



Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's representative at the United Nations, is at 38 the youngest ambassador in Israel's diplomatic corps. Before that, he served for two years as Israel's deputy ambassador in Washington, D.C. Although in this interview he declines to describe his political future because of the diplomatic post he now holds, it is widely recognized that he will soon return to Israel, where he will be elected to the Knesset on the Likud list. Should the Likud party form a government as a result of the election, Netanyahu will almost surely be a member of the cabinet and, some say, may even become prime minister. The following interview took place on December 9, 1987, in Netanyahu's New York office, shortly before the rioting began in Gaza and the West Bank.

Hershel Shanks: I vividly remember July 3, 1976. I came to New York with my wife and a friend to see the tall ships that were going to sail past the Statue of Liberty the next day, on the 200th anniversary of the United States' Declaration of Independence. When we got to the apartment where we were staying, we turned on the radio at 11 o'clock and heard the wonderful news that the hostages in Entebbe had been rescued. Everyone was wildly happy. It was a great occasion. The American independence celebration and the miraculous Israeli rescue operation coincided. I can hardly look at you when I say this, but that day brought a great tragedy to your family. Your brother, Yonatan, led that rescue mission—and he fell. He is an authentic hero. When I hear people speak of you, it's very frequently as the younger brother of Yoni Netanyahu. He must be a beacon for you, a star, an inspiration. But after 11 years, he's still an identification for you. You live somewhat in his shadow. I wonder if it's a burden. What's it like being Yoni's younger brother?

Benjamin Netanyahu: Anything but a burden.

Shanks: Tell me about it.

Netanyahu: Anything but a burden, neither in his life nor after his fall. It was a great privilege, a privilege both my younger brother [Ido] and I valued even while Yoni was alive. He had a tremendous influence on us. In many ways, he educated us. He set an example for us. We never had any feelings of being encumbered; on the contrary, we felt we were almost especially singled out to have a brother like Yoni. After his death he left a legacy that endures. His legacy is like a compass rather than a weight. When people sometimes ask me, as you just delicately did, is it a problem being Yoni's brother, the answer is no. It never was and it isn't today.

Shanks: Tell me about your relationship with him.

Netanyahu: We were very, very close, a very close family, very close brothers. We felt that he was unique even in his lifetime. We weren't the only ones who felt that way. People even wrote it.

He's Israel's man
at the UN.

His brother was
the hero of
Entebbe.

He could be
Israel's next
prime minister.

Shanks: What was this quality, this aura, that seemed to inspire him and direct his life?

Netanyahu: It was a wholeness, a composite of ideals and personality that made him a complete human being, a young Jew who devoted his life to the resurrection of the Jewish people and the Jewish state. He understood that this depended on the few who would wield the sword; he was always prepared to take up that burden, even though he had so many other things that could fulfill his life. He didn't have to die to become a legend. He was already a legend in his lifetime.

I don't want to describe my brother to you as some sort of granite monument. He was a very warm human being. He had a tremendous warmth that radiated from him, from his person, from his speech, from his smiles, from his humor, sometimes from his completely unguarded laughter. He charmed us in a way that captivated us. Everything that he did had an unrestrained, an unlimited wholeness about it.

Shanks: As Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, you're in an unusual position among this motley crew of countries. From the perspective of the United Nations, you represent a pariah nation. Israel is boycotted diplomatically by much of the world. At the United Nations, Israel is almost constantly vilified, the object of a barrage of vituperation. What's it like, representing Israel in this sea of hatred?

Netanyahu: Well, it's not exactly an easy forum for an Israeli diplomat. The United Nations has in fact been used as the instrument for a universal anti-Semitism that didn't exist before. For quite some time, people didn't understand the importance of the UN as an anti-Semitic instrument. Ben-Gurion used to say "*Um* [pronounced *oom*] *shmoom*." *Um* is like the acronym of the UN. And *shmoom*—meaning nonsense. In other words, the United Nothing, it doesn't count. I wish that were true. Unfortunately, the UN does count. It may not count for very much on the positive side of the ledger, but it counts a great deal on the negative side. It has been used to disseminate anti-Semitic and anti-

Zionist poison—they are the same—throughout the five continents.

When I first came here, [the U. S. ambassador to the United Nations] Jeane Kirkpatrick told me that she had been to an Independence Day celebration in an African country. There was a big square and thousands of people were cheering. But the biggest banners were not "*Vive la république*," but "*Zionism equals racism*." In the heart of Africa. You have to understand what the UN has become. Rather than an instrument to promote peace, it became an instrument for waging political warfare. And the chief target was, of course, Israel.

That is something new in the history of anti-Semitism. Throughout the ages, anti-Semitism always had a geographical center. For the last millennium, it had such a center whose location changed with each century—it was originally in England, then France and then Germany. Then it moved to Spain. Then it moved to the Ukraine and then it moved to Russia and then, in this century, it moved to Germany. Now it's back in Russia. But since the establishment of the UN, there is something new,

MOMENT editor Hershel Shanks, left, and Benjamin Netanyahu.



because anti-Semitism now has a universal instrument, a universal apparatus for global dissemination. It now passes resolutions intended to delegitimize the Jewish people, the Jewish state. In the UN, the anti-Semites have found a way to spread their poison through the bloodstream of nations.

Many countries in Africa, in Latin America and in Asia view the UN not as *shmoom*, but as a repository of historical truth and political authority.

When these resolutions are passed, they are given the "Good Housekeeping seal of approval" for over 100 nations. For them, they carry the weight of truth. They are recorded in foreign offices and in colleges and in universities and are talked about in Rotary Clubs and in magazines and in newspapers. There's a cumulative weight to this slander; with its constant repetition and elaboration and refinement, it becomes "truth." It's important to understand the significance of the UN in this negative aspect.

Shanks: How do you operate in this situation? What can you do?

Netanyahu: If you think that you cannot do anything, then you will not do anything. There are basically two common attitudes that one can adopt with regard to Israel and the UN. One attitude is to just beat your head against the wall and try to break out of this isolation. The other attitude is just to sit back and wring your hands and say it's terrible, the world is against us but there's not much we can do about it.

We don't adopt either of these two positions. We don't just attack and beat ourselves against this obstacle indiscriminately, nor do we say there's nothing we can do about it. We look for the cracks.

It turns out there are a lot of breaches

and cracks in this wall. One of the first things I learned as a young soldier in the Israeli army is that there is no fence, no wall that is impregnable.

If you look long enough you will always find a place where the water has burrowed underneath or where some stone has become dislodged. It turns out there are a lot of breaches in this UN wall. Rather than lick our wounds, we look for those breaches and then concentrate our power to widen the breach, to break through.

Shanks: Give me an example.

Netanyahu: I'll give you several. Take the continuation and extension of the "Zionism is racism" campaign. That slander continues today in the attempt to link Israel with South Africa, and Zionism with apartheid. That is the extension of the "Zionism is racism" campaign. Resolutions are manufactured by something called the Special Committee on Apartheid. That committee has traditionally been used by the Arabs to harness the Africans to the Arab cause. Instead of being a campaign against apartheid, it is a campaign against Zionism. We decided to try to breach that alliance, to try to fracture this Arab-African coalition that was responsible for so much of the slander against Israel.

We found the way to do it one day when a researcher on our small staff at the UN mission, Ralph Cwermerman, came in and dropped a sheaf of papers on my desk and said, "Look at this." He had obtained reports from an organization in Rotterdam called the Shipping Research Bureau, which was set up in 1980 to monitor a UN ban on shipping oil to South Africa. This little-known organization was putting out these reports but nobody paid any attention

to them. These reports described every oil tanker that went to South Africa. But the information was only partial. It would tell you whether a tanker came from the Persian Gulf, but it wouldn't say from which port. We had this information cross-referenced with Lloyd's registry of shipping. This gave us a record of every oil tanker that had gone to South Africa since 1980—what was its port of embarkation, its port of deposit and the volume of the ship. From this we could calculate the tonnage of the oil, multiplied by the average price of oil that year.

Lo and behold, we now had irrefutable evidence showing that the Arabs had been selling South Africa \$2 billion of oil annually.

Shanks: Ninety-five percent of South Africa's oil.

Netanyahu: Ninety-five percent of their oil. When we presented this information to the UN in 1984, it made a tremendous impact. We did the same thing the following year. Finally, last year the Africans actually passed a resolution against the oil-producing Arabs. Did you ever hear of the UN passing a resolution against the Arabs? Well, they didn't quite name the Arabs. They said they had passed the resolution against countries exporting oil to South Africa.

You know, the UN has accused Israel of many things, but it hasn't yet accused us of shipping oil to South Africa.

This year the report went further. It actually named and condemned the Arab countries who were shipping oil to South Africa. That has never happened before.

Shanks: Unfortunately, that hasn't received very much publicity. *The New York Times* reported it—in a two-inch story on an inside page. The story said

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that Israel claimed that 95 percent of the oil shipped to South Africa came from the Arabs, and then in the second paragraph, to be even-handed, the *Times* said that Saudi Arabia denied the charge, claiming it strictly enforced the boycott against shipping oil to South Africa.

Netanyahu: Nevertheless, it made a tremendous impact where it counts—with the African diplomats and with the African governments. As a result, this year the language in the traditional resolutions condemning Israel was suddenly toned down. We're on the way toward completely eliminating the African resolutions against us. On the Arab side of the ledger, I see the Africans focusing more on Arab trade.

So we are creating a fissure in this coalition, and in the automatic singling-out of Israel with respect to South Africa.

Shanks: That's a terrific story, but very little known. When I read the story in the *Times*, I wondered how you could prove your claim that 95 percent of South Africa's oil was being supplied by the Arabs. They didn't report how you knew this.

Netanyahu: By the detailed listings of oil tankers visiting South African ports. One thing is important—to have irrefutable facts. Facts must then be coupled with powerful arguments. And then, of course, you have to use rhetoric to combine the irrefutable facts with the powerful arguments. But the most important thing is to have a basis in irrefutable facts. That makes people take you seriously.

Shanks: How many nations do not recognize Israel and how many do recognize her?

Netanyahu: About half of the members

of the UN recognize us. There are 159 countries in the UN. Part of the problem in establishing relations with the rest of the world [that doesn't recognize Israel] is the impact of these anti-Israeli resolutions. The traditional wisdom is that no UN resolution, especially an anti-Israel resolution, ever dies. When I first came here, a veteran Latin American diplomat took me aside and said, ‘Benjamin, I will tell you one thing about this body. It's the house of immortal life. No resolution ever dies here. It's passed in '55. It's reaffirmed in '65, '75, '85, etc.’ That turns out not to be the case. The Iraqi resolution turned out to be an exception. In 1981, Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear bomb factory. Since 1981, the Iraqis have had a resolution passed each year condemning Israel for this attack. When I came here in 1984, I learned that there was an Iranian nuclear reactor that the Iraqis were attacking quite regularly. The Iraqis did not dispute this; indeed, they confirmed it. So that year, the Iraqis lost 20 votes on the resolution condemning Israel for its attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor; 20 countries left their side in one year. They resurrected that resolution the next year and lost another 20 votes. The next year they simply neglected to bring the resolution up. They simply killed it, their own resolution.

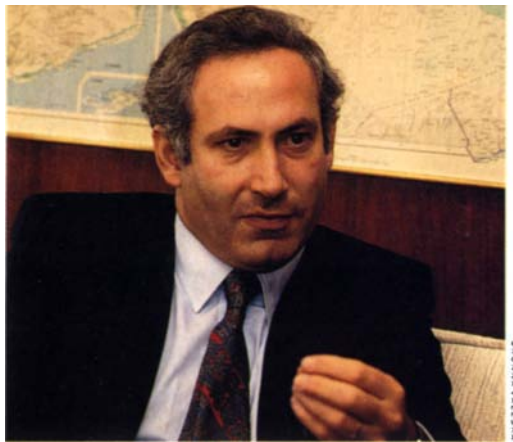
Another example: The Syrians recently wanted to convene a conference on international terrorism in order to define terrorism. Normally, this proposal would pass in the UN. Five years ago, ten years ago, such absurdities would have passed. Well it failed abjectly, completely.

Shanks: Why didn't it pass?

Netanyahu: Because we succeeded in changing the terms of reference on the

way terrorism is discussed. In the 1970s, the Arabs were able to make a lot of headway against us by claiming that international terrorism was exploding all around the world as a result of Israel's policies and the ‘Palestinian problem.’ If a bomb exploded in Tokyo or in Rome or in London, this was because of the ‘Palestinian problem.’ What we were able to do in the 1980s was to turn the tables on the Arabs because we exposed the practitioners of terror. We exposed the fact that nearly all international terrorism is the work of governments, which use terror as an instrument of warfare—not only against Israel, but against the Western world. Once this became apparent—it was also publicly exposed in the trials of Syrians in London and in West Berlin, when the Libyans were captured and exposed in Madrid and the Iranians caught by France—then the whole debate concerning terrorism was reshaped. No longer was it what to do about the Israelis, but what to do about Syria, what to do about Libya, what to do about Iran; the PLO was seen merely as an adjunct of these governments. That represents a complete shift in the terms of reference of the debate. In this way, we were able to defeat the Syrian resolution to define terrorism.

Or consider the annual vote on our credentials. Every year the Arabs and sometimes the Iraqis join together to try to expel Israel from the UN. They do so by trying to deny our credentials as a prelude to our expulsion. Each year they lose, but the interesting thing is they lose by a growing margin; the number of countries that support them remains fixed at about 40. The number of countries that support us has gone up steadily. This year it reached an all-time high of 88. A few years ago it was 72.



It went to 79, to 82, to 85, to 88. We are obviously cutting into the countries of the middle ground. It's a different UN, albeit still a very negative one, but less negative because we have been able to find the cracks.

A final example is the battle over the UN's Nazi archives. Initially, we faced a united international opposition to opening up these archives. After a year and a half of struggle we won; we opened the archives, and this has also increased our standing.

All these are examples where this wall of obstruction and indifference and hostility has been breached. And when you breach it people take notice.

Shanks: What's it like when you walk through the halls of the UN? Do people shun you?

Netanyahu: On the contrary.

Shanks: What about the nations that don't recognize Israel?

Netanyahu: We have many, many contacts in the UN with most of these countries.

Shanks: Including with the countries that don't recognize you?

Netanyahu: Especially with them.

Shanks: Including Arab countries?

Netanyahu: Arab countries, yes.

Shanks: In addition to Egypt?

Netanyahu: In addition to Egypt. The important thing to understand is this: Israel has relations with about half the countries, which means it doesn't have relations with the other half. For a country that doesn't have an embassy in Israel, the UN becomes the universal embassy. It's very easy to meet the ambassador of a country you don't have

relations with; we meet them practically every day and we have a full-time person on our staff who does just that. In other words, in addition to the multilateral diplomacy that takes place here, there is a lot of bilateral diplomacy.

And it is important to understand that the multilateral affects the bilateral. If we are seen in the multilateral arena as isolated, weak, a pariah, a leper, then that's what we become. Others begin to think of us as a leper, and eventually we will think of ourselves as a leper. If we fight back and score some visible victories, then the climate, the attitude toward Israel changes, and this helps us in our bilateral contacts. There has recently been a tremendous increase in these bilateral contacts; indeed, many countries are now coming to us. What do they want from us? They want our agricultural experts, for one thing. Through the UN we sent some of our drip-irrigation experts to China.

Shanks: Mainland China?

Netanyahu: Sure. The Chinese now send people to Israel. That is also true of many African countries. They want our agricultural help. We have medical assistance that they want. They want security systems against terrorism.

And invariably they want one other thing: They always say "Give us your secret."

And I say "What secret?"

And they say, "You know the secret."

And I say "Could you be more specific?"

And they say, "You know, tell us how we can get to the Americans."

And that is another factor that has changed. The closeness of the relationship between Israel and United States is viewed as one of Israel's important assets. In diplomacy, if you're weak and

isolated, you are a liability. Nobody's interested in you. But if you are strong, and appear to have strong allies, you can attract other nations. That is now very much the position we find ourselves in.

Shanks: Let me talk to you about talking to the PLO. It's always seemed to me an inadequate explanation to say I won't talk to the PLO because it doesn't recognize Israel or because it's a terrorist organization. I recognize that they are the enemy. But it seems to me that what we should be asking is, "Is it good for Israel or bad for Israel to talk to the PLO?" Peace is made with enemies, not friends, so if it . . .

Netanyahu: Could peace have been made with Hitler?

Shanks: I don't know.

Netanyahu: The argument that peace is made with enemies is true if the enemy is not dedicated, in the very foundation of his being, to your destruction. You can talk to an adversary if you're talking about a resolvable grievance. But if the grievance is your existence, there's nothing to talk about.

Shanks: That really isn't responsive to my question. The issue should be whether it's good for Israel or bad for Israel to talk to the PLO, not whether the PLO recognizes Israel or whether it's a terrorist organization.

Netanyahu: I'm trying to respond in that direction precisely, because what the PLO is seeking is the destruction of Israel. What it lacks is legitimacy in pursuing that goal. It seeks its goal of destroying Israel by a combination of terror and diplomacy. The PLO, especially Arafat, has understood what some of his colleagues do not understand, that terror coupled with diplomacy is much more

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potent than terror alone. With words you can often achieve much more than with bombs. The PLO annually reaffirms its desire, as stated in its charter, calling for the destruction of Israel.

Shanks: It's nothing new that Arabs talk out of both sides of their mouths.

Netanyahu: That's not the point. The point is that the essential thrust of the PLO, its *raison d'être*, is the destruction of Israel. I think they [the PLO leadership] agree on nothing else. They don't even agree on the nature or size or territorial definition of the Palestinian state that is supposed to emerge after Israel is destroyed.

Shanks: That's true. But doesn't everyone really recognize that this aim of destroying Israel is posturing, and if you get down to serious negotiations, they know they can't get that?

Netanyahu: It's not posturing. The PLO is very specific about it. Very specific. And quite explicit.

Shanks: But that's what they say.

Netanyahu: In their English pronouncements, they are always vague. They talk about "ending Zionist aggression," ending the "occupation of Palestine." They leave these formulations vague, but in Arabic they are quite explicit. In Kuwaiti newspapers, for example, PLO leaders quite recently discussed the strategy of liquidation.

Shanks: But that's what they say.

Netanyahu: No, no. They're talking quite specifically, in their inner councils, too, about the strategy of liquidation. Number one, let's get the Jews to talk to us about setting up a PLO state in Judea and Samaria. Number two, let's destroy both Jordan and Israel. This is

what they say. What they don't say publicly, except when they occasionally slip up—and this is the essence of their strategy—is that in order to achieve their goal, they must have a foothold in diplomatic negotiations.

Shanks: Imagine someone who reasonably disagrees with you; he may be wrong but he may still be reasonable in believing that it may be possible to negotiate something with the PLO that would provide for Israel's security and its existence. . . .

Netanyahu: What should we negotiate with an enemy that seeks our destruction? The method of our decapitation? The process of our liquidation? In the case of the PLO, in the case of these butchers, we're facing little Hitlers. The only reason they are not big Hitlers is because they haven't amassed the power.

Last year, I exhibited in the UN Security Council a PLO calendar marking the dates to celebrate. The anniversaries included the [1972] massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich, the [1974] massacre of children at Maalot, and no doubt this year's calendar will include the [1986] massacre at the Istanbul synagogue. This tells you something. The celebration, the adulation of these massacres and the reaffirmation annually of the larger purpose of our liquidation tells you something. When it comes to the PLO, means and ends are indissolubly linked. They are one and the same. The technique is massacre because the goal is massacre.

When you ask about the PLO's reformability, basically people would like to believe that "everybody's like us." They would like to believe that everyone ultimately can be reformed into the political process. Politics, after all, is the nonviolent resolution of conflict. But it

must include the acceptance of the basic legitimacy of your adversary; that's when you don't shoot him. That's why you have shouting matches or verbal jousts or ballots, not bullets.

The terrorism that the PLO practices reflects the opposite of politics. It's the complete rejection of politics and the legitimacy of your opponent.

Now they also have another problem. If any one of them were to try to deviate from the line of destroying Israel, he would be destroyed. This is true of all terrorist organizations, as Dostoyevski understood 100 years ago. If there are five members of a terrorist group, and four of them are convinced that the fifth is a dissenter in their pact of terror and anarchy, they will murder him. At that point, they are all locked in a circle of blood and none of them can escape. That is true of the PLO.

Both its inherent goal of destroying Israel and the internal mechanism of mutual terror prevents a real reformation of the PLO. If you want to move toward peace, the best thing to do is to keep the PLO outside. As long as the PLO is there, there won't be peace. It will veto any peace.

There is absolutely nothing irresolvable or irreconcilable in the Arab-Israeli conflicts. The grievances themselves are not impossible to resolve. Not the territories, not the refugees and not boundaries. They are complex, they are stubborn, but they are not irreconcilable. Much more difficult problems have been resolved in this century, involving much more difficult territorial divisions, borders disputed and tens of millions of refugees. When you look at what has been holding up the reconciliation of Arab and Jew since the 1920s, it is the fact that we cannot get people to negotiate with us. Those who genuinely



want to negotiate with us and accept our legitimacy are afraid they will be shot if they come forward and say they want peace with Israel. This is what the Mufti [Hajj Amin al-Husseini, Jerusalem's Islamic leader] did in the 1920s and 1930s to those who wanted to negotiate; this is what is done to Arab leaders today who want to negotiate. Why do some talk about all sorts of mechanisms and circumlocutions instead of direct negotiations? Why? Because the Arabs who would negotiate are afraid of getting shot.

Shanks: There's a widespread belief that the PLO's withholding of recognition is a negotiating ploy, that at the negotiating table they would obviously have to give that up.

Netanyahu: That reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the PLO. This beast is not going to change; this leopard is not going to change its spots.

Shanks: Many people feel that the position you take casts Israel in the role of the party who is hindering, resisting negotiations.

Netanyahu: Two days ago I was in the General Assembly, and I spoke out to the Arab delegates. I said, "You all talk about Israel refusing to negotiate. Fine. I have a simple proposal to any Arab ambassador. I am authorized to enter negotiations right outside this corridor, in comfortable chairs. I am authorized to sit with you right now, with any representative from any Arab state. Will anyone come forth?" And I stood there and folded my arms. And I waited. And I waited. And I waited.

Shanks: Would you do that with the PLO?

Netanyahu: No, I wouldn't do that with the PLO. The PLO calls for my destruction. The PLO is not a government.

Shanks: What's the down side of offering to negotiate with the PLO?

