

The Brookings Institution  
Brookings Cafeteria Podcast  
Israel's election result and what comes next  
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(MUSIC)

DEWS: Welcome to this special edition of the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast. I'm Fred Dews. Today's show features a conversation about Israel's election—what happened, who won, and what comes next—between Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, and Ilana Dayan, host of the investigative journalism program “Uvda” on Israel's Channel 12. We're grateful that she took the time to call in to our studio from Israel.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policy\_podcasts to get the latest information about all of our shows.

And now, here's Natan Sachs with Ilana Dayan.

SACHS: Thank you so much for joining us, it's really a treat to have you here on a Brookings podcast.

DAYAN: Thanks, Natan. It's great to be with you.

SACHS: So, it's been an eventful 24 hours, I'm guessing you haven't slept much. It's been an eventful month, an eventful few years. Netanyahu won the elections. It seemed close at first, but he won a decisive victory. It's his fifth victory overall and fourth consecutive. In July, I think July 20th, he will become the longest serving Israeli Prime Minister, and it seems to me the opposition has basically tried everything. They've tried now security generals, three chiefs of staff in one party, previously they've tried an economic approach. Netanyahu just keeps winning. What's the top line? Is Netanyahu King Bibi? King of Israel? Or is he just here to stay?

DAYAN: It is King Bibi, and it is Bibi's time. And these elections were a referendum about Bibi. The campaign was about Bibi, the elections were about Bibi, and the results are on Bibi. It's, kind of, if you take this guy's affinity with his base, if you take not only his political skills, his diplomatic record, his rhetoric, his charisma, his coming, and going you

know anywhere from the White House to the Kremlin. His good friends and allies from overseas who have done everything they can from recognizing the Golan Heights to organizing a ceremony in Moscow last week. You take all of that and you put it aside, and you stay only with one thing: the ability of Bibi to correspond with his base. I have been there tonight in the headquarters of Likud Party. I have seen the people who vote for him. These are rational Israelis, many of them lower middle class, many of them are middle class. Many of them have voted Likud forever. Many of them are rational voters who just appreciate Bibi's risk management formula. They don't overlook his corruption affairs. They care for corruption investigations. They are minded, they are well-informed. They are enlightened. But they perceive Bibi as the one best single guardian of Israel's interests, and they think that he can keep this house together.

And, you know, he delivers, and this is the one thing that I think people overseas have to understand, and people in Israel from the left wing have to understand that, of course, there's something to, you know, to the tribal aspect of Israeli politics. I've been with you at Brookings since, I guess, five, six years ago. And I interviewed Martin Indyk, and he told me about a conversation he had with Bibi back in 1997. He had a message from President Clinton to Bibi not to build in any one of the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, and Bibi told him tell the president that I'm sorry, but I will have to be there anyway and Martin asked why. And he said because Israeli politics is tribal and I got to feed my tribe. So, Bibi knows how to feed these.

SACHS: He does, and it seems like playing to the base is a very successful strategy in Israel for a simple reason which is his base is very large. However, you parse the numbers. you know. the left has tried all these different things that are mentioned it's called itself the center, it's brought in right wingers, even blue and white. The party of Benny Gantz was the challenger to Netanyahu. And these elections included real right wingers, like Bogie Ya'alon, the Former Defense Minister from Netanyahu's Likud, and the

members of his party who are no way left or even center, they are center right. And still, the numbers of the overall blocs are rather stable. The blocs overall look quite similar to the last elections and even the elections before that. And the base of the right wing plus the modern Orthodox plus the ultra-orthodox is simply more than 50 percent. In the United States would talk about President Trump playing to his base. But, of course, the base is much smaller here. He can still win an election like he did in 2016, but it's much harder you have to bring the base and many others. In Israel this base has really grown. We've seen a dramatic shift. Is it fair to say, you think, that Israel basically has been set politically since the Second Intifada, since the whole doctrine of the left wing of the Oslo process seemed to crash and the suicide bombings of the Second Intifada? Has much really changed since then in terms of the map?

