

Netanyahu was the author of his near defeat and his great victory



Israeli PM Netanyahu 3-17-15

Source: *Newsweek*

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Shortly after Pres Obama's inauguration in 2009, Likud, with Netanyahu at its head, was tasked with forming the government. He was concerned to balance the pressure he was under by the right wing of Likud so he invited Ehud Barak, a former Chief of Staff of the IDF and former Prime Minister to break away from Labor by forming a new party so that the new party could be invited to join the Government. For his troubles he was made the Defense Minister, arguably the second most important ministry in the government. You will recall that Barak made an unprecedented offer to Arafat in the peace negotiations under President Clinton.

He appointed Michael Oren to the post of Ambassador to the US. While Oren had great credentials for the post he was also a left winger.

A few months later under wilting pressure from Obama, he delivered his [first Bar Ilan speech](#) in which he embraced the two state solution subject to certain caveats, namely, Palestine must be demilitarized, and must recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people. In addition Israel needs defensible borders with Jerusalem remaining the united capital of Israel. Just as when President Bush delivered his speech in 2002 in which he envisaged a Palestinian state subject the

certain caveats, the world quickly forgot about the caveats and embraced the future Palestine.

Obama pressured for more and Netanyahu delivered by announcing a unilateral 10 month construction freeze east of the '67 lines, except for Jerusalem. He quietly applied it to Jerusalem as well. Both of these concessions were contrary to Likud's platform and alienated his base.

After four years in office he disbanded the government and called for new elections. This time he merged with Liberman's party, Yisrael Beiteinu, hoping to get a total of over 40 seats. To his chagrin, the public didn't buy it and the combined party only got 31 seats. Thus a weakened Netanyahu was forced to accept into the government the combo of Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid (19) and Naftali Bennett's Bayit Yehudi (12). But first he invited Tzipi Livni head of Hatnua (6) to join the government. He rewarded her with the Ministry of Justice and appointed her, head of Israel's negotiating team. Livni was very experienced but was viewed as a left winger. The same went for Barak. Netanyahu's base was further alienated.

Bayit Yehudi was Naftali Bennett's creation. His pro-settlement, anti-Palestine and anti-prisoner release platform attracted my many disgruntled right wing Likudniks thereby weakening Likud. Also Moshe Kahlon, a longtime member of Likud, withdrew and started his own party called Kulanu which campaigned on one issue namely lowering the cost of living. He complained that Likud had become complacent in that task.

This government came under intense pressure from the Obama administration to make "gestures" to the Palestinian Authority to induce them to enter negotiations. This was a bazaar demand because if a party doesn't not want to enter negotiations, it certainly doesn't want to make concessions or consummate a deal. Netanyahu was given a choice of "gestures", either release over 100 convicted Palestinian terrorists or freeze

construction of settlements. He chose the former, to much outrage, and ultimately imposed the freeze, too.

This government was short lived. With Lapid and Livni pulling in a leftward direction, it proved ungovernable. Netanyahu disbanded the government and called for new elections.

To his credit, Netanyahu, has done his utmost to ensure Israel's security. In pursuit of this goal he planned to bomb Iran in 2012 to set back their nuclear program but was prevented from doing so by Obama's leaks and pressures.

During the election campaign, Congressman Boehner, Speaker of the House, invited him to address a joint session of the House and he leapt at the opportunity. Obama was apoplectic because he knew that Netanyahu had the potential to unseat his dash toward a bad deal with Iran. Obama did his utmost to discredit Netanyahu. He also mobilized Democrat Congressmen and Senator's to boycott the speech and not one of the senior echelons of his administration was allowed to attend. Nevertheless the speech went ahead and was a resounding success. It greatly impacted the negotiations. In addition, Congress has prepared legislation that would require any deal with Iran to be treated as a treaty requiring the Senate's approval. Finally, in a near unprecedented move, Sen Tom Cotton mobilized 47 Senators to sign a letter to Iran which said, "The next president could revoke such an executive agreement with the stroke of a pen and future Congresses could modify the terms of the agreement at any time."

Back to the elections

Obama was determined to remove Netanyahu from power and to install the Herzog/Livni combo named Zionist Union. He mobilized his election team headed by Jeremy Bird for the job and arranged for the State Department to fund them to the tune of \$350,000 for the job. And they weren't alone in this effort. The EU also funded the anti-Netanyahu campaign as did

a number of prominent foreign philanthropies. A perfect storm. The US Senate has launched a [bipartisan probe](#) into the White House's alleged funding of an NGO pushing for the ouster of Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu choose to campaign on security and his experience. The Zionist Union mounted an "anybody but Bibi" campaign and mercilessly attacked him for everything, real or imagined. They supported Obama's Iran policy and the peace process. They stressed many economic issues such as the high cost of housing and of living. Netanyahu choose not to defend himself on these issues which he might have well done giving the fact that under his leadership, Israel fared better in the aftermath of the economic crises which began in late 2008, than anyone else. And their unemployment rate was the lowest of any developed nation.

On Friday, last, the last polls published showed Likud (21 to 22) trailing Zionist Union (25 to 26). Bibi had to close the gap. He decided to play up the fact that he was behind and asked for the nationalist camp to vote for Likud rather than other rightwing alternatives. He pleaded with them to help close the gap. The national camp voters were very concerned that he would not be returned to power though they had many differences of opinions with him.

On Sunday night, last, they mounted a massive rally in Tel Aviv which attracted 100,000 people though the leftwing press reported only tens of thousands attended.

Thereafter, he promised to make Moshe Kahlon finance Minister no matter how many seats Kulanu got.

Then on Monday evening, just before Tuesday, the voting day, Herzog announced that the Zionist Union was no more and that Livni had withdrawn. This announcement was a bombshell exploding. What happened? What could it mean? Evidently internal polls conducted by the Zionist Union, suggested that

the gap was closing quickly and that something must be done to win the election. Their internal polls also suggested that if Livni dropped out, the remaining party, Labor, may get an additional 4 seats. So the Hail Mary pass was thrown.

Exit polls published at 10.00 PM on Tuesday, showed Labor at 27 seats and Likud at either 27 or 28 seats. To Israelis this seemed to insure that Bibi would be tasked with forming the government. Overnight, the results got even better; 30 seats for Likud versus 24 for Zionist Union. A real blowout.

Netanyahu announced that he would form a government from among the parties on the right only and the religious parties. He had learned his lesson.

One of the reasons he had succeeded in attracting Likudniks back to Likud was because of his policy announcements made in the last few days. He announced his three "no's"; no to a Palestinian State, no to dividing Jerusalem and no to releasing terrorists. For good measure he added in one "yes". Yes to building thousands of houses in Jerusalem in the face of all the (international) pressure.

As a result of returning to his base and appointing Kahlon, Finance Minister, the base returned to him. Bayit Yehudi dropped from a projected 12 seats to 8 and Kulanu dropped from 12 projected to 10 seats. The first person Netanyahu called after the exit polls were announced was Naftali Bennett.

The new government will have a stable majority of 68.

This is a brilliant victory for Netanyahu.