Netanyahu: The down side of it is that people who have a susceptibility to PLO propaganda will accept them as a legitimate partner for negotiations. We're not going to allow that crack in the door, that will open the door, that will lead to the achievement of their objectives. Because their objective is the liquidation of the state of Israel. The minute you legitimize them, the minute you give them a foot in the door, the minute you give them the intermediate stage of that PLO state that they seek, it's a prelude to the destruction of the Jewish state. Would you have negotiated with Hitler? Would you have given him something? There are times in the life of civilized nations when they're faced with intractable opponents.

Shanks: Aren't there a lot of Arabs on the West Bank who look to the PLO for leadership, but who really aren't dedicated to the destruction of Israel?

Netanyahu: I think that there's a difference between the rhetorical support they give to the PLO and the actual support. If it were actual support, our life would be hell and their life would be hell [—day in and day out, not just periodic bursts of violence*]. But, in fact, the PLO is an abject failure in its ability to mobilize the masses. There is a tremendous gulf between what is said and what is done. Actions speak a lot louder than words, and the PLO's actions speak a lot louder than their words (although their words are quite interesting, too, especially in Arabic).

* Added later by Netanyahu

Shanks: If Israel were to announce that it would talk to the PLO, what security danger to Israel would that entail?

Netanyahu: I think the PLO's immediate objective is to establish a PLO state in Judea and Samaria. This would pose an immediate threat. . . .

Shanks: You don't have to agree to that.

Netanyahu: Well, you're getting onto a course that is very difficult to stop. Once you begin the course of diplomatic moves, you open the door a crack, and the door will be open for them, because obviously the international forces would support the PLO all the way.

Shanks: There is no way anyone would imagine that Israel would agree to a Palestinian state in Samaria and Judea.

Netanyahu: Well . . .

Shanks: You wouldn't, would you? You'd never do that.

Netanyahu: I agree with you. In that case, why place yourself in an impossible position?

Shanks: What's the down side of talking?

Netanyahu: Merely that the pressure to concede would increase immeasurably, would be immeasurably stronger. It's like Czechoslovakia. The West asked them, "Why don't you [Czechoslovakia] speak to the Nazis." The London *Times* had an editorial: Why is Czechoslovakia resisting negotiations to give self-determination to the Sudetenland Germans? Why are you so resistant? Finally, the Czechs gave in. And within three months, without firing a shot, the international pressure from the Western countries became so intolerable that Czechoslovakia in fact was forced to cede this territory. Shortly afterwards, Czechoslovakia was conquered by the Nazis.

“It’s better to be unpopular and alive than to be popular and dead.”

Shanks: Do you see that happening in the case of Israel and the Palestinians?

Netanyahu: One of two things: Either we are forced to cede—and I assume we will resist that—or if we’re not forced to cede, our isolation will become much greater.

Shanks: What about the *hasbara* [public relations] victory for Israel if Israel goes to the negotiating table with the PLO and the PLO is unreasonable?

Netanyahu: The PLO will be reasonable because it has, as they tell us, an intermediate objective. The intermediate objective is to get a foothold from which they could explode both Jordan and Israel. First Jordan, in my judgment, and second Israel. I tend to agree with Golda Meir when she said—I’m paraphrasing—it’s better to be unpopular and alive than to be popular and dead.

Shanks: You’ve said that Israel should keep the West Bank and Gaza permanently and forever. Do you still hold to that position?

Netanyahu: Well, in my official capacity, I said that military control over Judea, Samaria and Gaza is absolutely vital for Israel’s security. I said it, I wrote it and of course I stand by it.

Shanks: But, that’s not my question. I asked something beyond that.

Netanyahu: You’re asking a question that I didn’t get into in my official statements, but I’ll be happy to do so once I leave this office.

But in my present capacity I can say this: There is now a force of 11,000 tanks on Israel’s eastern front. This is equal to the power of NATO. We have to anticipate that the Iran-Iraq war will end. When that happens, half of that force will become available. Another 5,000 tanks are in Syria. Another 1,500

tanks in Jordan. And there’s a swelling arsenal in Saudi Arabia. All this force may one day, with surprising rapidity, amass on our eastern front. For most of this decade, the Arab world has been split, largely because of the Iran-Iraq war. But that war may end very soon. The end of the war might even be facilitated by focusing on a common enemy—Israel. Israel can be the great unifying cry of a nascent Arab coalition on our eastern front. That would pit the equivalent of the entire power of NATO along the borders of the Jordan River. If we do not have complete military control over the five routes that lead from the Jordan up to the Judea-Samaria mountain range and over the ridge-line itself, then we simply cannot defend ourselves. This territory dominates and controls the 80 percent of our population that lives in a slender banana-shaped piece of land from Jerusalem through Tel Aviv to Haifa. That’s why, basically, there is a consensus in Israel, with the exception of fringe groups, that whatever arrangements Israel enters into, these must provide for complete military control over this area. Otherwise, Israel simply would not be able to defend itself.

