

**WHAT DETERMINES POLITICAL LONGEVITY:
INDISPENSABILITY OR A LACK OF OPTIONS?
(ISRAELI CASE)¹**

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The two politicians entered the typically exclusive and closed circle of the Israeli political elite for various reasons, and their careers were also influenced by various things. Within the confines of the Israeli political system that was already in place, each of them helped to create their own government, which was more technocratic under Netanyahu and more authoritarian under the first Prime Minister. As A.P. Tsygankov, a Russian political scientist, correctly notes, "a regime is unquestionably a collection of state structures that permit the ruling elite to exercise its powers. In some cases, there may be an institution of multipartism and well-developed civil society structures, while in others political decisions are made and implemented by the regime using fundamentally different structures and mechanisms, without any alignment with the public interest. ... regime, as compared to the system, has its own temporal characteristics. ... the same political system can function in different regimes.

This perspective is essential to understanding how Israel's political system evolved under fundamentally different governments, each of which proposed their own mechanisms for addressing the most pressing social issues, primarily security-related ones, in accordance with the demands of the time and the resources available. While this is going on, decisions are being made by a small group of individuals, various kinds of shadow cabinets, as well as the built-in

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multiparty system, separation of powers, strong civil society, and other democratic features of the Israeli political system. The Defense Minister role is still the most crucial, however the Prime Minister may hold many responsibilities concurrently.

The credibility of a leader is defined by his ability to find answers to society's most pressing questions, to be convincing, to ensure that no one else can do the job better. Ben-Gurion did not just share the public's particular security concerns, he also was able to offer military and security solutions. Netanyahu, who came to power when the might of the Israeli army could no longer be questioned, has also emphasized security in his political program, turning the slogan of the center-left Avoda party 'territories for peace' into 'peace for security'. He has masterfully exploited public frustration over attempts to resolve the Palestinian problem and concerns about new threats, which has enabled him to remain as Prime Minister longer than his great predecessor.

Ben Gurion's emergence as a politician is closely linked to the era of the search for national identity and the building of a state that did not exist in the modern era. Historical reminiscences about the ancient kingdoms of Judea and Israel could only conventionally be seen as legitimizing Jewish claims to Palestine. The members of the European Jewish communities had no continuous routine history of life in Palestine, no close connection with this ancient land, no names of heroes left in living popular memory that previous generations could still remember, no common language in which they could speak and write. All this was in fact created under the influence of the Zionist doctrine, born out of broader European nationalism.

The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine required passionately committed people, ready to make sacrifices and suffer for the sake of statehood. Such people also needed leaders with qualities that were far from ordinary, since the goals required complete dedication.

Thus, the chairman of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), Chaim Weizmann, carried out the political task using his own authority and the organization behind him as the resource. He negotiated with the British government for the establishment of a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine, which

meant getting the rights to buy land and ensuring an influx of immigrants. His efforts contributed to the emergence of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917. [4]

As for Ben Gurion, he carried out the practical and organizational tasks of establishing and strengthening the dominant political party, forming quasi-state structures and illegal (Haganah) or semi-legal (Palmach) armed formations. Unlike Weizmann, who was estranged from life in Palestine, Ben Gurion controlled the main political and power resources of the Jewish community (Yishuv), which enabled him to count on its support and make decisions of both tactical and strategic nature.

The formation of the future Israeli elite followed a scenario in which the most active representatives of political parties, trade unions, volunteer organizations and military groups were promoted to its ranks. The elites do not always emerge from the state apparatus or large corporations. In a weak state or in the state in the making, or in revolutionary turmoil, a new elite is recruited primarily from 'the armed forces, trade unions, the media, NGOs, any social movement and so on. However, according to the Brazilian researcher Matias Lopez elite theory acknowledges that elites may come from anywhere, as long as they find the necessary tools to exercise power...However, elite theory limits elites to a necessary minority. Therefore, provided with the necessary tools, *anyone* but not *everyone* could eventually become a member of the elite'. [5]

In other words, personal qualities are the main driving force. It is not the routine reshuffling of political figures or the process of succession, but persistence and charisma that pave the way to the top for the strongest and most ambitious. Ben Gurion certainly possessed charismatic traits - the ability to lead people, to make them believe in themselves. This type of legitimacy was described by Max Weber. To sum it up, according to him, the charismatic fold is an extraordinary personal gift (Gnadengabe) or charisma, the total personal devotion as well as personal trust evoked by the leader in his followers. A man of this type is regarded as inwardly 'called upon' to lead people; the latter obey him because they believe in him. [6]

Perhaps only David Ben-Gurion belonged to the ranks of charismatic politicians in Israel, because of his own leadership qualities and because society needed the Leader and, finally, because he fairly quickly lost his political rivals, who progressed with him from young idealists to bureaucrats and apparatchiks. Some of them died, some drifted away, some were politically marginalized. Thus, Ben Gurion found himself alone at the top of the state pyramid he had created. The last of the old guard with whom Ben Gurion forged the Israeli state was the Speaker of the Knesset, Yosef Spinzak. In 1952, after the death of the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, Spinzak tried to run for president. Ben Gurion rejected his candidacy^[7] - he was not so much afraid of political rivals as he was trying to prevent the rise of those who had known him in his youth and for whom he was not an unquestionable authority.

Benjamin Netanyahu was not overly charismatic, but had a strong personality which ensured his political career. Netanyahu used to point out that he did not belong to traditional politics. Most of his political life was spent outside the Likud party. In that sense, he was not a traditional apparatchik. Nor was he from the military system. Party activists tend to divide society into Left and Right, friends and foes. Netanyahu insisted in his interviews that this was not the case with him.^[8]

POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL SUCCESSION

The process of Ben Gurion's becoming a political leader was taking place over decades. The political struggle in which he was engaged required him to maneuver and at the same time stick to his principles. His active work in the most influential Zionist parties and organizations eventually brought him to the political top of the future Israeli establishment.

In his long political life, Ben-Gurion has never sought universal recognition. He always took positions that seemed right to him, and which were sometimes at odds with the mainstream. During the First World

War he had already taken a special position concerning service in the British army which became a source of controversy in the Yishuv. Not all Palestinian Jews were sympathetic to military cooperation with Britain, as they

did not want to alienate the Turkish authorities on whom their life in Palestine depended. Russia was fighting alongside Britain and France during the war, and under these circumstances the Ottoman authorities deported Russian subjects from Palestine. One solution to avoid this was for the Palestinian Jews to adopt Turkish citizenship, however, this automatically meant that they were conscripted into the Turkish army. Other choice would have put the whole Zionist project at risk, since deportation would have led to a drastic reduction in the small Jewish population. Under the circumstances, some Zionist activists, including the young Ben Gurion, took the initiative to become Turkish citizens and serve in the Turkish army.^[9] Later, convinced that Turkey was losing the war, Ben Gurion joined the Jewish Legion established within the British army.

A decisive role in the World Zionist movement of the first half of the twentieth century and in the development of Palestine was played by the socialist movement. At the end of the 19th century, the Poalei Zion Party (Workers of Zion) was established in Russia, uniting Marxists and socialists. The party proclaimed as its goal class struggle and common ownership of the means of production. The general ideological platform was the concept that the Jewish proletariat, while sharing the fate of the world proletariat, nevertheless faced specific problems, and that these could only be solved by concentrating the Jewish working class in Eretz Yisrael. Ben Gurion rose to the top, taking the classic path of a functionary: first working for a political party (Poalei Zion), then working in the secretariat of the Histadrut trade union as well as editing a trade union newspaper. In 1930 he became a head of the new socialist Mapai party, which for many years dominated the political system in Yishuv and later Israel.

In 1929 the Jewish Agency was established to co-operate with the British administration in Palestine in matters relating to the creation of a 'national home'. D. Ben-Gurion was also head of the EA's executive committee from 1935 to 1948.

But Ben-Gurion would not have become a recognized leader had he been content to do only bureaucratic work. Unlike many, he possessed strategic vision and the ability to choose the right course of action. In May 1942, in New York, he took an active part in developing the 'Biltmore Program'. It was seen by Ben Gurion and his supporters as a crucial step towards the reorientation of the Zionist

movement from Britain to the United States. In its final clause, the Biltmore Program 'declares that the new world order that will follow victory cannot be established on foundations of peace, justice and equality unless the problem of Jewish homelessness is finally solved. The conference urges that the gates of Palestine be opened; that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine and with the necessary authority for upbuilding the country, including the development of its unoccupied and uncultivated lands; and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world. Then and only then will the age old wrong to the Jewish people be righted'.¹¹⁰¹

Unlike activists in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann believed that the possibilities for cooperation with Britain were far from exhausted. He was highly critical of the 'Biltmore program'