DAYAN: The short answer is, yes, you're right. And, you know, we can analyze very easily the paradigm that says that not only since the Second Intifada, but even you know before that, after Oslo, and the huge and terrible and bloody suicide bomb attacks of 1995 and 1996 that both of us remember very, very closely and very sadly. And we've known people who were killed there and the Israelis ever since are experiencing, you know, a kind of cycle that every time you see territory or you see anything to the Palestinians between the Oslo Accords, and then you get the 1995 and [19]96 bombing attacks, and then comes the Camp David summit in 2000 and you get the Second Intifada and then comes the disengagement in 2005 and you get the, you know, rain of rockets from Gaza ever since. It's also Israelis, yes, have been disillusioned, many of them all for right of center, and even left from the prospect of even coming remotely close to a peace agreement with the Palestinians. So, in our lifetime, yes, this is the not the short answer, but I guess the empirical answer.

On the other hand, Natan, you can look at it a bit differently. You have 70 members of Knesset, 35 Likud, and 35 we call them Blue and White. We're center. Center right,

center left, not very, very different from each other. Gantz and Netanyahu didn't offer so different solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian problem or to any other problem. On national security they don't really differ that much. So, you can look at it a bit differently. And the last thing that I would tell you the only shift that you had, the only shift that you heard in terms of members of Knesset was the growth of the Haredi, of the ultra-orthodox parties both Shas and Yehuda Torah. Other than that, other than that, Bibi's bloc remained the same. Even shranked a little bit, he had 67 in his previous coalition, he is going to have 65 in the next one, presumably. So, it's not that Israel has shifted to the right. Israel has been there for a while and has stayed there.

SACHS: Yeah, it's it's interesting. I mean it seems like it has, all this time Israelis sort of been disillusioned as you said so well on the possibility of solutions of solving this issue. But the question that comes back always and you hear it a lot abroad in Israel. So what? What is it that Netanyahu manages to capture in terms of what he offers for the future? I mean obviously he's not only running against the policy of the left, which is no longer very relevant, but he's also offering his own record now after so many years in power. What in essence do you think is kind of the Bibi doctrine, if it exists in the eyes of the Israeli voters that's been so popular there isn't doctrine and the doctrine say we stayed put?

DAYAN: We don't know. The status quo is better than anything else. We work around it with China and with Oman, with Qatar and with Saudi Arabia, with Egypt and with United States, with Hungary, and with Poland. We don't care about Western Europe. We care less about the Democratic side of the aisle in the United States. We work around and therefore if you, if you ask about, you asked about what the vision for the future, I'm not sure there is any, and I'm not sure that Israelis feel the need that many Israelis feel the need for any vision like that which is sad, which is bad news.

You know I heard someone analyzing the problem a while ago that we used to know the endgame. Many Israelis will tell you, like if you ask them a decade or a decade and a half ago, they will tell you we know how it will end. We know that the land between the sea and the river will have to be divided. We know that Israel will not be able to occupy and control the lives of 6, 7, 8 million Palestinians between the sea and the river. We know that many settlements will have to be dismantled. We know that Jerusalem will have to be governed by some kind of multinational solution. We know that Palestinians will not get the right of return. We know that the water problems which have to be solved somehow. We know the endgame. But ever since the Second Intifada many Israelis are much more skeptical. And yet, and yet I think you, and I know, that if there were to appear courageously there on our side and/or on their side, and they would come up with this very, you know, obvious endgame and they would put it on the table. I think that still, even today, if Bibi were to propose such a vision for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian problem and if there happened to be a courageous leader on the other side, I think 75 percent of the Israelis would sign on to that. And I think 65 percent of the Palestinians would sign on to that. But I think that our 75 percent don't believe that there's 65 percent even exists, and their 65 percent don't believe that our 75 percent even exists. And there you have it. So, do Israelis care that nobody speaks about peace? Obviously not. Do they care that nobody proposes anything to the future? Obviously not, because they think that we have more threats than possibilities, more dangers than chances for a better future. And this is this is not good news. But this is part of the explanation.

SACHS: Yeah. You know sort of called it sort of an anti-solutionist approach, which is to say that I think that Netanyahu and [Moshe] Ya'alon with the guns and the party as well. They look at others in the United States, especially you want to come and solve the problem and draw a nice map and bring the parties together to negotiate in good faith, and they think that that will produce some kind of solution. And for Netanyahu, for Ya'alon and

for others, how are you alone or others that seems to be the naive approach, this very American and commendable in many situations approach of solutionism of trying to solve all problems. They, I think, have a much more pessimistic, they and most Israelis, obviously, have a much more pessimistic view of Israel's fortunes and of the Middle East, and a feeling that the problems in the Middle East are ones to be managed. There are chronic problems.

You know, Naftali Bennett, the leader of the right, he said a few years ago he was talking about a friend of his who had shrapnel stuck in his near his spine. I was actually at this conference that he was holding, it was a small conference on public relations for the settler movement. And I went to listen in and take notes. And he was describing this and he was saying that his friend had this shrapnel near his back from the military. It was a little painful to walk. But when he went to the doctors, they said we can operate and take it out. And you might be fine. But you also might lose the ability to walk overall. And so, the question for you is, do you want to manage the problem, live with the pain, or do you want to take a huge risk and maybe be paralyzed? And what Bennett said then is, the answer's clear: don't operate, live with the pain, manage an imperfect world. And, I think, this sort of captures also the way Ya'alon, but certainly Netanyahu think about managing the world, it's imperfect, it's bad, but it's what we got. And, in the meantime, while we avoid the worst risks, Israel can grow, flourish, its economy can can grow, and, in that sense, offering kind of hope which is a much more modest hope.

DAYAN: Can it really live, can really live with the pain?

SACHS: Exactly.

DAYAN: Can it really manage the problem? Can it really stay in a democratic state without solving that problem.? These are questions that you and I know that these politicians don't really address.

SACHS: And I think there's no two big things come out of it. First is if you take that kind of conservative approach, it's exactly as you said, if you take that kind of conservative approach then you would try to keep your options open. You would try to not change reality while you're doing this. You would try to allow yourself in the future to either solve or partially solve things in a way that you can't today. And, of course, the current reality on the ground is not that. The current reality is one in which things are sliding in a very particular direction. And on that I want to ask a very important question now about foreign policy, about what this election will mean. Netanyahu made a promise during the campaign, very near the end, that he would start the process of annexing settlement blocks, maybe starting with Gush Etzion, which is near Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. Others have proposed Ma'ale Adumim, just east of Jerusalem. Things that are in the consensus in the Israeli mind, not the Palestinians one, of being part of Israel and any deal with the Palestinians as part of the settlement blocks that Israel might swap territory for. That would be very much against this conservative kind of doctrine. And the Netanyahu approach of just managing and doing as little damage as possible in any direction would be much more in line with say Naftali Bennett or other people on the right. Do you think it's going to go through with it? Do you think we're actually going to see the annexation of territory in the West Bank? And, especially, let's keep in mind Donald Trump here in Washington very recently just recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights where there is an international border actually. Here in the West Bank, there's disputed lines of an armistice and the Israelis could claim it's an easier thing for Trump to recognize. You think it's going to happen?

DAYAN: I'll give you the cynical analysis of it. The cynical analysis which was delivered on the Israeli media even before the elections was annexation for immunity, which means the notion that Bibi will kind of settle annexation to the extreme right parties that he needs for his coalition in return for them voting for his immunity in trying to the

indictments that are waiting behind the corner. I think this is not going to happen or the chances of that happening are not in my view.

SACHS: Why not?

DAYAN: Because of two reasons. One again the realpolitik is that Bibi is not dependent now on any one single right-wing party. As it seems now, Bennett and Shaked are not going to be in the Knesset. The extreme right has five members of Knesset but Netanyahu will also have an alliance with Lieberman, with [Kakhlon], and with the Orthodox parties, so he will be in a much better position [than] we thought that he was going to be. He will have a 65 members of Knesset coalition, not the 61, in which case, he's, you know he's, he's much less prone to be blackmailed. But this is one thing.

But the other thing goes back to Bibi Netanyahu's persona, and as much as Bibi is an ideological politician, he has a very well-established worldview, a hawkish worldview. One which is both conservative and tough. He believes in the need to be tough in this violent neck of the woods. But, on the other hand, Bibi Netanyahu has proven himself to be a very prudent, cautious, and, and that adventurous leader. If he thinks by now, after being so many years in power, that a move that he makes can lead to any kind of escalation in the area, he will not take that, and annexation might mean that. So, I think, you can parallel these statements of these, those before the 2015 election when he said that he will not have a Palestinian state established alongside the state of Israel. And then, you know, look back on it after the elections I think the same will happen now. I'm not sure, but I think that Bibi, more than anything else, is cautious. Some would say, afraid to go for very, you know, valiant kind of move.

SACHS: You've known him for many years. You've covered him since he was running in 1996. He was very young then, he was 47 when he became prime minister for the first time and he was then the least experienced Prime Minister ever. He was only a deputy minister before he entered the residence on Balfour Street. His opponent now,

Benny Gantz, would have even less experience in the political sense, although he was chief of staff. But what has happened to Bibi since between 1996 and now his first term then in the '90s was considered a failure in many respects, he lost by a landslide three years later, but now he's won four consecutive times. What's changed? He's obviously aged, as he matured. Do you think something fundamental about him has changed, or not that much?

DAYAN: I think many many things have changed. The most important of which is his decision to take revenge, because when Bibi Netanyahu was elected in May of 1996 after Rabin's assassination and after he defeated Shimon Peres, many people within the Israeli elite, within the liberal elite, within the media, took it as a personal offense. They were hostile to Bibi even before he did anything, before he proved himself this proves that this proved himself. And this, this car became or where it was that car was transformed into a sentiment of resentment of hostility on Bibi's side towards the media and the liberal elite that was building, and building, and building, and after the 2015 election corrupted, and I could, you know, I could feel it personally with this rather violent response that he sent to an investigative piece of it which he calls the extreme left and was very personally and very low and very violent, and that was kind of the watershed mark after which all hell broke loose and Bibi not the media as the enemy of the people or slogan that you know all too well. And it became an asset for him. The fact that media became an asset rather than a liability, because he knew that the base sees it as something that you know that carries the sentiment of the base towards the very same media and this is something that changed yesterday night even tonight in his victory speech in Tel Aviv on the one hand you heard him shining and beaming and you could see him so happy and so proud and rightly so of his amazing achievement. And even, you know, saying something which people expected him to say, look everybody was sure that he would say, I will be the prime minister of all Israelis, Jews and non-Jews, right and left, on the other hand, he could not

you know we could not help it. And he said we won in spite of the hostile media. So, we were you know, again, the enemy. In that regard, he changed and I think that day that change is there to stay. And in that regard, you can see you can you can draw many similar similarities between Bibi's world and Trump's world although these are truly very, very different personas.

SACHS: Yes, it's an interesting one. The two of them as you said are such different personas. Netanyahu is very cautious, he's very studious and erudite, he's a very careful man with a lot of experience. Trump is obviously completely new to politics, or was at least two years ago, and just in temperament a very different person.

DAYAN: And, you know simply, Netanyahu is an intellectual.

SACHS: Yes.

DAYAN: Which, I'm afraid nobody, not even Trump, would say about himself.

SACHS: Perhaps not. He might. But no one else would, I think. And moreover, that I mean even detractors of Netanyahu would not say he is reckless or any of the things that detractors of Trump say. But there is this interesting alliance between them. And the United States obviously, especially on the left side of the political map, there's a very strong sense that Netanyahu is aligned with Trump. He, of course, previously had a very bad relationship with Barack Obama, whom Democrats generally liked, then he seemed to win the battle against Obama since the Iran deal was, the U.S. withdrew from the Iran Deal, Trump did. And now he's very close to Trump and obviously benefits from that in the Israeli sense, and in the Israeli political scene. But Trump is much more popular in Israel than he is in the United States and in the United States and especially among Democrats that can be a problem. Do you think there's much awareness to this in Israel? Or you said earlier that Netanyahu was simply maybe written off the Democratic Party and thinks there's not much future there for Israel anyway so might as well get whatever you can from

Trump? Isn't this a very dangerous strategy going forward in terms of bipartisan support for Israel?

DAYAN: You know, I am trying to imagine middle of the road, the Israelis listening to the conversation, and saying oh well this guy from Brookings Institute, of course he would warn us from —

SACHS: Right.

DAYAN: — from afar to the bipartisan support to Israel in the United States from Bibi's moves with Trump against the Democratic Party, with the evangelic, whatever, Christians in the United States against the others, with Orthodox Jews in Israel against the reform Jews in the U.S. And, I mean, even Bibi supporters would, even Bibi himself, even Bibi himself wouldn't disagree with you that it's better for Israel to get the bipartisan support, and so forth. But, you know, as I see, he takes advantage of his friendship with Trump. I think there's no reason to criticize him for that. Really, I don't. I'm not sure, you know, I'm not sure that Israel is now all forgotten by the other side of the aisle. And I think that some of the statements by the Congressmen or Congresswomen is yet another proof that there is an anti-Israeli sentiment on the other side of the aisle. But, but really Natan it's nothing that many Israelis or most Israelis are too bothered by. And I think you would agree that that day the administration in the U.S. changes, the day Trump's days are over, then there will be another kind of dialogue with Israel by another kind of administration, given that perhaps it will be a Democratic administration. The basic interests are still there, the basic values I hope, I hope are still there. The basic frequency on which the relationship is managed for 70 years now are there. So, it's taken another, you know, another alley in which Trump and Bibi, and another one with Trump, or with Obama and Bibi. Take it another one, with say, what, Beto O'Rourke with Bibi, Joe Biden and Bibi, your guess is as good as mine. Perhaps it will not be Bibi, by the way.

SACHS: It might not. That's right. I want to get to that. Well I'd like to turn now to the domestic scene just a little bit. There are other results of course from this election. Israel has a multiparty system, so it's not just between excuse me Netanyahu and Gantz, but others. Interestingly on the right you already mentioned Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked who were sort of the stars of the right wing. They might not be in the next Knesset. We don't know yet for sure because there are still some absentee ballots from military personnel to come in. They might just get into the Knesset, but there's certainly not a big success like they hope they would be.

And the Labor Party and [ ] party on the left or the left as a whole took a very serious beating especially Labor which is at a historic low. That's the founding party of Israel and is now at historic low. It seems like really, we're left with sort of two major parties, Likud and Blue and White. I wonder what you would make of all that. And, in addition, is Blue and White, you know the figures in Blue and White, all four of the leaders there that party are going to be around for long or is this just a phenomenon for this election to evaporate in a few months?

DAYAN: You know we have that saying from the Talmud that the prophecy was only for the fools.

SACHS: Yeah.

DAYAN: But, by the way, we will know before long because. Because if they start to structure the party, Blue and White, if they start to operate is its true opposition to Bibi, if they start to operate as a team, then we will know that at least they have intentions to stay together, the things can change. So, we'll know before long, and by the way, partly if they all stay together in the opposition and none of them deserts to Bibi's coalition, but that's one thing. The other thing is that the failure or the fiasco Bennett and Shaked the fiasco of this other guy was legalizations taking and was supposed to be the surprise of the elections is what is really amazing and exciting and thrilling with Israeli politics. I think you

seldom find it in other political systems the fact that that the system is robust is right and is helping is curious sees you know things are happening all the time and that's because people thinking they don't take anything for granted. You know that Shaked up until yesterday was on her way to be the prime minister someday. Bennett had, you know, had the plan before the day after Bibi to take over Likud. Both of them were the most successful, the most appreciated the most, you know, the coolest leaders on the right wing. And all of a sudden, they disappear. And, you know, with Labor Party it was a slower and more miserable process. But things happen, and they happen sometimes overnight.

So, the fact that we now have mainly two big parties it could be good news in terms of, as I said before, many Israelis going to the right and the stability of the system when you have sort of more like, more an American-like bipartisan system. It's not there yet because we still have a lot of factions, and because Israeli society is tribal, because you have the Arabs, and the Orthodox, and the secular, and the left, and the right, and the, you know, the left and the right. You need people to be represented, they need their votes to be heard. It's not like we can have only a blue party and a red party. But, but the one thing and I guess we'll get to it toward the end of our conversation, the one thing that we have to ask ourselves is how much of it is Bibi oriented? Everything that is happening now is Bibi oriented. Which means what will happen the day after? Because someday will be the day after.

SACHS: And I'm going to end by pushing you towards a prophecy, nonetheless about when that comes, but just before that a couple of short questions. So, first the point exactly about what you're making, I think if you think of the Likud, the Blue and White, one of the interesting things about this whole election campaigns that going in before Benny Gantz managed to coalesce Blue and White around him, it didn't seem there was a very serious challenge to Netanyahu. Of course, he had the legal issues and that's a major cloud hanging over him still. But it did seem like that Netanyahu was the frontrunner from

day one. And so, to a certain degree, this whole election was a bit of theater, it was almost like the dress rehearsal for the real show. And the real show would be the day after Netanyahu. So, you think of Bennett and Shaked, they left a national religious-based party a modern Orthodox based party, they left that to found what they called the New Right. And the idea was very clear. The idea was to be a right-wing alternative to the Likud, maybe they could merge with the Likud in the future. Maybe they could take over the Likud. And this would be a road for each of them to become prime minister one day. Still to be decided which one would be first, probably Bennett. But instead they found themselves with at best a very small party and possibly both of them out of the Knesset, which is really phenomenal. I mean, if you think of it, they both are very senior posts, Shaked is the Minister of Justice and Bennett the Minister of Education, and they're both out.

Inside the Likud, if you think of many of the characters there, a lot of them are thinking of course about the day after as well. You have people like [ ] who is now probably going to be a senior minister again and others who are vying for the possible day after and the day after. As we saw last night is not going to come from the electorate, but if it comes it would come from the legal issues. So, I'd like to end with just two questions on the legal issue. The first, you're also a legal expert. A lot of the campaign or some of the campaigns certainly by Shaked but also people in the record was about reforming the Supreme Court, changing the structure of the judiciary, and how judges are appointed. What's the prospects of that now? It seems to have robust support in the new right-wing coalition and the new right-wing coalition may be at least as right wing as the outgoing one.

DAYAN: Yes. Again, this is one take on it. The other take would be that the revolution led by Shaked to diminish the effectiveness and the independence of the Supreme Court and of many other gatekeepers of Israeli democracy. This revolution is not to be completed because Shaked will not come back to the Ministry of Justice. Now will we have there another political persona like \_\_\_ Levine or other people from the Likud or the

extreme right who think like her? This might very well be the case. But there are get back to Netanyahu. I think Netanyahu, after everything is said and done, he's a Democrat. And Netanyahu stood by the Supreme Court in many instances in the past when there was another justice minister, his name is Daniel Friedman in the Olmert Administration who tried to launch an offense on the court. I still believe that Netanyahu will not let his new coalition launch another kind of offensive against the Supreme Court. The only thing that can disturb that is his own personal legal problems. And there we get to the very concrete question, will he try to move forward with any kind of initiative on what we call the French law, which means that the Prime Minister cannot be indicted while in office or another interpretation of the immunity law which would mean that his immunity as a member of Knesset will not be lifted because of the intricacies of the legal interpretation?

Will he use his political capital and his majority in the Knesset to stop the indictments? I hope he will not. And I think that two major tests will be presented if it happens. One, is a test to the decent politicians in the right, both within Likud and outside the Likud, from [ ] to Gilad Erdan, from Avigdor Lieberman to [ ], people who have already said that they will not raise their hands in favor of such initiatives which disturb and distort and skew the rule of law in Israel.

The other test will be to be held and to the strength of the legal system itself. Will the Supreme Court stand tall and strong in front of any such initiative? And will Israeli public, and us, by the way, the reporters, the media, the journalists, the gatekeepers of Israeli democracy will go out and say this is a red line? You know the red line in the sand that we will not cross. They will not let anybody cross because if there are such groups suspicious if there are such serious indictments if there is a cloud over suspicions are of grave corruption on the side on the part of the prime minister, this has to be investigated, and this has to go to court. And only the court will decide if Bibi is guilty or innocent. And I

think that Bibi knows that much, he knows that Israeli democracy is stronger even more than him.

SACHS: So, Ilana, thank you so much. I want to end with a question, I'm going to push you to make a prophecy, although as you said prophecy is for fools. A year from now, given the corruption charges, given the question of can he pass or will he pass French law to give himself immunity, do you think Netanyahu will still be prime minister a year from now, or maybe we're speaking just after the elections to the 22nd Knesset, the next Knesset, a year from now in 2020?

DAYAN: If I had to bet, I would bet that be it a year or a year and a half from now, I don't know exactly the day, that the indictments will be served and if not any one way or the other will end his political career and the era of Bibi will come to an end. Buoyed by his indictment or by a plea bargain or any kind of deal which by the way might be the best for everybody by the risks and to avoid the drama that can you know that can be bad for everybody. If I had to bet, this is where I would put my money, but given that we are speaking about the most unexpected, skillful, and amazingly powerful politician that I have known I wouldn't.