Shanks: I think that’s the generally accepted position throughout the world: If there’s going to be peace, that area has to be demilitarized.

Netanyahu: It shouldn’t be demilitarized. This is not what Israel believes in.

Shanks: You want your military hardware there.

Netanyahu: The area is too small to be demilitarized. This is not the Sinai. Even if Egypt were to violate the Sinai agreements, it would take the Egyptian army at least two or three days to cross that distance. In the case of Judea and

Samaria, it’s a tiny distance, a spitting distance to our population centers. It takes two hours to cross it, traveling slowly with a tank. So there is no question that we have to control that territory. For Israel to survive, it must maintain military control over this territory—not so much over its population, that is not the issue, but over the strategic passes and the electronic surveillance platforms that are so necessary for Israel’s defense in the coming decade and in the coming century.

Shanks: Does what you say mean that the Iran-Iraq war is good for Israel?

Netanyahu: Well, I’ll say this: Obviously when these two predators are locked in a grip of death with each other, they cannot threaten others. And, by the way, their first conflict is with the Arabs, not with Israel. In fact, before the war with Iran, Iraq was beginning to encroach on Kuwait, whose territory it claims in its entirety. Kuwait is a stretch of sand that happens to have a lot of oil, and Iraq eyed it and wanted it. But then it thought it had a much riper plum ready for plunder, the oil fields across the Shat el-Arab in Iran. When the Shah collapsed, Iraq violated the nonaggression pact it had signed with Iran a few years earlier, and proceeded to invade. Now Iraq is suing for peace because the balance of power has changed. That’s important to understand, because what it tells you is that the whole Middle East is littered with treaties that have been violated. The only thing that keeps the peace among the Arabs themselves is their perception of the strength of their adversaries. Vulnerability and strength are the key to both war and peace in the Middle East. If Israel is made vulnerable in exchange for paper agreements, then the peace will not be kept.



For peace to endure, including a paper peace, a contractual peace, Israel must have the ability to enforce that peace. And that ability cannot be maintained, in my judgment, without Israel's complete military control over the entire territory west of the Jordan.

Shanks: Would you talk with [President] Assad of Syria if he wanted to negotiate a peace?

Netanyahu: I would ask him whether he wanted to relinquish the claim of destroying Israel. If he said he was willing to do that, then, yes, I would negotiate.

Shanks: You wouldn't negotiate before he made that concession?

Netanyahu: I would expect that concession to be inherent in any statement that he would make on negotiating with Israel. If he would say, "I want to destroy Israel, and I seek negotiations merely to achieve that goal," I would say, forget it. If, on the other hand, he said, "I recognize the right of Israel to exist and now it's a question of settling some of the grievances between us," that's a different matter.

Shanks: I understand you're going to be leaving your present position soon to go into Israeli politics; you're going to run for the Knesset. Is that official?

Netanyahu: You understand that I will be leaving my post; that is true.

Shanks: When will you be leaving?

Netanyahu: I will be leaving before the next General Assembly in late September. What I will do then I haven't decided. So reports of my demise are premature and exaggerated.

Shanks: Not of your demise, of your ascendancy. You haven't decided whether you're going to run for the Knesset?

Netanyahu: Well, as long as I'm in my diplomatic post, I don't think it's appropriate to discuss my personal plans.

Shanks: Why did you turn down the chairmanship of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization? That's an enormously prestigious position that most Israeli politicians would leap at.

Netanyahu: First of all, who told you I was offered the chairmanship? People were discussing the possibility that I'd run for that post. But nevertheless, the reason I declined that offer was that I had plenty of things to do here. I had to finish my job here. Also, I would like to spend as much time as I can in Israel. I've spent the last five years outside the country. I'd like to go back and spend all my time in Israel itself.

Shanks: The Jewish Agency wouldn't have been outside of Israel, would it?

Netanyahu: I think if you do the job properly you have to spend a very good portion of your time outside the country.

Shanks: I realize that you can't talk about your political future, but other people can and they do. I'm told that your wife is not Jewish, and if that's true, how would that affect your future as a politician in Israel? Would it have any effect?

Netanyahu: Well, I don't think it will have an effect because my wife is Jewish. My wife was born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother. Her father's family fled from Berlin in the 1930s and settled in Britain, and there her father met her mother. My wife formally converted to

Judaism with Rabbi Yolles in Philadelphia, who's considered among the most respected rabbis. I think that lays the matter to rest. But since you asked, I'm glad I had the opportunity to set the record straight.