In fact, the 'program' charted a radically new course chosen by Ben Gurion and his associates, whose success depended on Ben Gurion's willingness to take responsibility for its implementation. In the words of Ben Gurion's biographer, Michael Bar-Zohar, he started to chart a new path - the path of militant Zionism, away from England, a turn toward America, a mobilization of American Jewry, a demand for the immediate establishment of a state, a call for a powerful Aliyah The Ben-Gurion line, in spite of its unquestionable radicalism, proved to be more viable and more in line with the immediate political objectives.¹¹¹¹

Ben Gurion also secured his place in Israeli history because he was associated with some of the most momentous decisions, which lent a special symbolism to his long service to his country. For example, he insisted on the immediate proclamation of the State of Israel and announced the Declaration of Independence on 14 May 1948.^[12]

Netanyahu's political fate was only partially subject to the logic of elite recruitment from party and social structures. Unlike the founding fathers, the unknown migrants from the outskirts of the Russian Empire who later became the Israeli elite, he belonged to it by birth, as a member of the so-called generation of princes. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, was not only a famous historian, but also a revisionist activist. He even worked as the personal secretary for the founder of

the movement, Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Thus, Benjamin Netanyahu could claim attention from the right-wing Likud bloc, the successor of revisionist ideas.

However, before Netanyahu took up party work and was elected to the Knesset, he received prestigious education in the US and, most importantly, had got political experience. The then Israeli Ambassador to the US, Moshe Arens, liked the young, well-educated, and ambitious Benjamin. In 1982, he appointed him deputy, and in 1984 Netanyahu became Israel's ambassador to the UN. In 1988 Netanyahu became a member of the Knesset on the Likud list. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir appointed him deputy foreign minister. Netanyahu eventually began a battle for leadership in the Likud, and he managed to overtake another 'prince; Benny Begin, the Herut right-wing party founder Men- achem Begin's son. Perhaps the conservative party apparatus initially underestimated Netanyahu's determination to win without fail. In fact, for the elderly Likud bureaucrats, he was a godsend. Young, charming, with a brilliant English, he attracted the attention of the voters, who were getting tired of the 'old guard'. In 1992 Netanyahu became head of the Likud. In the direct election for the post of Prime Minister in 1996 he won a decisive battle with Socialist Shimon Peres.^[13] The margin was slim, but Netanyahu became Prime Minister for the first time, the post he was to contest many times - in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND AMBITION

One important feature of Ben Gurion's political style was his own brand of authoritarianism. 'The typically observed consequences of authoritarianism result from an *interaction* between authoritarian predispositions and threat.'^[14] There is no doubt that Ben Gurion possessed the traits of an authoritarian leader who did not tolerate objections and pushed for his own approach to most political problems. The testimony of Ben-Gurion's loyal disciple, Shimon Peres, who became President of Israel at the end of his career, is quite saying in this regard. 'I once asked him (Ben-Gurion), 'When did you feel that you were a leader?' He answered me: 'when I looked around me and saw that I had no one to ask.'^[15] Was the Old Man (as Ben Gurion was called) sincere when he uttered this phrase, or

was he already thinking about his place in history? At any rate, this phrase, to a great degree, epitomizes the Israeli first Prime Minister.

Another reason for Ben Gurion's authoritarian style was his group affiliation. Before the creation of Israel Ben Gurion belonged to a rather narrow circle of like-minded Zionist socialists, who worked under the difficult conditions of the British Mandate. After independence, the Prime Minister became increasingly oriented towards the Israeli military establishment, repeatedly holding the post of Minister of Defense in addition to that of Prime Minister, and surrounding himself with army officers and bureaucrats from the Ministry. He trusted and promoted members of this group, often at the expense of people with no military experience. Both groups constituted fairly closed corporations with their own rules. Group identity may, depending on the hierarchy built within it, become a source of authoritarianism.

