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ISRAEL'S OVERLAPPING CRISES

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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NATAN SACHS: Good morning, all. Thank you very much for joining us for this very timely panel on Israel's overlapping crises. I'm truly delighted to be joined in this panel by three excellent speakers on the topic. We're delighted to host guest host here is Ilana Dayan, one of Israel's most preeminent journalists. She is the anchorwoman of the fact for many years one of the most important investigative journalism of venues in Israel. She's also a doctor of law from Yale, has taught constitutional law, which is extremely relevant these days in Israel and is really one of the deans of Israeli journalism. Alongside Ilana, we also have two of my own colleagues here at Brookings, nonresident senior fellow Shibley Telhami, who is also Anwar Sadat chair at the University of Maryland. He is a preeminent expert on public opinion in the U.S., but also in the region and certainly in Israel and the Palestinian territories and elsewhere. And a long time a pillar of our program here at Brookings. Shibley, welcome. And one of our newest nonresident senior fellows, Amos Harel who's joining us from Israel as well, the most is the senior defense analyst for Haaretz newspaper in Israel and a long time dean really of defense journalism in Israel. He is also the author and coauthor of books about the Second Intifada, the Second Lebanon War and the changes in the IDF. Amos It's wonderful to have you join us. Thanks for joining. I'm going to turn first to Ilana. But before that, I'd like to note that a lot has happened. It's hard to imagine. It's just been a week of so much, so many events. But doesn't last 24 hours. President Biden has said the strongest words he has yet about this issue. He has noted to Reuters that Israel cannot continue down this road and has hoped that Netanyahu would shelve his proposals. He has also clarified words that the ambassador to Israel has said and clarified that Netanyahu will not be invited to the White House in the short term. We saw Nathaniel come out with a very late night statement in reply. When we get to that, certainly, Shibley I'll turn to you very soon. Ilana I'll turn to you first, though, if I may. Could you tell us a little bit about this moment? You took an extraordinary step on that does investigative journalism venue. As I said, you've never had any personal views on it. You broke that. You said this is a different moment. Can you tell us a little bit? As an Israeli, as a journalist, as a legal scholar, what's different?

ILANA DAYAN: It is a constitutional moment, perhaps the only one we had ever since 1948, which was a moment of grace in which the state of Israel was founded. No constitution was established that the Declaration of Independence was written according to which this is a Jewish, democratic, liberal democracy. And all of a sudden there is an assault on our democratic institutions, on the supremacy of the judiciary in this country, on human rights and minority rights. And that is what brought me the other day, a couple of weeks ago, to deliver this monologue and to that which was even though it was something that I never did, I never imagined I would do. I always believe that our duty is to bring the news rather than abuse my duty, at least. Of course, I appreciate any other journalist who does otherwise, but for me it was both rare and natural. It was all of a sudden very natural and very obvious to me that I have to speak my mind because I have to speak my mind and that it goes along with everything I believe a journalist has to do in terms of defending democracy, in terms of defending our profession, in terms of defending the profession of this country, as I see it, and also from a very personal place. I was not born in this country. I was born in Argentina. My parents came here because of Zionism. But as I said, they stayed here because it was the most perfect place on earth for us to live in and also for my kids. And they all intend to build their homes here and straight homes and gay homes, but very Israeli homes. And I said that they know how to spot my up, my fake optimism from my house, and they can tell that I am not as optimistic as I always was, because in our readers, a couple of lines for me because. Because I don't believe when they say that everything is going to be okay. And because as this process moves forward, I believe that the rights of gay women are oppressed colors to people and eventually Orthodox and others will be harmed. And how do I know that? Because I believe most of what's in the head of the judiciary and Yariv Levin, the Minister of justice, I believe what they say. And because a regime that insists on appointing counsel so that they will not count, insists on appointing judges according to the politics and insists on cutting the wings just in case, insists on enacting laws which cannot be overruled and denies human liberties that we cannot live without. That kind of regime would take us to a place no democracy has ever come back and live from. Now, the prime minister on Monday evening suspended. Stopped. Delay death legislation. Amos wrote yesterday that he's in the habit of turning one crisis into another rather than solving it. There is a lack of confidence between the two camps that I'm sure will talk about and most of all, and that

will be my closing remark. Most of all, I think that even if there is a compromise, even if there is some kind of modification of this legislation, these people who are leading this process in leading this country have already been exposed for what they are. And they see liberal democracy as. Perhaps a threat to this country or anyway, they don't see the future of this democracy the way many of us do. And and that's where I that's why I cannot tell you the time that I'm very optimistic. Not today.

NATAN SACHS: Thank you. I'm going to come back to you in a moment for a little bit of the detail of why it is what's so special about the the legal changes. But but simply, I'd like to jump to you now. We heard Biden's words. This seems remarkable. Is it really remarkable? What does it say about the Biden administration and its approach to Israel, but also to this particular crisis? And if could tell us a word about the background, not just the administration itself, but public opinion, Congress opinion.

