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The Netanyahu Investigations: What Comes Next?

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Who is Benjamin Netanyahu?

[Benjamin Netanyahu](#) is the current and longest serving Israeli Prime Minister. He has held office for 12 years, most recently from 2009 to present, and previously between the years of 1996 and 1999. As chairman of the right-wing Likud Party, Prime Minister Netanyahu has led a conservative and defense focused coalition in Israel's parliament. His career in public service has also included time spent as the Minister of Finance from 2003-2005, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2002-2003, and as Ambassador of Israel to the United Nations from 1984-1988.



What are the ongoing corruption investigations?

Prime Minister Netanyahu and a number of his close confidants and advisors are the subjects of several police investigations into bribery, fraud, and breach of public trust. In two of these matters—Case 1000 and Case 2000—[the police have concluded their investigations and recommended charges](#) to the Attorney General, Avichai Mandelbilt, who was appointed by Netanyahu. Two other investigations—Case 3000 and Case 4000—are still under investigation by the Israeli police.

Case 1000 alleges a series of improper financial arrangements between Prime Minister Netanyahu and two businessmen—Israeli film producer Arnon Milchan and Australian investor James Packer. All three men deny wrongdoing. The allegations include [claims that Netanyahu received approximately \\$300,000 USD worth of gifts from the businessmen](#), including champagne, cigars, and concert tickets, in exchange for his assistance advancing various legislative and personal matters benefitting Milchan and Packer. Netanyahu's actions allegedly included lobbying for bills, arranging for a visa, and impacting business deals, all to benefit the two businessmen.

Case 2000 alleges that Netanyahu engaged in a corrupt bargain to curb poor press coverage from the left-wing newspaper *Yedidot Abaronot*. Netanyahu allegedly told Arnon Mozes, the owner and publisher of the paper, that Netanyahu would help to decrease the circulation of the paper's right-wing competitor, *Israel Hayom*, in exchange for more favorable coverage from *Yedidot Abaronot* by intervening with Sheldon Adelson, the conservative American financier and political donor who provides financial backing for *Israel Hayom*.

There are currently [two other cases investigating possible corruption](#) in the office of the Prime Minister. Case 3000 alleges that officers close to Netanyahu bribed officials in the Israeli Defense ministry to purchase submarines and other vessels from the German defense company ThyssenKrupp. Case 4000 alleges that Netanyahu, in his capacity as Communications Minister from 2014 to 2017, volunteered to assist the *Bezeq* media group in regulatory matters in exchange for favorable press coverage from *Bezeq* group's *Walla* News site. As of May 2018, the police have not concluded their investigation into either matter, or made any recommendations of charges.

What are the political implications?

Prime Minister Netanyahu has proved to be an effective leader of the right wing in Israeli politics. If the investigations continue, it is possible that this may jeopardize his standing within his coalition. Moshe Kahlon, the Finance minister and head of the centrist Kulanu party which is part of Netanyahu's governing coalition, has expressed concerns about Prime Minister Netanyahu's attacks on the legal system, calling on all parties to "[stop attacking the police and the legal system](#)," although publicly stating his continued allegiance to the Prime Minister. Netanyahu's public image has also suffered, with sustained anti-corruption protests in Tel Aviv calling for his removal.

Is there precedent for such investigations against the Israeli Prime Minister?

Several other Israeli Prime Ministers have been the subject of corruption investigations, the outcomes of which have been mixed. Prime Minister Netanyahu himself came under scrutiny during his first term as Prime Minister in the 1990s. Although investigations resulted in the recommendation of two charges, neither case was pursued by the Attorney General. Similarly,

the [charges](#) recommended against Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2002 were dropped in 2003, as were charges recommended against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2004. On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stepped down in 2008 after allegations of corruption during his time as Jerusalem mayor. Olmert was ultimately convicted of bribery in 2012.

What are the charges against Sara Netanyahu, the Prime Minister's wife?

In [late June 2018](#), [Attorney General Mandelbilit indicted Sara Netanyahu](#) on charges of fraud and breach of public trust arising from a 2015 investigation into her use of taxpayer money to fund nearly \$100,000 USD of catered meals. Israeli law forbids the Prime Minister's office from ordering meals cooked by outside chefs when there is already a chef on the Prime Minister's personal staff. Sara Netanyahu stands accused not only of violating that law, but also of attempting to cover up her wrongdoing by having the Netanyahus' personal chef described as a "maintenance worker." Her [trial is set to begin in July 2018](#) in Jerusalem's Magistrate Court. This indictment demonstrated Attorney General Mandelbilit's willingness to make politically risky decisions, and has heightened speculation about whether he will prosecute the charges recommended against Prime Minister Netanyahu, who has dismissed the charges against his wife as "[a new height of absurdity](#)."



What comes next?

[According to Israeli Law](#), a Prime Minister is only required to step down if convicted of a crime, which is unlikely to occur in the near future. Netanyahu's busy travel schedule caused delays in the initial investigations, and may continue causing slowdowns as Attorney General Mandelbilit considers whether to prosecute the charges recommended by the police. Even if an indictment is brought, it could still be years before a trial begins, during which time Prime Minister Netanyahu would be legally free to remain in office. Alternatively, Attorney General Avichai Mandelbilit may decide not to pursue charges, as occurred when the police made similar recommendations against Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak in the early 2000s. The matter is further complicated by the absence of safeguards to ensure the independence of the Attorney General's office, and the fact that an [Attorney General can be removed](#) from office by the Prime Minister in consultation with Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked.