

Why Binyamin Netanyahu tape is no real shocker

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Netanyahu's words highlight his hostility to the peace process, but in Israeli-Palestinian politics being two-faced is not unusual

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A [recently released tape](#) revealing Binyamin Netanyahu's contempt for both the Palestinian and US administrations has caused far less of a diplomatic storm than his opponents hoped it might. For all that Netanyahu's innate arrogance and self-aggrandisement was [laid bare by the contents](#) of the nine-year-old recording, the collective shrugging of shoulders implies that few expected anything else from a man who has been boasting of his own political prowess throughout his tumultuous career.

Secretly taped during a 2001 meeting with terror victims in the settlement of Ofra, Netanyahu's words display a hostility and venom towards Israel's peace partners entirely consistent with his [approach to negotiations](#) with the Palestinians over the years. "America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction. They won't get their way", he said, referring to his plans for a "broad attack on the Palestinian Authority ... [one which would] bring them to the point of being afraid that everything is collapsing".

"They asked me before the election if I'd honour [the [Oslo accords](#)]", he went on. "I said I would, but ... I'm going to interpret the accords in such a way that would allow me to put an end to this galloping forward to the 1967 borders. How did we do it? Nobody said what defined military zones were. Defined military zones are security zones – as far as I'm concerned the entire Jordan Valley is a defined military zone. Go argue." In this way, he concluded, "I de facto put an end to the Oslo accords."

Despite the context of his outburst – he was speaking off the record and during the height of the [second intifada](#) – his words serve to reinforce the impression that he has little to no interest in dealing equitably with either the Americans or Palestinians round the negotiating table. In terms of his current status as prime minister, the revelations will only serve to deepen suspicions among his detractors both at home and abroad, who will doubt whether the Likud leopard's spots have ever been, or can ever be, changed for the better.

All the signs from Netanyahu's latest spell at the helm of Israeli politics suggest he is as intransigent as ever. Obfuscation, procrastination and alienation continue to be

watchwords of his political strategy: serious, sustained peace talks seem as distant a prospect as ever, and in the interim the heavy-handed measures taken against Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza continue to widen the gulf between the two sides.

The absence of domestic pressure to reopen talks with the Palestinian Authority backs up Netanyahu's belief that he has a mandate from his own people to close his ears to pleas from overseas for concessions. Save for occasional attacks on Israeli border towns, life is sweet and secure for the majority of Israelis, at least by comparison to the traumatic years of the first and second intifadas – hence Netanyahu sees no need to fix what to him doesn't appear broken.

President Obama won't be strong enough to force Netanyahu's hand any more than his predecessors were, given Netanyahu's antipathy towards anyone pressuring him to strike a deal with the Palestinians. Bill Clinton was "radically pro-Palestinian", according to Netanyahu's 2001 assessment, hence Netanyahu fought tooth and nail to avoid having to implement the deal struck under Clinton's auspices. Given the publicly stated suspicion of various Israeli ministers towards Obama and his cabinet, it appears Netanyahu will again employ his old tactics in his latest battle for supremacy.

However much succour is given to Netanyahu's enemies by the release of the Ofra tape, it must be recalled that he is far from the first player in Israeli-Palestinian politics to be caught saying one thing in public and secretly believing another. Yasser Arafat had a long history of [duplicitous grandstanding](#) when it came to the disparity between statements he made to the west and to his supporters in the Islamic world, while numerous other diplomats on both sides stand accused of similar deceit.

Few would really be naive enough to believe that politicians don't regularly harbour private views at odds with the policies they promote in public, hence Netanyahu's exposure as two-faced should come as no major surprise. That he was so cavalier in stating his true beliefs is the only real shock, but whether he was overly worried then or now about his words seeing the light of day is unclear. For a man who has built his reputation and career on iron-fisted, nationalist policies to be revealed as a die-hard hawk is unlikely to ruffle many of his or his backers' feathers.

In terms of current negotiations, US and Palestinian officials are stuck with the devil they now know a bit better than before. For all that Netanyahu's true colours have now been shown, he's not going anywhere and there is precious little his opponents can do about it, regardless of the Ofra tape's release. Distrust and mutual suspicion are an ever-present feature of the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock, and once the dust settles after the latest revelations, all those involved in the peace process will simply have to grin and bear the situation as before.

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