ILANA DAYAN: Yeah. Thank you so much, first of all, for holding this nuts on. And I'm really happy to join with my colleagues. Look, I mean, this is a really an important moment for Biden, particularly for Biden. And I say that because it doesn't measure up to the moment, let's say, of James Baker withholding loan guarantees to Israel because it's not action related at the moment. It's mostly words. But the messaging is extraordinary, particularly as every side is waging a battle of narrative. And now this plays into a very significant battle of narratives that has taken place. As you know, Biden has been far more sympathetic with Israel, far more reluctant to criticize Israel, even during the Gaza fighting than his Democratic constituency, than Democrats in Congress. We have seen this in the public opinion poll. Many Democrats have been critical of his overly embracing Israeli policies that seemed objectionable from a lot of points of views. We've seen how Democrats have shifted dramatically and the public opinion polls have been doing over years, how they become increasingly more sympathetic with the Palestinians. We've seen the most recent Gallup poll, which showed for the first time in all the years of polling, Democrats sympathize more with the Palestinians than with Israel. So and they see Biden to be far more pro-Israel than they are in the polling. So this is important. This is obviously a context in which it's taken place. Now, when Biden came to office, Biden didn't think he had to deal with this. And honestly, to be fair to him. He had his hands full. And then you have the Russian invasion of Ukraine to boot and you got so much on your plate that he clearly wanted to do the minimum on this issue. Not not you know, it's sort of more of a crisis management reverse some of the things that Trump did, but not overly that and keep peace with Israel. He didn't want to take on any Israeli government. Now, things have changed so fundamentally that even Biden is speaking out. I mean, that's the point to make here, that even Biden finds himself in a position where he has to speak out. And and obviously, that is a shift in sentiment, not just, you know, in in his administration and probably getting a little bit more heat from Congress. But obviously, the American Jewish community, which has been very much disturbed by what's happening. So people who typically may have urged him to be far more lenient with Israel may be urging him exactly the opposite right now within his constituency. So, yes, that's a dramatic change. Now, whether or not he will go beyond that is questionable, whether or not this will become, let's say, will he stop shielding the Israeli government in international organizations like the U.N., as he did just last month? That's a debatable question, but but it does impact the narrative and it shows something. Look, the headline today in Politico over his democracy, that is Biden's democracy conference is, quote, Netanyahu, the skunk in Biden's democracy party, unquote. Now that that message that that picture, that those words is good are conveying something, you know, really dramatic in the public shift, the policy shift, I should say, not the policy shift, but the narrative shift that obviously ultimately could have an impact on policy.

NATAN SACHS: Thanks so much, Ali. We'll come back to this question. Amos, you were quoted yesterday in The New York Times by Tom Friedman talking about the major crisis in the military and in the Israeli military. And it is very worth dwelling on this for a while, because the instigation, for the most dramatic moment, the nightly enormous demonstrations in Israel, was the firing, perhaps firing of the minister of defense, and which came after warnings for the minister of defense and after pretty widespread threats by reservists not to show up for training and for reserve duty, which is a line that I don't remember being crossed in Israel, certainly not in such numbers. Can

you tell us a little bit about the mood in the military and the brass at the top of the military and the Ministry of Defense? Where does it stand at the moment? Who is the minister of defense? I believe it's still going on. Will that be for long? Give us shed some light on what's happening there.

AMOS HAREL: Okay. Thank you for inviting me. Well, the Israeli society has a huge place for military service. It's always discussed. It's always part of your CV. It's something that you're judged for 50, 40, 60 years later. Think of Netanyahu still using that card of statement card of the unit that his brother commanded and died for it on tap in 1976. And this might look exaggerated to Americans or Europeans, but Israelis still love their troops. And when it comes to elite fighters like pilots, they actually admire them. And I think the protest movement understood that very, very quickly and quite spontaneously tried to use that the threats of refusal as an attempt to apply pressure on the government. And this is what really, really turned the attention to the movement, maybe more than other warnings or other threats. I'd say it's one of the top three with the economic situation and the potential economic economic damages. And what's happening with the Biden administration. So this became a big deal very, very quickly. It's not as if the want conscientious objectors in the past. This happened during the first intifada and mainly around the first Lebanon war. By the way, the atmosphere in the streets sometimes reminds me of that period of 82 to 84 or something like that. But I think this is probably going to get worse. So if we look at the meaning of all of this, I think what the pilots managed to do and the pilots were leading the way, there are other units joining in by now. They managed to put themselves as the real patriots fighting against the right wing. And also one more important trick, if you'd like to be used was reclaiming the flag. The fact that all of those rallies everybody's carrying the Israeli flag with the star of David is quite amazing. Thinking back to the period where the left was blamed of being pro-Palestinian or cooperating with the Palestinians and so on. Secondly, this has had an immediate effect on the Air Force and especially its preparedness, because the Air Force, unlike other branches of the military, relies on maintaining the reserve pilots as though they're the backbone of the of the service and they're the most experienced and are actually they actually remain active. They train once a week every week. And they're also part of many Air Force activities like the strikes you see in Syria and so on. And this is a fact that the Air Force already and there's a big fear among the chief officers that this would actually really affect the airport's preparedness for a full scale war, which is, of course, the biggest deal. I should also note we are not really. Of course, Netanyahu called them refusers or refuseniks, but this is actually volunteering, especially as pilots. Nobody would force you if you're 40 or 45, if you decide to resign and nobody would force you to to fly dangerous missions. I should also say that the reserves in the Army are less important than they were before the war. A part of them are more subplot and symbolic. If you go back to Ben-gurion's doctrine regarding the military, it was based on the assumption that the irregular units would block a strike from foreign Arab armies. Well, wait until the reserves appear and then the reserves would help win the war. This is what happened in 73. By now, only one and a half percent of Israelis actually serve in active reserve duty. So it's not as big deal as it was before, except two important branches of the army, which are the Air Force and the intelligence courts. And in those two branches. There's a big part of reservists who are also now refusing. Everybody knows that those people would come once a real war starts. But the question is, what happens if something in between happens, let's say, some kind of conflict with Hezbollah? Will those people who declare the group refuse to appear? Will they actually believe Netanyahu's good intentions believed in the Vienna? I was only defending the country. I'm not looking for some kind of a political maneuvering to get him to get himself out of the current situation. It remains to be seen, but it's quite frightening. Going back to the Gallant affair, I think Sunday was you, not to mention that before Sunday, and you did, too. Sunday was the, I think, the most dramatic height of the crisis up till now. Maybe Biden's. Duration yesterday is more important than the long run, but the fact that he was actually willing Netanyahu was actually willing to fire Gallant under these circumstances after gunmen warned him about the situation at large and also the situation among the reserve soldiers. This, you know, this cut to the heart of the matter. And this is why hundreds of thousands of people who are on the streets, I can tell you that all three of my kids who were marching and protesting that evening and other evenings as well. And I think that, you know, again, I'll reveal my age here. I'm slightly older than you and slightly younger than the other panelists here. But I don't think any of us, since we're not the 48 generation, I don't think any of us have seen such an atmosphere in Israel or something

so dramatic. And 48 we were not there for 48. But this is the biggest thing that happened since 48. We'll have to see how it plays out. But in London, I mean, we took the text of each other yesterday, are slightly more optimistic than she is. I may be unrealistic about this, but I think what I saw on the streets, although it's violent and frightening, I also saw a huge belief in the future of Israel among many young people who came to demonstrate. And this this gives me hope that this could end, but perhaps slightly better than we thought.

NATAN SACHS: Okay, since we're doing Snake, let me follow up with a short question and hopefully short answer. The Pentagon relationship with the IDF is a core element of the U.S. Israel relationship. There's, of course, enormous aid, but there's also very close cooperation, and particularly now with Israel joining the CENTCOM, Central Command, American Central Command area operations. How is that relationship been affected by this as much happened there? What's the reaction been from Americans dealing with the idea?

AMOS HAREL: It hasn't affected deeply yet, but you have to remember, Gallant, the moment Gallant was appointed as defense minister, that was late December. Once the government was sworn in, Gallant was the great white hope for the American administration. Biden administration had deep fears about people like Smotrich and being green, of course, and were also suspicious of Netanyahu's comeback, although very surprised by the fact that it went so far to such extremes. And Gallant was the point of contact. He was their man, so to speak. He was the man to do business with. And during the last two or three months, you saw how gallant almost immediately stepped into Benny Gantz shoes. The same guy it goes all the way back to of being those generals who spent time in Washington in the past speak by Israeli standards. Good English know that the terrain can speak in the same kind of terms as the American generals. This is the context is almost immediate, and the friendship was almost immediate. And they were totally surprised that, in fact, the director general of the NGO, the general, he has a meal, just arrived in Washington on Sunday evening. He got the news the Karen was fired and took the first plane back to Israel. This is only goes to show you how serious the matters are. Having said all that, it's not even clear if government is fired because they always announced that on Sunday in an official statement. But he never bothered to send them the letter. And by Israeli law, it takes 48 hours once you get the letter to actually fire you, to actually force you to leave office. So golf is still on purpose and still attending the same meetings with Netanyahu. In spite of everything else. This seems like an episode of Seinfeld, but this is where we are right now.

NATAN SACHS: Thank you. Ms.. Okay. I'd like to circle back and ask you to wear your legal hat for a moment. What's the big deal in the United States? The judges are appointed by the president, confirmed by Senate. Sometimes it's a state party and often isn't. Isn't this a lot of a lot of noise over some small, minor changes in some committee somewhere?

ILANA DAYAN: Everything they say that's here that in the United States it's political appointees A come to think about gun control, about abortions, about so many things in America including obesity that they wouldn't wanting for it to this country. But to go to the point, Nathan, it's it's a constitutional moment in the sense that history melds into structure and architecture. It's not only that Israel needs the judiciary as the fortress, the only fortress, not only the last borders, the only fortress to operate to function is checks and balances to government. It's the check and the balance. The Supreme Court is all of the above. That is why. Because we don't have a written constitution, because we don't have two chambers of parliament, because we don't have a federal system of government, because we don't have a president with executive powers. That is why the Supreme Court is almost a sacred monument of Israel's liberal democracy, which were not. For the Supreme Court. We wouldn't have had equality for women. We wouldn't have had fighter pilots, female fighter pilots in the military. We would not have had any kind of gay rights, all of gay rights in Israel. That the prime minister is always so proud of. Our case law made our judge made law. We wouldn't have had that the right of defendants for lawyer. And the fact that the government has no permission or the judiciary has no permission to negate a lawyer. We would have had most human rights that are really enshrined and written and protected by case law in Israel. And this is the reason for which the plan to smash the Supreme Court, to make it political, to make

appointments to the Supreme Court, political, to make sure that only a very special majority within the court can make or can apply judicial review on the constitutionality of the laws to make sure that laws that are justifying basic laws are immune from any kind of judicial review. And then to smash the authority of legal councils to make their advice, you know, not mandatory and not, you know, not binding the ministers or the government in any shape or form, and then to split the job of the attorney general and then to appoint the prosecutor general might, God knows, perhaps decide that you have to abolish the indictments against maybe the prime minister who's indicted nowadays. So if you ask me, this is not, you know, minor reform. It is not minor changing the balance between the judiciary and the legislative branch. It is an overhaul. It is a revolt against it is a this, you know, an attempt of assassinating Israelis, liberal democracy, no less. So this is big news. It's no small news. The good news and I'm jumping on what I must said is that there is a liberal camp that all of a sudden awakened any say no more. But there's another news. And by the way, there is a there's a broad agreement that there might be a broad agreement. Okay. If you ask Israelis, by and large, if you ask the guy downstairs, the cab driver, the guy at the grocery store, even those are mainly those who voted for this government. Many of those who tell you we don't want this kind of reform, we don't want what's happening in the streets. We want it otherwise, we want it milder and we want it to happen according to broad agreement and consensus. But. When you ask me what's the big deal? I'm afraid that by now. The process then. This social rift that we've been experiencing for the last three months that has left its marks and it exposed much deeper rifts within Israeli society. I'm also talking about the fighter pilots using their leverage. They don't refuse. They just they will not volunteer. And and again, it's like I don't know what legitimate is is problematic in Israel when you talk about military service that services as a mosque that is so sacred and so highly cherished in Israeli society. But let's say that the fighter pilots understood that they have the power in a mosque, wrote the last Friday, it looks like ages ago, last Friday, on average, if Israel will be saved and if Israeli democracy will be saved, many Israelis will owe a lot to these fighter pilots and to this intelligence officers who said that they will not come to service. And and I interviewed a couple of weeks ago the former head of Shin Bet Network, a man, and he said that the same will happen within the Shabak, within the Shin Bet, within the security services. And he said, we serve. The country we don't serve achieve. This is how far it has gotten. But a development of the last couple of days, the last 24 hours, a group of mechanics within the Air Force reservists wrote a letter and they say we. Are against the fighter pilots. We are the ones who make sure that they have a plane to go. We are the ones that make sure that the plane is fixed and is ready to go. We are the ones without whom they cannot fly anywhere and we don't agree with it. But they say more than that. They are up here and we are down there. And this is a variation on a subject on which Netanyahu has built much of his political career. The sense of many Israelis that they were left behind, that they were marginalized, that they are the underprivileged. Now, does it have anything to do with the reform? Not much, because the reform is not there to fix any of those social gaps. Right. But it exposes the social group and those who are going to the streets are mainly the haves and not the have nots. And those who are refusing are the fighter pilots and the intelligence officers, the privileged ones. They were also people from the first Israel and not the second Israel. Again, many people capitalized on that rift and Netanyahu knows how to use that. And he spoke about it even last Sunday, last Monday. But you have to bear in mind the scar is really the sentiment is authentic. The feeling among many Israelis might be if the reform is indeed stopped, that their vote doesn't count and they are frustrated once again that they voted for the right and they got left wing policy. So that is something that we have to bear in mind. That is why I think it is the interests of all of us to make sure that some consensus somehow, somewhere, sometime is reached. The problem is the future of democracy cannot really be split. You cannot have half democracy, a quarter of democracy, one eighth of a democracy. This is the problem. And I'm thinking about it so much. I think that all of us have to reach out. But how it can be done, What would be the details of such a compromise? And will it be enough to patch now those deep and historical rifts and frustrations that were exposed? I'm afraid it will not be.

NATAN SACHS: So I'm going to get you in a moment. But but Shibley, we're talking about deep breath among Jewish Israelis and a sense of second Israel first Israel among Jewish Israelis. Of course, 20% of Israeli citizens are non-Jewish. And where do they stand? Where do Arab citizens of Israel stand in this reform? I think you're still muted.

SHIBLEY TELHAMI: Thanks. Let me start actually where my colleagues ended, which is. Yes. Among Jewish Israelis, you can argue that liberals have awakened. I mean, that is a very obvious here. But here's the reality of it. Liberals, even if they're awakened among Jewish Israelis, have absolutely no electoral chance without the Arab citizens of Israel. Absolutely no chance. I mean, look at the trends. Look at the public opinion among Jewish heretic Arab Israelis out of the game. And you have a solid right wing majority no matter how you look at politics in Israel. Even with this awakened liberalism. And yet they're not even part of the picture of this conversation, let alone the Palestinians, obviously, in the West Bank and Gaza. Put that aside for just a second, because I don't think we can afford to put that aside, because there are, you know, we're ignoring that reality. But so why are why aren't Arabs out there in large numbers? They are Arabs who are joining Jews. And sometimes some of the Jewish rallies are hospitable to ours, but many have not really taken efforts to invite them or cultivate them. The language of the discourse has not been oriented towards them, and many of them feel, you know, not in the sense so what what is keeping them out? And I think there are a number of things that we really need to keep in mind. And we're talking only about those who hold Israeli citizenship. We're not talking about Palestinians under Israeli occupation. First, I think there's you know, a lot of the liberal discourse is about, you know, retaining what they think is an Israeli democracy, which is the status quo that preceded the crisis, that preceded the rise of this. To them, that is not a full democracy for them. A lot of the grievances they've had, they continue to have and many things have gotten worse in the past few years for them. And so in a way, you know, defending the status quo is not a particularly thing they want to do. They think they need to go beyond the status quo. And they fear that there is a kind of a legitimation of the status quo if this crisis is averted. Number two, they don't see the Supreme Court exactly in the same way. There's no question the Supreme Court has a lot of said has protected a lot of rights, including in many cases related to Arabs, but has not always been friendly to the Arabs and the Arab issues, in part because the Supreme Court focuses on narrow legal issues and that does not overcome the structural discrimination in the system. For example, with regard to, let's see, house demolitions were legally. The Supreme Court can say, well, the law says, you know, this is illegal, but that doesn't capture the fact that many Arabs cannot build houses because of zoning policies that were restricted, their ability to build homes and so forth. So they don't see and very often they find the Supreme Court has ruled against them. And so in that sense, they don't feel quite as attached to it, even though many understand that it's obviously better to have it than not they're better off with the Supreme Court that we're not. Nonetheless, they don't have the same attachment. Third, they, you know, see hundreds of thousands of Israelis, which is really incredible. I mean, this is unprecedented. Those of us who obviously all of us who watch this, this is incredible. I mean, it is something, you know, to to come to grips with. It's that we it's like like the Israeli spring, so to speak. You know, it's it's that kind of that kind of momentum that you see. But, look, people ask, where were these hundreds of thousands when the nation state law was passed in 2018, which obviously. Substantially restricted Israeli democracy for the Arabs. So you only defending, you know, the threat to Jewish democracy. There were some demonstrations, in some cases reportedly up to 25,000 people, but nothing on this scale. Where were the the key victim of the nation state law where the Arabs and people weren't out there? And if you want to take it one step further, just think about. Now, the pause that Netanyahu announced, let's assume it's not a pause that it really ends, that he's not going to do it anymore. Okay. So what is what has he done in order to get his supporters to do it? It came at the expense of Palestinians, Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestinians in Israel. Because if, in fact, he is giving ben-gvir this National Guard, which is essentially zone militia, which is principally going to be aimed at Arabs, they're going to see it as coming at their at their expense. And you're not going to have hundreds of thousands of people if you just to say, announce tomorrow, I'm going to pull this, I'm going to stop the the the change, the the judicial upheaval. And I'm going to instead allow Ben-gvir to have his own National Guard. You're not going to have hundreds of thousands of Jews demonstrating because the Arabs are going to be frustrated or feel like they're threatened by it. So that's it. That's it. That's a reality. And this, of course, doesn't touch on the fact that this whole upheaval about democracy. Is this completely discounting any voice for Palestinians under occupation? There's a bubble in Tel Aviv, and that bubble maybe is burst a little bit now. But the but the bubble is to think of Israel in Israel, Israeli democracy strictly in 1967, Israel, when in fact the state has been

dominating all the territories. And and, you know, you could think, okay, but the Palestinians under temporary occupation. Well, it's lasted most of a century, and it's a military occupation, military rule over people's lives. They were half of the population altogether when you had the Palestinians on both sides of the green line, at least half of the population and completely voiceless in all of this, they have no voice. So that's part of the reason why, you know, Palestinian Israelis are alienated. Now, many of them understand that it's still better off to win this battle that is Jewish liberals are fighting to to stop, you know, the judicial change. Of course, they understand this is going to be worse for them. Bad as things are, they can get worse for them and many of them want to stop it. But they fear that the cost of stopping it will come at their expense anyway. So you have all this, you know, tension going on. I want to add one more thing, if I may, just just for this. I'm just thinking about it intellectually a little bit more. Somebody who studied Jewish history, studied Arab history, studied Palestinian history. And I look at that and I say to myself, you know, you know, I understand that the pain of Jewish intellectuals, the Jews in Europe who wanted to assimilate the word military and who are not mostly highlighting the Jewish identity in a liberal environment in many parts of Europe in the 19th century. And obviously the the rise of nationalism and anti-Semitism forced them to focus on, you know, the way other people define them. And and that generated a completely different momentum, both for Jews and and the environment in which they exist. And I look at Arabs inside Israel, the assimilationist and there are many and you could see people in voting. They want to. They want to yeah, it's an imperfect democracy, but they want to make it more perfect. They want to participate. The public opinion is on that side. You find people going in. You find businesspeople who are integrated, people who want to be part of this state, even with all the restrictions that are going on there. But everything that has happened in Israel over the past decade has gone away from that, forcing them to focus more on their non-Jewish Arab identity. And that is and that's what the what the nation state law did into, you know, in 2018. And look at, for example, at the Druze, who who serve in the Israeli military, who were considered themselves to be part and parcel of the state, how they reacted to the fact that you have this and now obviously with the far right in Israel being driving the vehicle of government, I think this is this is really a dark moment. No matter what the outcome of this judicious judicial battle will be.

NATAN SACHS: Thanks so much. Amos over to you. And in particular, if we could touch on on the ban the militias, if indeed it happened, but elucidate a little bit what that means yet.

AMOS HAREL: One point that I'd like to add to what the Ilana's spoken about, the whole issue of the two armies within the IDF as a reflection of the first Israel and the second Israel. Of course, everything L.A. described is absolutely true and the sentiments are there and the scars from the past are there. And it's very, very clear that Netanyahu is playing with fire. They're trying to ignite the fire in order to incite one part of the Israeli public against the other. But the interesting thing is that even this letter by the mechanics may be a spin. It's not really clear how many of those mechanics are actually reservists or serve in those particular roles. And there's an even more interesting scandal right now, because two days ago there was an interview, a radio interview that went viral. And Drew actually drove the interviewer to tears when supposedly a former Air Force mechanic who deals with fighter planes described his ordeal under those conditions, Ashkenazi pilots, elite pilots and so on. It turned out that the guy was at the commission in an Iron Dome battery and never, never served as a reservist and never saw an airplane from anywhere nearby. So, again, people are using, of course, all kinds of spins and all kinds of engineering.

NATAN SACHS: But if I can just push in for a moment of this, nonetheless, though, the weapon of we won't show up, although volunteering and not actually refusing. That's a good point. But the perception of refusing to participate in common defense. Doesn't that open a Pandora's box?

AMOS HAREL: Of course it comes later, people. And when you ask the pilots, we say, Yeah, we're absolutely sure that this is the case, but also this is the doomsday weapon. But this is the doomsday scenario we're fighting to serve to to save Israeli democracy. And if we don't fight this by any means necessary right now, then we will lose this battle. And there's no point in fighting the next one because Israel would no longer be a democracy, as we know. Of course, it's a slippery

slope, but the left should be bothered not only by what's happening right now, but it's actually giving a sort of a green light to the right to use the same means and methods. For instance, when if there's a miracle happens in one day in the future, we discuss the possibility of evacuating even one illegal outpost, not to mention settlement blocks and and so on. The right wing would be happy to jump on the wagon in that case, because there's a precedent now. And that happened. And we have to admit, the mainstream media has more or less supports that. Going back to your question, it's hard to tell. We've been through, I suspect in the end that he's not much more than a troll. He's this was his whole political career for 30 years of his media career was very, very good at operating the media. He's a Kahana student, of course, but a Kahana follower. But the guy has never run anything. He ran a small lawyer's office, which was its main role, was defending all kinds of extreme Jewish right wingers or terrorists. He has no business in running the police or being in charge of the police. And he's way you know, he's he's very, very far from performing something similar to anything we've seen in the past. And we've seen better ministers and worse ministers. But this is nothing we've seen before. Netanyahu, under extreme pressure from Denville during the current global crisis, promised him that he would have his National Guard. Now, this is an old problem, as it was discussed three months ago when the coalition was founded and it was discussed two years ago after the the events, if you remember, on the Arab channels, the riots in the Arab towns during the latest operation in Gaza in May 2021. Now what he wants is his own private militia and more or less to Netanyahu's letter, promises him something that will be under his control. It remains to be seen whether there's a budget for this, whether there are volunteers, wherever there are actual units that can be established, this being Israel and this being the Middle East, it could turn out to be an empty promise. But this is frightening, especially because we saw those same Bengal gangs on the streets of Tel Aviv in Jerusalem in recent days, and they were listening to dog whistles. They were actually getting messages, whether it was from Netanyahu Junior or from Bengaluru or from others on the extreme right. And there were messages, those dog whistles, that some people understood as a sort of a green light to go on and attacked leftists. And this is what happens on Israeli streets. Look, I wouldn't be surprised. It's mostly football gangs, football followers who are organized and all kinds of gangs are looking for violence. I wouldn't be surprised if somebody is severely injured or even dies on the streets of Israel in the next few days because of what's happening around this, because of all of this incitement.

NATAN SACHS: Most you mentioned before that this reminds you of the early eighties. And in the early eighties, people were killed.

AMOS HAREL: In 83, in February, 83.

NATAN SACHS: Ilan, I want to I want to touch again on this this sort of rift and the very first instance of trying to maybe bring about some kind of resolution to the rift is the negotiations that have just started at the president's residence in Jerusalem between the coalition and the opposition. Correct me if I'm wrong on substance, I think there's definitely room for compromise, certainly between Gideon Sale was now in the opposition, but used to be a senior minister from the Likud and I think many others in the opposition and the Likud. But if I'm wrong about this too, there is so little trust, and it's not completely clear that the negotiations are in good faith. What would what would these negotiations look like from a legal perspective and a social perspective? Do you see much chance for their success?

ILANA DAYAN: No, I don't. And I'm afraid that's because of lack of confidence just today. There was a news report that the Minister of Justice who led all these judicial overrule, he texted with a supporter of his and he said, I am ready to pass this legislation in the next term of the Knesset. We will make sure that people from within our camp don't disturb and we are on the streets as well.

NATAN SACHS: Just to clarify, the next term means in the summer it's the Knesset.

ILANA DAYAN: Not in you know, not in the very far future. So so you have that and you have the people on the protest were simply said before. It's something amazing. It's nothing that we've seen ever even what we remember. Those of us who still remember in the days after the first Lebanon

war and after the massacre in the camps of Sabra and Shatila. It's nothing like anything we've seen before. So and those people who are on the streets and their leadership, which is not one leadership, is not someone to deal with. There is no one leadership. So the real opposition, the real opposition is not in the Knesset. These is on the streets. That is why I don't I cannot tell you where it's going. I can tell you something that I that I have in mind. And it has to do with what I'm also saying about Itamar, because it goes deeper than that, the militia and that and the fact that Netanyahu, during 10 hours of Monday, last Monday, didn't go to the public because he was dealing with them, because he had to make sure that he doesn't need his coalition, because without Bender, he doesn't have a coalition. What does it mean? It means that Qana was normalized, that the very, very extreme, far right, the far right that is racist, that these fascists, that these might lead us to an apartheid. A country is normalized now. And that brings me to the even more, more pessimistic thought that what we are seeing nowadays is really a fight between the land of Tel Aviv and the land of Jerusalem. You know, they say about Tel Aviv that sometimes it is straight standing. Because it is so gay friendly. Tel Aviv is the epicenter of Israeli freedom of the Israeli gay community, of of feminism, of human liberties. And Jerusalem is the place where you have the Orthodox universe. And nowadays this is what you see. It's not only left and right, it's it's secular and orthodox. Israelis is Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. And. And. And what I'm thinking, what are we almost like three weeks before the Independence Day and the Memorial Day, three weeks and a half weeks. And I'm thinking about the fact that the Amazon is the famous Israeli author once wrote that Israel is a federation of mistakes, that the people who came to this country and Shibley, just to mention those Jews that wanted to assimilate and didn't want any kind of Zionist sovereignty, that you had those and you had those who came here and dreamt of rebuilding the Kingdom of David, and you had those who dreamt of reconstructing the state of from the diaspora, and you had those who wanted to bring here or to build here socially to the kibbutz, and somehow it all ended up together. Somehow we managed to hold it together. Until it didn't. And this is what's happening nowadays, that all of a sudden these ties, which were fragile to begin with, are starting to tear apart. And it goes much deeper than think there's militia or really Bolivians reform. It goes to the essence of Israeli society. I am optimistic only in the sense that I think, first of all, I believe in the Israeli gene of democracy in our DNA, which, by the way, in the place that I was born in Argentina, is everything other than this gene. And the second thing is the sense of common destiny. That most of us still have. That is the one thing that can save us. Plus, one more thing that has to do with the near future. It is something that Netanyahu knows very well. It's the limit of power when it comes to international. A fence. He was always very cautious in applying force, in starting wars, in going into military adventures. This time around, he was not as cautious when it came to an internal adventure. Perhaps he was led to it. Perhaps it was a combination of his personal interest vis a vis his trial and his partner's interests in all sorts of other orthodox or for rights agendas. Anyway, he was led to this dead end, and I believe that his government and perhaps any future government will be from now on much more cautious, much more careful in the use of its power, because the Israelis have proved in these last three months that they know how to fight for the future, for their kids, for themselves and for their democracy.

