000 rockets into Israel when Israel left Lebanon you know because we had terrorist attacks from there then we had Lebanon taken over by Hezbollah terrorist organization that seeks to destroy Israel and and therefore every time we just walked out what we got was not peace we didn't give you know territory for peace we got territory for terror that's what we had and that's what would happen as long as the the reigning ideology says we don't want Israel in any border so the 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 and 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're they'd say that's not going to work in that concept so what do you do what do you do with the Palestinians okay they're still there and I don't 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 in Israel is the width of the Washington Beltway more or less 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 with a regular you know 747 okay with the fighter plane it takes you a minute and a half okay so you're not how are you going to divide the airspace well you're not going to divide it Israel is going to control that airspace and the electromagnetic space and and so on so security has to be in the hands of Israel my view of how you solve this problem

is that 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 and takes its security forces out of an area it immediately is overtaken by Hamas or Hezbollah or Jihadists who basically are committed to the destruction of Israel and also bring misery to the the Palestinians or Arab subjects so I think that that principle is less than perfect sovereignty because you're taking a certain amount of powers 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 okay call it what you will call it you know I don't know limited sovereignty call it 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 so a two-state solution where Israel controls the security of the entire region 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 know you can walk it in not one afternoon if you really fit you can do it in a day less less than a day I did so the expansion of settlements in the West Bank has been a top priority for this new government uh so people many harshly criticized this as contributing to escalating the Israel Palestine tensions what do you can you understand that perspective that this expansion of settlements is not good for this two-state solution yeah I can understand I can understand what they're saying and they don't understand why they're wrong first most most Israelis who live in Judea Samaria live in uh in urban blocks and that accounts for about 90 percent of the of the population okay 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 by Americans by

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even by Arabs many Arabs they don't think that Israel is going to dismantle these these blocks you know you look outside the window here and within about a kilometer a mile from here is 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 and most people don't expect that then you have the other 10 scattered in tiny you know small communities and people say well you gotta have to take them out why why remember that in pre uh 1967 Israel we have a over a million and a half Arabs here we don't say oh Israel has to be uh ethnically cleansed from Arabs in order to have from its Arab citizens in order to have peace of course not Jews can live among Arabs and Arabs can live among uh Jews and what is 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 uh you know uh 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 you know that that's outrageous if you said the only way you know you shouldn't have Jews living in uh 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 uh that Jews cannot live among Arabs and Arabs cannot live among Jews I don't think that's the right way to do it uh 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 uh maintained for the entire territory by Israel which involves not rooting out anybody not kicking up rooting 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 transportational continuity as opposed to territorial continuity that is uh you know for example you can have tunnels and overpasses and so on that connect the various communities we're doing that right now we're doing that right now and it it actually works I think there is a solution to this uh it's not the perfect world that people think of because that model I think doesn't apply here uh if it applies elsewhere it's a question uh 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 you know 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 two percent of the Arab world uh and the other you know the other 98 percent you're not going to make peace with them and that's our goal and for a long time people accepted that after the initial peace treaties with Egypt with uh prime minister Beggim of the Likud and the president said out of Egypt and then uh with Jordan between prime minister Rabin and uh 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 so we could wait another half century and I said no I mean 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 uh and essentially uh reversing the equation not a peace process that goes inside out but outside in and we went directly to the these countries

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and forged these uh 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

what does it take to do that with Saudi Arabia with the Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman you know I'm a student of history and I read a lot of history and I read that you know in the Versailles discussions after World War one 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 there's we're not gonna advance a Saudi Israeli peace by having it publicly discussed and in any case it's a decision of the 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 percent in order to get to the 98 percent we're going to fail and we have failed if we go to the 98 percent we have a much greater chance of persuading the 2 percent you know why because the 2 percent the Palestinian uh hope to vanquish the

state of Israel and not make peace with it is based among other things on the on the assumption that eventually the 98 percent the rest of the Arab world will kick in and destroy the Jewish state help them to dissolve or destroy the Jewish state when that hope is uh 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 you know 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 you know I've been involved in a few I told you the conceptual battle is always the most difficult one and you know 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 that said you have to go through the you know the the the the Palestinian straight S-D-R-A-I-T to get to the other places there's no way to avoid this you know you have to go through this this uh uh impassable pass uh and I think that now people are recognizing that we'll go around it uh and probably circle back and that I think actually gives hope not only to have an Arab Israeli piece but circling back an Israeli Palestinian piece and obviously this is not something that you find in the you know in the sound bites and so on but 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 so expanding the circle piece just the linger on that requires what secretly talking man to man human to human uh to leaders of other nations theoretically you're right theoretically okay well let me ask you another theoretical question on the 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 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 I think it's one of the um the savage horrors of history and one of the great tragedies that is occurring and let me say in advance that that if I have any opportunity to use my contacts to help bring about an end to this tragedy I'll do so I've had I know both leaders but I don't just jump in and assume you know there's be a desire at a certain point because the conditions have created the possibility of helping stop this this carnage then I'll do it and that's why I choose my words carefully because I think that may be the best

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the best thing that I could do look I think what you see in Ukraine is what happens if you have um 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 low to use nuclear weapons and I'm not sure that I would think that the the russian side would use them with happy abandon 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 and how you resolve this conflict so it doesn't uh well it doesn't go off the rails so to speak that's by the way the the the car area is here we don't want Iran which is an aggressive force with an just aggressive ideology of dominating first the muslim world and then eliminating israel and then becoming a you know global force uh having nuclear weapons it's totally different when they don't have it and when they do have it and that's why one of my main goals has been to prevent Iran from having the means to 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 uh how to bring about an end to Ukraine I have my ideas I don't think I don't think it's worthwhile uh discussing them now because they might they might be required later on do you believe in the power of conversation since you have contacts with Volodymyr Zelensky and Volodymyr Putin just leaders sitting in a room and discussing how the end of war can be brought about I think it's a combination of that but I think it's the question of interest and 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 what part is 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 yeah 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 you know pre-negotiation on the negotiation then you negotiate endlessly on the negotiation they're not even there it took a lot of work for you to get a handshake in the past it's an interesting question how did the peace the Abraham Accords how did that begin you know I mean we had you know we had decades but 70 years where they or 65 years where these people you know would not meet openly or even secretly with an Israeli leader yeah we had the Mossad making contacts with them 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 just bettering the life of their peoples and the combination of the 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 you

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know the president of the United States well I had no choice I mean 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 we'll always remain that we can have arguments as we have but in the family as we say in the mishpoche you know it's the the family 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 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 there are large Islamic populations and it could bring about an end to the an historic enmity between Islam and Judaism it could be a great thing

so I'm looking at this larger thing you know you can you can be hobbled by saying well well you know you've had this you know this hiccup in Gaza or you know this

this or that thing happening in the Palestinians I don't I don't 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 the peace between Israel and the Palestinians rather than waiting to solve that and never getting to the to paint on the larger canvas I want to paint on the larger canvas and come back to the Palestinian Israeli conflict as you write about

in your book what have you learned about life from your father my father was a great historian and well he taught me several things he said that the 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 didn't 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 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 you know the flexibility of navigating and working towards that vision you know be flexible but understand where you're heading and he said well you need that for anything you need it for you know if you're a university president or if you're a leader of a corporation or anything anybody would have to have that I said all right so so what do you need for to be the the leader of Israel he said 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 you have to be able to to do that now you know as I spend time in government being reelected you know by the people of Israel

I recognize more and more how how right it was you 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 learn all the time you have to add to your intellectual capital all the time Kissinger said that he wrote that once

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you enter public life you begin to draw on your intellectual capital and you know it'll be depleted very quickly if you stay a long time I disagree with that I think you have to constantly constantly increase your understanding of things as they change because 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 you know I've done it no learn learn learn learn never stop and if I might suggest as part of the education I would add in a little literature maybe Dostoevsky in the in the plenty full of time you have as a prime minister to read well I read him but I'll tell you what I think is bigger than Dostoevsky oh no who's that not who's that but what's that I was Dan rather came to see me with his grandson a few years ago and he asked me the grandson asked me he was a student in an Ivy League college and he said he's 18 years old and he wants to study to enter politics and he said what's 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 that's the fundamental discipline for political life but then you have to study other things study economics study politics and and so on and study study the military if you have if you I'm 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 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 aren't you yes who's not I mean if you're conscious if you're a being with conscious I mean one of the unhappy things about the human brain is that it can contemplate its own its own demise and so we have to we all make our compromises with this but I think the question is what lives on what lives on beyond this 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 are specs you know 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 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 thank you and I hope you come back to Israel many times it's remember it's the innovation nation it's a robust democracy don't believe all the stuff that you're being told it'll remain that uh it kind of be any other way and it's 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 all right now off mic I'm gonna force you to finally tell me who's gonna win Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg but that's uh it's a good time man we ran out of time here I'll tell you outside thanks for listening to this conversation with Benjamin and Tanya to support this podcast please check out our sponsors in the description and now let me leave you with some words from

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Ahahma Gandhi an eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind thank you for listening and hope to see you next time