One can agree with the New Zealand researcher John Duckitt, a scholar of authoritarianism, that 'measures of patriotism and nationalism, indexing group identification at the level of the society or nation, have invariably shown very powerful correlations with traditional measures of authoritarianism... Moreover, if authoritarianism is viewed as reflecting the intensity of individuals' group identification and their consequent commitment to group cohesiveness, then a formal definition of authoritarianism follows quite readily. On this basis, authoritarianism is simply the individual or group's conception of the relationship which should exist, that is, the appropriate or normative relationship, between the group and its individual members'... One possible model would be 'the belief that the purely personal needs, inclinations, and values of group members should be subordinated as completely as possible to the cohesion of the group and its requirements.'^[16]

This state of affairs, characteristic of both mafia groups and cohesive revolutionary units, tend to endow the leader with authoritarian traits. Interestingly, Ben Gurion was attributed the following statement: 'I don't know what the people want, but I think I know what is good for them.'^[17]

In comparison, Netanyahu can hardly be called an authoritarian ruler, but he has always shown himself as a politician with a huge ego. He has been known to be disinclined to consult even his advisers, to assume that his own assessments of the situation are almost always correct, and to push through his own decisions. Perhaps these traits, or possibly a personal experience, led the Israeli journalist Yoel Markus to describe Netanyahu as 'charismatic, driven, from an extremely ambitious family, egocentric, a lone wolf, the kind of person you might say has no God.'^[18]

Ambition and determination are considered the main features of Netanyahu's character. Once Netanyahu experienced a great family tragedy. His elder brother Jonathan was the only Israeli commando who died in 1976 during the hostage rescue in Entebbe.^[19] Jonathan Netanyahu became a national hero in Israel, and Benjamin, according to a common belief, tried all his life to be worthy of his memory. He found his own way of doing it.

Perhaps this, too, has determined his political trajectory. He always tried to be the best, he set himself hard goals, achieved them, was not satisfied with partial success and never gave up. 'Netanyahu sees the game of politics as governed by the 'laws of the jungle,' where the strong survive and the weak fall by the wayside. To him, achievement of the goal justifies any political means... In most cases, he does not act out of aggression, malice, or cruelty. His dominance and manipulation stem from cold, rational calculation, directed solely at achieving goals at any cost'.^[20]

Reaching his goals at any cost did not always translate into public support for Netanyahu. At times he realized that he had overreached himself. He reached a difficult point in November 1995, when a far-right radical assassinated Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had been trying to resolve the Palestinian problem and had sanctioned direct negotiations with the PLO. These talks and their subsequent results, which became known as the 'Oslo process, led to a revival of far-right activists and parties. For them even a partial withdrawal from the West Bank was unacceptable. The territorial issue was actively exploited by the Likud, which strongly criticized Rabin and whipped up a lot of hysteria about the West Bank. In describing the role of the Israeli right in the events leading up to the

assassination, Israeli researcher Itamar Rabinowitz wrote that Netanyahu attended all major rallies organized by the right, including those in which Rabin was portrayed as wearing a Nazi uniform. On 5 October 1994, for example, he spoke at a rally organized by the Likud against the signing of an agreement with the Palestinians. The rally quickly turned into pandemonium and the crowd began shouting 'Death to Rabin!' . The main motive for criticism against Netanyahu was that he failed to condemn the electrified crowd for unacceptable and dirty tricks and thus de facto justified them.^[21]

Rabin's murder prompted Netanyahu to lower the degree of confrontation sharply and join the Likud in supporting Shimon Peres PM candidacy as Peres had been working closely with Rabin. In fact he did not have long to wait for his own premiership. In 1996 he defeated Peres in a direct election as Prime Minister.^[22]

Netanyahu skillfully exploited not only his oratory skills and youthfulness, but also the real fears of the electorate, faced with the intensification of the terrorist attacks from Hamas and Islamic Jihad that came before the elections. In reality, the struggle for security has always been at the top of his political agenda, and the terrorist attacks gave added logic to his fight against the Oslo process.

THREAT RESPONSE

Both Ben Gurion and Netanyahu consistently emphasized the issue of security and tried to reduce the threats to the state primarily and almost exclusively by force. In fact, the willingness of the leader to escalate in response to the threat, may also be seen as dictated by authoritarian behavior. The willingness to promptly respond to any security threat provided public support for both PMs thus allowing them to resort to rather harsh methods and to entrust the decision-making process to a narrow circle of confidants. At the same time, the threats under Ben Gurion and under Netanyahu were different, their respective perceptions of these threats were also different, and they had different resources at hand for deterrence.