NATAN SACHS: Thank you so much, Ilana. Simply, you know, we were just Ilana just touched on the international scene and you obviously follow most of the regional news and speak very frequently to regional leaders. The Abraham Accords several years ago were Netanyahu's biggest legacy achievement, in a sense, in foreign policy. Have they been affected at all? And I say this because the perception certainly when they were signed was that this was a turning of the at least the Emirati back in the Moroccan, back to the Palestinian cause, at least to a degree, a perception which, of course, they they would contest. And and yet here we have seen at least some minimal voices, signals from the Emiratis, in particular after Smotrich said several things. Is there any real change there? Is this pro forma or is it some kind of change?

SHIBLEY TELHAMI: All right. Let me first say something about these accords, the Abraham Accords, particularly, that created more normalization between Israel and the Arab states. You know, I look at how the Israeli body politics reacted to the universally embrace them left and right, because there's this idea we need to make, you know, you hungry for peace with the Arab states. And and some people wanted to build them as maybe even they can be an avenue to word getting

Arab activism, addressing the Palestinian issue. Exactly the opposite has happened because while, in fact, yeah, there is more economic and tourism. You know, strategically it's not clear that anything really profoundly changed. They were cooperating in the past, Israel and the UAE. Even Israel and Saudi are at some level. But there is no question in my mind that the Abraham Accords have done nothing but to empower the far right in Israel, because what they did was to send a signal that all their cool and meaning the expansionism that they want, that the exclusion of the Palestinians that they want have no cost. And I think this, to me, is a message that needs to be internalized by Israeli liberals. This is not something that can be ignored. It's a slippery slope. You start someplace and you empower the radicals. It is true, you know, in this new book that I've co-edited that just came out, the the one state reality. Sociologist Gershon Shapira writes a chapter on Israel moving from a Jewish privilege to Jewish supremacy, mostly religious, religious Zionism, moving from Jewish privilege to Jewish supremacy. It's a slippery slope. And in unless there are certain costs across some place, that's what you're going to end up with. And usually you don't see it because you see it aimed at someone else. That's what angers Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza for Israeli Palestinians is the fact that they're excluded from this definition. What's good for Israel, what's good for the Israelis, and because the outcome for them has not been good, certainly not for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Now, what will happen now? Now, you know, Arab governments, like all governments, Arab rulers, first and foremost, they advance their own interests. And, you know, many of them don't, you know, repress their own people. So let's keep that in mind. It's not something that these are advocates of democracy when they're doing it. The question is, how does this affect them strategically and politically? And I think up until now, it has been assumed that it wasn't going to hurt them much, particularly with, you know, let's let's be realistic. The Abraham Accords were principally built around the UAE agreement with Israel. Everything else was added. The UAE was mostly focused on relationship with the U.S. Those now are Iraqi between Israel and the right wing government. That's going to impact the way they see their interests. It turned out the public opinion has not abandoned the Palestinians, and many have assumed we've seen lots of that taking place. And as things escalate and become more violent, which is likely in the including the possibility of having a full fledged intifada, there's no question that our public is going to be drawn in. And so you already see them applying some brakes, trying to figure out how to navigate this space. And I doubt it that in this environment, number one, you're going to have an expansion of the Abraham Accords or expansions of the kind of, of course, that now exist. And number two, whether or not the Biden administration will champion that cause, as it has in the past few months, whether or not it's not going to apply brakes on its effort to bring that about. So, yes, I think there's no question in my mind it's going to have an impact.

NATAN SACHS: Thank you. Amos turning to you on a follow up on the same sort of theme, but a little closer, We titled This Tunnel originally, Overall, Israel's overlapping crises, because there's a second crisis. We've already seen the past year of significant rise in violent clashes in the West Bank and a erosion of the Palestinian Authority's control, certainly in the northern West Bank. Q Tell us a little bit about how that is developing and combine to that, we've seen infiltrations from Lebanon, at least one case perhaps tied to Hezbollah and Iran, closer than ever. We just heard the American administration and military discuss is closer than ever to the possibility of a bomb. In theory, this would have been the only topic we were talking about. There's the security arena. Could you sketch that out for us? And I'll give you 2 minutes to do so.

AMOS HAREL: Okay, look, when you look back to. Gallant's speech. That was. When was it? On a Saturday night. And he spoke of the crisis inside the military. But he also mentioned that the events in the region are extremely troubling. It all combines together to a sort of a perfect storm. As you mentioned, the situation in Iran, in Lebanon and the territories. And on top of this, of course, is what the Israelis opponents and neighbors see as Israel's weakness right now and perhaps a temptation to act. So you've mentioned Iran being on the brink of becoming a nuclear power. We saw Iran and Hezbollah providing more and more assistance to Palestinians in order to encourage terrorist attacks. And we're entering Ramadan, which is usually notoriously a period where things are slightly more mixed security wise from an Israeli point of view. Especially on commentary from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. And as you mentioned, there has been this very strange incident

in Megiddo, which is closer to the West Bank. But actually, apparently, according to the IDF, the terrorists who blew up a road bomb there came all the way from the Lebanese border. Now, nothing happens on the Lebanese border without Hezbollah's consent or encouragement. And this is troubling from an Israeli point of view, because for the first time in 16 and a half years since the war in Lebanon in 2006, Hezbollah is actually risking something like this. It may be that the perpetrator himself was Palestinian, but Hezbollah was involved there. And this goes back to Nasrallah's recent speeches in which he keeps attacking Israel as being extremely weak and keeps promising the Arab world that Israelis won't get to celebrate their 80th birthday, the day of independence within five years. So it seems as if Nasrallah himself and maybe other Arab leaders feel that they have more leeway right now to provoke Israel. So it's a quite a threatening combination. Security problems, Israel busy with and extremely busy with itself and not really prepared the other side, smelling some kind of a weakness. Netanyahu nodded. Order best and half of what we call it happened. Defense Minister Right now we've got and so it's a whole combination. It's quite worrying that this could become a perfect storm that was actually brewing right now and might explode sometime in the future.