Shanks: You were instrumental in establishing the Jonathan Institute in memory of your fallen brother. This institute studies terrorism. You edited an important book on terrorism. Do you think Israel acted wisely in trading more than a thousand terrorists in Israeli jails for three Israeli soldiers who were held by the Syrians? Is there any lasting effect from that trade?

Netanyahu: This was widely viewed as a mistake across the Israeli political spectrum, and I share that view.

Shanks: Are there any lasting effects?

Netanyahu: I think there would be, if people believed that this was a continuing policy. Part of the problem with fighting terrorism is to establish the principle of no surrender. Basically terrorism is blackmail. So the only way to handle a blackmailer—the only way to handle a terrorist—is to refuse to surrender. Once you begin to march down the path of capitulation, it's very difficult to stop. I think that we have had several opportunities, since then, to demonstrate that this is not our policy, because we have had many threats, including threats against some Israelis who are held captive today in Lebanon.

Shanks: Recently *The New York Times* reported that terrorism in the Middle East was occurring at a steady level. It wasn't increasing or decreasing. Do you share that view?

Netanyahu: Actually, terrorism within the Middle East, Arabs against Arabs, is as rampant as ever. But the kind of

"I'm sure there's disaffection on the part of the Palestinian Arabs, although perhaps not as deep as commonly reported."

international terrorism that attracts our attention—explosions in airports and on airplanes, and so on—has, by and large, disappeared. It has disappeared because the main forces behind it have suffered devastating blows. The forces behind it are essentially a League of Terrorist Nations. Since the American raid on Libya, since the exposure of Syria and the sanctions applied to it, and since the discovery of Iran's involvement [in kidnappings of Western citizens in Lebanon in recent years], they have basically ceased their terrorist activities in the West. They have simply stopped. Libya has not carried out a single terrorist attack in the West since the raid on Tripoli, Syria has practically called off all terror operations in Western Europe. It has stopped attacking targets outside the Middle East. That is a direct result of the political, economic and military pressures applied on these regimes. Now if they think this is an aberration, this will be only a momentary respite and they will resume their terrorist activities. If they think that this is a lasting policy, led by the United States, followed by the allies of the United States, then they will cease and desist. I think that the recent deal between the French and the Iranians for hostages in Lebanon was a setback to this policy.

Shanks: There's a general feeling, despite the statistics, that Arab terrorism within Israel and within the West Bank is increasing. Is that your perception?

Netanyahu: It's not borne out by the statistics. In fact, the actual number of incidents has been declining quite substantially.

Shanks: What about the indigenous terrorism?

Netanyahu: There is very little indigenous terrorism *per se*. The indigenous terrorism that people talk about is usually conducted by front organizations that are monitored, organized, sponsored and instructed by the PLO. Typically, these are student organizations, including high school students. Admittedly, they have a problem making violent attacks because it is much harder to smuggle weapons into Israel these days. There is also some imitating element in terrorism, because if even one attack succeeds, successful terrorism in one place encourages terrorism elsewhere. But essentially, if you eliminate the PLO's access to the territories and if you strike at their headquarters outside [Israel], you will achieve an immeasurable reduction. In fact, that's what you're seeing.

Shanks: There's a widely held belief that we're seeing a descent into despair regarding the West Bank. Do you sense that, that we must do something to stem the desperation both on the part of Palestinians living there and on the part of Israelis?

Netanyahu: That's the usual reporting. I'm sure there's disaffection on the part of the Palestinian Arabs, although perhaps not as deep as commonly reported. I think that, by and large, their actions speak a lot louder than their words. Their actions are quite different from the common reporting. There is no spontaneous mobilization of people to go against the Israeli presence. In fact, it's amazingly placid compared to what any one would expect reading the news reports.

Shanks: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. 

Addendum from the Ambassador

Following the unrest of late December 1987 and early January 1988, Ambassador Netanyahu asked us to print the following addendum to his interview:

The typical media reporting about the situation in Judea, Samaria and Gaza is that the absence of progress towards a political settlement breeds spontaneous unrest and terrorism. The truth, however, is very often the reverse. It is terrorism and extremism that prevent progress towards mutual understanding and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs.

The recent disturbances were painted by the press as an unorganized outburst of popular feelings against Israeli rule. But this depiction completely disregards the network of professional PLO inciters who orchestrated these "spontaneous" outbreaks. Their purpose is to insure more riots, more bloodshed and no settlement. Any Palestinian Arab who shows the slightest inclination towards coexistence with Israel is silenced by the PLO, either by threats or by bullets. Israel's recent arrest of many of these inciters is meant not merely to ensure tranquility, but also to facilitate the progress for reconciliation, which is still the dominant desire of the great majority—Jews and Arabs alike.