Ben-Gurion tended to exaggerate the danger of new wars. He cited the relative weakness of the state and the army during his rule, the small population, the absence of reliable allies, and Israel's non-involvement in military-political alliances. It is no coincidence that the Israeli historian Nir Kedar calls David Ben-Gurion a 'security-minded leader'. According to him, this image 'is also reflected in his conduct during his fifteen year tenure as premier and defense minister: his custom of wearing a khaki uniform; his tendency to glorify the IDF as one of the greatest achievements of the Zionist project; his favorable bias towards former army commanders and defense ministry people ('Ben-Gurion's boys') whom he surrounded himself with and promoted at the expense of other equally talented young men who lacked a military background; and, finally, the all pervasive sense of national emergency that he and his close associates inculcated in the country'.^[23]

Ben-Gurion did everything in his power to defy international pressure and the divisions within the Israeli elite in order to develop Israel's nuclear potential, which has never been openly acknowledged by the Israeli leadership. The war with the Arabs on three fronts at once remained a constant nightmare scenario for him. It is this perception of reality that determined his political downfall.

On the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, Ben-Gurion showed a lack of realistic assessment of the situation - retired from the government, without any reliable information and cut off from the decision-making process, he had no idea of the dramatic changes that had taken place in the Israeli army and of its newly acquired capabilities. Even less was he able to evaluate the military potential of the Arab states, since the intelligence services were reluctant to share vital information with him. The old statesman was convinced that the war would last for months and would require many casualties, and so he resisted the outbreak of it in every possible way. While at the beginning of the war Ben Gurion was still perceived by many as a most prominent leader of the country, a kind of savior, to whom the wider public would turn in danger, several days later he was a retired politician, an old man, whose time had passed; the fierce battle for Israel was fought by others - they had the laurels of victory.^[24]

When Netanyahu was in power the threat of Israel's destruction (which was a nightmare for society in the early years of independence) had long been removed from the agenda. Peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan; the development of informal ties with some Gulf countries and a process of 'normalization' started in 2020; the increasing political marginalization of the Palestinian problem have all contributed to this.

In the view of many Israelis, the Palestinian problem has been gradually becoming an Israeli domestic issue. In reality, this has an increasingly destructive effect on Israeli society, unleashing the most radical, extremist, nationalist forces, which are prepared to go to extremes. For this expanding electorate, Netanyahu was for a long time a most sought-after politician.

Finally, Israel's special relations with the US, which are very different from the US-Israeli relations under Ben Gurion, also play a role in strengthening the premier's position. While the first prime minister was never even invited to the US for an official visit, Netanyahu could count on Washington fulfilling all its obligations regardless of the tensions on certain issues. Since the second half of the 1980s US-Israeli relations have been institutionalized in the framework of strategic cooperation. Trump's rise to President opened a whole new page in the relations between the two countries. The unilateral decisions to recognize the Syrian Golan Heights as part of Israel and Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the pro-Israel plan to resolve the Palestinian problem (the 'Deal of the Century') were a clear demonstration of his political and personal preferences.

The notion of an existential threat was revived, however, when Iran was named Israel's main enemy. Iranian leaders did indeed at times make harsh and irresponsible remarks about Israel. Reaching an agreement on the nuclear issue was hoped to appease Israel, but it did not. On December 12, 2017 Israel and the US signed 'a far-reaching joint memorandum of understanding providing for full cooperation to deal with Iran's nuclear drive, its missile programs and its other threatening activities'.^[25] The document crowned intensive talks between representatives of the major Israeli and American intelligence and defense chiefs.

The Israeli leadership welcomed the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018. In its view, even the remote prospect of Iran possessing nuclear

weapons would destroy Israel's nuclear monopoly, and Israeli political and military leaders were prepared to go to extreme lengths to prevent this.

The Netanyahu government highlighted the Iranian threat since Iranian forces appeared in Syria. Israel accuses Iran of strengthening ties with Lebanon's Hezbollah in an attempt to build a 'corridor' from Iraq through Syria to Lebanon, of intending to establish a permanent foothold in Syria. Israel's response has been constant shelling and bombing of Iranian targets in Syria.

The importance of security threat in political mobilization was demonstrated in the April 2019 Knesset elections. The ability to counter threats has become a crucial element not only of the Likud agenda, but also of its opponents, the Kahol-Lavan (Blue and White) bloc, created by former Israeli Chief of General Staff Benny Gantz and bringing together a number of retired senior military officials. The emphasis on security undoubtedly won votes for the new bloc, which unexpectedly managed to garner as many votes as Likud. In the end Likud and Kahol-Lavan won almost equal numbers of seats in the Knesset, although Netanyahu had the advantage in coalition building.