NATAN SACHS: Okay. I'm going to do a lightning round now and then do something very unusual for the Center for Middle East Policy, because I'm going to ask you, demand of you your optimistic scenario. So assuming that we're talking a year or two or five from now and things aren't rosy and beautiful, but they're significantly better. Try to think back, reverse engineer it. How did that happen? Ilana think very quickly, when I turn to you in a moment, how how did that happen? What is the reasonable case scenario here, whether it's domestic and for Israel, whether it's relations with Palestinians, whether it's regional insecurity? You know, the one answer to you, and especially in terms of Israeli society, how can things turn out okay? You're muted know. You need a.

ILANA DAYAN: Muted in both senses in the sense that they'd say it's tough from this turmoil is a most said this perfect storm to find the optimism other than the fact that Zionism for me very personal thing was American still is Israel is American a vibrant, curious. At. Robust, Democratic, nervous, sometimes unbearable, but amazing society, imperfect, as Shibley said, with many problems. And and we see part of them right now. But there is something to this society, to its energy and its stamina and its optimism and the fact that it is built on tragedy that wouldn't have been built other than for its optimism that we will be able, I believe, to rebuild the future. And by the way, you see it in the polls, you see it in the polls. The fact that Benny Gantz by now is the big winner of these crises in the polls doesn't mean that it will turn. There are no elections in the near future. It says something to the effect that people want peace and quiet because that is what the guy represents. And and it says something not because, you know, the coalition is crumbling and Netanyahu has less mandates in the polls. And no, the fact that the vast majority of Israelis wants that to be over, to be over and done with. And and and the second thing is that they think Israelis have proven over the years that the only form of life of government that they want to live in is a democracy in the sense that they need to fight, they need to quarrel, they need the debate, they need the dispute, they need the discussion. It's part of our over our blood system. And and and and again, the optimism comes also from the streets and. And so if you if you ask me, it will. Realistically speaking, I don't think that anything will come out from the discussions into the president's residence. But I think that the street will prove not only its power, but its responsibility. And I had a conversation the other day with a settler from an extreme settlement. I know him ever since the disengagement. He's a good friend of mine. He called me after he heard me on the podcast and he said, I didn't I didn't sleep through the night. I didn't know that we are so far apart. I said, I have no good news for you. We are that far apart, but we'll keep talking. And that's as best news as I can.

NATAN SACHS: Shibley, you know, I'm sorry to do this off the cuff, but your optimistic scenario, how did it work out? Well.

SHIBLEY TELHAMI: Well, as you know, I'm not particularly optimistic. But just imagine that we could be at that, that this energy that came out of Jewish liberals in this episode and crisis could

come into coming to grips with the fact that Jewish liberals in Israel have no path forward without a coalition with Arabs in the country. And then in the end, there is no path forward for any Israeli democracy without Palestinian freedom in the West Bank and Gaza. All of this is tied together. To pretend that you could split one from the others is just, you know, impossible, in my opinion. And I think that really there isn't a path. I mean, look at the numbers. As I reported earlier, within the trends among Jewish Israelis, there is no path. Even if you put for a second aside, the West Bank of Gaza is no path for Israel and liberals to prevail. To prevail without a genuine coalition with Arab citizens of Israel. And in the end, that wouldn't be enough, because you cannot ignore the 5 million Palestinians that are under the gun. Their absence of freedom means there will not be a full democracy in Israel, no matter what you do.

NATAN SACHS: They were most in question.

AMOS HAREL: So I'll take a slightly more cynical view than my colleagues and I'll focus on the domestic issue. At the heart of this matter is Netanyahu's fate. This is all around one man. Nothing of this sort would have happened. And again, it's the perfect storm of domestic reasons as well, but nothing of this sort. What would have happened if Netanyahu was facing such deep legal problems? Now, I sometimes joke that the whole family is a sort of a cosmic punishment that the Israelis got for refusing to solve the Palestinian conflict. And I think that this matter, the specific matter, would end infinite and would be pushed into a corner in which he has no other choice than reaching a plea deal. And if you remember, he was on the brink of signing one a year and a half ago when Bennett and Lapid were still in office. Then things changed. A year ago, less than a year ago, things changed. The elections came. He won the elections and so on. But if you look at the recent week where he has failed to reach anything, you know, and then the Gallop affair, which was a huge mistake, then Biden's reaction and so on. I think there's still a slight possibility that at one time or another, if he does face this wall of resistance from Israelis and cannot move forward with the legal matters and cannot pass the legislation, he may step back at one time or another. I don't think that it's a very plausible scenario. It's a possible one. And I think that those forces that were released that both my colleagues have mentioned regarding the Democrat liberal camp, I think that this is not going to go away anytime soon. People have discovered their political voice again. And this is a this is a significant matter. This could all go terribly wrong and with mentioned the external reasons why this could blow up. And yet, if it's all focused on one man, then one point this man might think otherwise. And this could change even the, you know, the narrative of history regarding this crisis.

NATAN SACHS: Thank you very much. I want to thank everyone who joined us watching from home and invite you to join us again for more events and to check out the ongoing research by my colleagues and others and guests. Ilana has been then a guest of ours before at the Brookings website. Brook, exactly to you. A special thanks to our guests, Ilana Dayan, calling in from Tel Aviv. Thank you very much for all you do and thank you very much for joining us. And to my dear colleagues Shibley Telhami and Amos Harel. And thank you again, Shibley, It was a pleasure to join you when I joined Brookings. It's a pleasure to welcome you this year to Brookings and thank you all very much. See you again soon.

ILANA DAYAN: Thank you.