SACHS: Yeah, I have to say I certainly wouldn't bet. But if I had to. That would be my guess as well. But I would just say, I think there are a lot of people on the left and also in the United States who are sort of yearning for this day after Netanyahu and thinking that his replacement will be the polar opposite of him. And I don't think that's the case either. My best bet, and it's a very weak one, but my best bet would be that probably Netanyahu era will end sometime soon, but that his replacement would still be from the Likud, and that the basic era of Likud dominance that is not nearly over, I think.

DAYAN: But I'll give you, I'll give you before we say goodbye, I will give you the most optimistic take on what happened tonight in Israel. Given that Netanyahu knows that he is on the threshold, of the last year, a couple of years in power, given that he has

proven anything that needs to be proven in terms of his political skills and abilities, perhaps he will seize the moment, perhaps he will, you know, catch history by the coattail and say, now I can make the dramatic \_\_\_\_, now I can go ahead and become part of history, now I can take my car, drive up to the \_\_\_\_ in Ramallah, meet Abu Mazen or whoever we can meet there, and say let's, let's talk. We can talk. I can deliver. You can deliver. We can try to change history. Can it happen? God knows.

SACHS: Well, since we're not supposed to agree too much on podcasts, I'll leave our disagreement for the very last end. I think Netanyahu, I say this actually with some appreciation for what he's achieved in the last year and a half, at least from his perspective, which is to say until Trump came into the White House, Netanyahu was facing Clinton, and then facing Obama—Bill Clinton and then facing Barack Obama. Presidents who were not predisposed to like him, shall we say. And he was not predisposed to liking them. And, in that sense, he was always on defense. So he could tell his voters that he had kept Israel safe or withstood pressure from abroad. But there was very little he could show as legacy. The last year and a half, two years, have really changed that. He now can talk about the embassy in Jerusalem, about the Golan Heights, about the Iran nuclear deal, and it goes, the list goes on and on. And so, my best guess of what Netanyahu will do is that he will be Netanyahu, and that he will see these as great achievements, historic achievements, and fall very short of what, you know, what other people might have done which is, you know, a grand move towards the \_\_\_\_ and Ramallah.

DAYAN: But I've got to give you, I'll give you one legacy that none of us can take away from him. You didn't mention, and, and forgive my sentimentality. But I'm saying that as a mother of three children, all of whom have underwent military service. The last July almost 500 rockets fell on the southern part of Israel, were launched from Gaza. I don't see any other politician who would take it and swallow it and don't start any kind of military operation. And understand that there's nothing to gain from an escalation towards Hamas,

and we can only lose and lose in terms of lives of Israeli young men and women. And Netanyahu used this political capital to avoid an unnecessary war, and he talked about it last night, and he talked about it during the campaign. As hawkish as he is he is the one politician that I can think of in the current Israeli scene that will be able to avoid the pressure from within to go to war. For me, this his most important legacy.

SACHS: It is a major one. I couldn't agree more. And I think it's the flipside of exactly his caution on peace, or diplomacy, etc. It's also caution on war. He's so hawkish that people don't notice sometimes that with such a long tenure, he's one of the least trigger-happy prime ministers Israel has had. He's gone to one major conflict, the last conflict in Gaza, and that was a conflict he did not want, he was dragged into it by mistakes, including his own. But in all these years, that's the only major conflict. Compare that to Prime Ministers, some of them had three, four years in office, and they already had a war there. And, in this sense, his legacy is very important too. A former senior aide of his one said to me, his legacy is intertwined with his ability to keep the overall quiet, more or less, of course, it's not a perfect quiet. But to keep things quiet and allow Israel to flourish, etc. under it. So, his bad side and his good side are props connected very intimately.

Ilana, I want to thank you very much for joining us. And thank you for all your wonderful work at Uvda in the years of investigative journalism. And it's been fascinating to talk to you. I hope we can do it again soon. So, thank you again.

DAYAN: It's been a pleasure. Thank you, Natan. Bye bye.

SACHS: Bye bye.

(MUSIC)

DEWS: The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues including audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. The producers Chris McKenna and Brennan Hoban. Bill Finan, the Director of the Brookings Institution Press, does the book interviews. And Eric Abalain

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Until next time I'm Fred Dews.