However, Netanyahu was not able to create it, because of the intransigent position of Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of Yisrael Beiteinu party. Netanyahu believed that he could get Lieberman to compromise. 'Netanyahu was almost certain of this,' a senior politician was quoted, suggesting that the Prime Minister may not have taken the Israel leader seriously. Perhaps he thought that, as usual, everything would 'blow over in the 90th minute'^[26]. Since this did not happen, and no coalition was formed, the President had to delegate the formation of a coalition to another candidate. This displeased Netanyahu the most, and he initiated the dissolution of the Knesset. New elections were held in September 2019.

During the election campaign, Netanyahu tried to make the most of his foreign policy credentials to raise his domestic profile. It is hardly a coincidence that Donald Trump's 'Deal of the Century' was announced just before the election in order to boost the Israeli prime minister's popularity by emphasizing the special relationship between him and the American president.

Relations with Russia remain no less important to Netanyahu. He attempted to convert them into a strengthening of his political position on the eve of the election. The release of Naama Issahar and her return to Israel on the Prime Minister's private jet were to emphasize the success of Netanyahu's skillful negotiations.

Nevertheless, in October-November 2019, neither Benjamin Netanyahu nor Benny Gantz were able to form a government coalition - both lacked votes to win a parliamentary majority. Blue and White overcame the Likud by a single seat. Nonetheless, the Likud received the mandate from the President but again failed to form a government. Gantz also failed. The President passed the mandate to the Knesset members for 21 days. After no other candidate was offered, the Knesset was dissolved.

In March 2020, the third election was held. This time, Likud gained more seats than Blue and White. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel worsened, which precipitated negotiations for a national emergency government. In the end, Benny Gantz decided on an emergency government in alliance with incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing parties that traditionally support him. Netanyahu could stay in power for 18 months, until the autumn of 2021. Benny Gantz would have then been entitled to take over. In fact, this arrangement was never in the cards.

The Prime Minister had no plans of passing his position to Gantz. 'In retrospect, it became clear Netanyahu had one significant tactical maneuver up his sleeve. Under Israeli law, a national budget must be passed by a specific date, and if no budget passes by that predetermined date, the Parliament is automatically dissolved... the reason Netanyahu refused to pass a budget was to give himself the maximum flexibility regarding when new elections would be held — in such a way that would deprive Gantz from serving as Prime Minister in the interim'.^[27] Following a failed budgetary vote in December 2020, the government coalition collapsed yet again.

The results of the March 2021 parliamentary elections ended Benjamin Netanyahu's record-breaking term as Prime minister when the Knesset voted to

approve the new government formed by Yamina leader Naftali Bennett and Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid^[28].

The political crisis that erupted was indicative of Netanyahu's main trait - a desire to win at all costs, to find a way out of a seemingly hopeless situation. His defeat was primarily a personal one. All sorts of political achievements that Netanyahu could put on the table did not affect the eagerness of the public and the elites to get rid of him. He was no longer trusted or respected even by his former confidants. According to a Russian scholar Lyudmila Samarskaya, 'being involved in several criminal cases (on corruption, abuse of public trust and fraud), he sought to remain in power even though his removal from the post of Prime Minister became almost the main election promise of many old and new Israeli parties'^[29]. In other words, Netanyahu's desire to keep power by plunging the country into a series of elections just to save himself from the Israeli Themis have caused growing public dissatisfaction.

Political longevity is not an exclusive feature of Israel's political system. It can be found in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. However, if in the first group longevity is provided by the political system, which does not provide for turnover and only imitates elections, then in formally democratic systems it has to be earned. For the same leader to be able to prolong his stay in power through elections, he or she needs public trust and support. This is often won when an 'emergency' situation arises, a real or exaggerated threat, which gives *carte blanche* to the candidate for the highest office. It makes such candidate seem to have no alternative, empowers him and encourages (apart from personal qualities) authoritarian tendencies. The entry into the elite, the presence of a narrow and reliable circle of like-minded people, personal background and charisma also play a role. In the Israeli case, the growth of ethno-nationalism, the increasing role of right-wing parties and religious institutions, internal conflicts and external challenges determined the type of leader that was in demand.

At the same time, a long stay in power poses serious challenges even for the most popular politicians. Such leader is gradually losing touch with reality: Ben Gurion was sure that he knew what the people needed, but found himself in

the end being far behind the dynamically developing social and military-political processes. The uncontested politician is becoming boring to the public. The younger representatives of the elite are also getting tired and irritated of him seeing no future for themselves under his no-ending rule. As a result, no merit can be a guarantee of lasting popularity and loyalty. People want to see new faces even if these long-awaited personalities may turn out in many respects inferior to their mighty predecessors.

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