
The Netanyahu Case

From Prime Minister to prime suspect

by Dean Andromidas

It appears that former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu has gone from being a Prime Minister to being a prime suspect. On Sept. 14, Bibi and his wife Sarah were questioned by police for eight hours on suspicion that they had taken bribes and misused public funds during Netanyahu’s three years as Prime Minister. Netanyahu is also accused of bribing a witness to commit perjury.

Netanyahu was thrown out of office as Prime Minister this past May 17, when Ehud Barak smashed him at the polls, winning 60-40% in the biggest landslide in Israeli history. Netanyahu’s election debacle came after three years of his lying and sabotaging the Middle East peace process, rupturing relations with the Palestinians and enraging the United States, and exploding in frequent near-psychotic outbursts against supposed enemies, foreign and domestic.

Expensive housework

Netanyahu’s present case involves a Jerusalem contractor named Avner Amedi, who sent an invoice of 440,000 shekels (about \$100,000) for work he had done for the Netanyahus on their private home and the home of Bibi Netanyahu’s mother. The police have in their possession documentation, including correspondence and inflated invoices, which point to acts of bribery, kickbacks, and fraud. The invoices include one for 12,000 shekels (\$3,000) for polishing the floors of Netanyahu’s private home four times in a single month! (It should be noted that Israeli Prime Ministers are not allocated a budget from state funds to pay for such work.) Also, accepting such work to be done gratis, can legally be considered a form of bribery or corruption.

Although Sarah and Bibi have not been placed under arrest, they were questioned “under warning” that they may face charges, and that anything they say may be used against them. Amedi, the contractor, was held for three days and then put under house arrest.

According to unnamed police sources cited in the Israeli press, there were significant contradictions in the accounts given by the Netanyahus, who were questioned separately. Moreover, both their accounts contradicted that given by Amedi.

The police also questioned Sarah Netanyahu’s former secretary, Neumi Agis, for four hours. Agis told Israeli TV news

that “there was more than one person who worked for free for the Netanyahus, and maybe they did not understand the significance of them working for free.” Agis claims her life has been threatened since she gave testimony to the police in the case.

Aliza Amedi, the contractor’s wife, was also questioned by police. According to the *Jerusalem Post* of Sept. 19, Aliza Amedi clearly indicated that the work her husband was doing for the Netanyahus was not being done for free. She claimed the high cost of her husband’s services—over \$100,000—could be explained by Sarah Netanyahu’s strange demands. For example, when they were contracted to move the children’s toys and other personal belongings from one house to another, each toy had to be individually wrapped—and only in Sarah’s physical presence—as if it were a priceless art object; if she left the room, work had to stop. Sometimes, no more than two boxes a day could be packed because of the constant interruptions. Given the notoriety Sarah has acquired, and her reputation for eccentricity, such a charge is highly credible.

Aliza Amedi also said that she and her husband frequently tried to collect payment for their work, but were told they would be paid only after the work had been completed. This apparently went on throughout the three years in which Netanyahu was Prime Minister.

According to an account in the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz*, Aliza Amedi said, “The work went on and on, and we understood that we’d eventually get our money.” She also said that “the Netanyahus never said we were overcharging.”

The police were planning to question Benjamin Netanyahu’s former Director General of the Cabinet, Moshe Leon, after the Rosh Hashonah-Yom Kippur holy days. Leon, who is currently in the United States, was responsible for issuing an authorization for the payment of 58,000 shekels to Amedi, instead of the 440,000 Amedi was demanding. The reason the lower amount was authorized instead of the 440,000 was that 58,000 was the maximum amount that could legally be given to a contractor who had not been subject to the issuance of a tender by the government.

Too many cigars, too

Netanyahu’s latest troubles have drawn an appropriate response from Members of the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament). MK Ilan Gillon of the Meretz Party commented, “There is no surprise that a person who smoked 11,000 shekels’ [\$2,500] worth of cigars a month at the public’s expense also took hundreds of thousands of shekels from the public to renovate his home. It is, however, bewildering that the suspected briber, Avner Amedi, was arrested two days ago, while Netanyahu comfortably stretches out in his armchair.”

Ophir Pines Paz, of Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s One Israel party, also asserted that the allegations are not surprising, since Netanyahu, throughout his political career, has not

known how to differentiate “between his private purse and the government’s purse.”

Mohammed Baraka, chairman of the Hadash, an Arab party, charged that Netanyahu was a “man who conducted himself in a corrupted and corrupting manner, both politically and personally.”

The Members of the Knesset from Netanyahu’s Likud party have not been quick to jump to defend Netanyahu’s integrity, insofar as he achieved national and international fame as the biggest liar among his fellow heads of government. Instead, Netanyahu’s party colleagues have adopted the tactic of attacking the police for leaking information about the investigation to the press. Notwithstanding, Israeli Police Inspector General Yehuda Wilk hinted in testimony before the Knesset that Netanyahu’s own lawyer was, in fact, behind the leaks.

Will he go to jail?

One leading Israeli commentator told *EIR*, “I think Netanyahu might have to postpone his political comeback a few years,” because he is very likely to go to jail if convicted. This source says that one problem is that the case is not having the political effect one would expect, since, so he asserts, the Israeli public seems to have “little respect for the law” and has a “culture that supports the guilty.”

Be that as it may, the Israeli police have said they have

yet to find “proof” of illegal activity, although they were quick to add that this does not mean there is none to be found.

This is not the first time that Netanyahu has been investigated for corruption. While in office he was accused of corruption when he appointed Roni Bar-On as Attorney General at the request of MK Aryeh Deri, a political ally at the time. This was seen as an attempt by Deri, who was, at that point, himself being accused of corruption, to escape prosecution through engineering the appointment political sympathizer Bar-On.

Commentator Ze’ev Segal, writing in the *Ha’aretz* of Sept. 22, recalled how Netanyahu had managed to wriggle his way out of the Bar-On affair, when the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Prime Minister had only “turned a blind eye” to the implications of the appointment, and had received no political favor from it. But, Segal continued, the current case is much more serious, because, according to all press accounts, two major offenses were committed: “The illegal use of state funds, and political corruption.” He pointed out that in the Supreme Court decision regarding Bar-On found that the “turning of a blind eye” can “be considered a criminal act if a civil servant has received a material favor. The receipt of a material favor is regarded as a more serious offense than the receipt of a political favor; thus, the present Netanyahu affair presents circumstances that are far graver than those of the Bar-On affair.”

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