



## Attempted Coup? Netanyahu Indicted on Charges of Bribery, Fraud, and Breach of Trust

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was formally indicted on charges of accepting bribes, fraud, and breach of trust in connection with three separate scandals. The indictments on Thursday mark the first time in the 71-year history of the nation's current incarnation that a sitting prime minister has been charged with a crime.

Netanyahu accused political opponents of an "attempted coup." Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing, and claims he is the victim of a "witch hunt" launched by political adversaries. If convicted of the crimes he's accused of, Netanyahu could face up to 10 years in prison for the bribery charge and three years for the fraud and breach of trust charges.

"I give my life for this state, I fought for it, I was wounded for it. I have to say this is a very hard day," Netanyahu said in a nationally televised address. "I think you need to be blind [not] to see that something wrong is going on. This is a political coup."

The prime minister attacked the process leading to the indictments. "It's very disturbing what is going on here and how the police conducted this investigation," Netanyahu said. "This is a contaminated process. We need to investigate the investigators: they didn't want the truth, they were after me personally."

But Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit rejected Netanyahu's claims that the indictments are political, claiming instead that it was an occasion of sadness for the country. "A day in which an attorney general decides to serve an indictment against a seated prime minister for serious crimes of corrupt governance is a heavy and sad day, for the Israeli public and for me personally," Mandelblit said.

The previous prime minister, Ehud Olmert, stepped down from office just before he was indicted on corruption charges a decade ago. Olmert would later serve 16 months in prison for the crimes of bribery and fraud.

The charges against Netanyahu are broken into three different cases known as Case 1000, Case 2000, and Case 4000. Case 1000 alleges that Netanyahu received gifts, such as cigars and champagne, worth "hundreds of thousands of shekels" from supporters including Israeli billionaire and Hollywood film producer Arnon Milchan.

Case 2000 contends that Netanyahu used his position to work out a deal to get favorable press coverage from Arnon Moses, the publisher of [Yedioth Aharonoth](#), an Israeli national newspaper, in exchange for Netanyahu's backing of legislation that would weaken a rival newspaper.





Written by [James Murphy](#) on November 22, 2019

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Case 4000 alleges that Netanyahu made regulatory decisions that favored the Bezeq telecommunications company in exchange for positive press coverage on the popular Israeli news site Walla. This may be the most serious allegation, since it claims that Netanyahu championed regulations that gave his friend, Shaul Elovitch of Bezeq, benefits worth more than \$250 million in exchange for favorable press.

Netanyahu says the indictments are full of “false information,” and spoke of a “tainted investigation.”

The indictments against Netanyahu add yet another layer of concern to the unprecedented political situation in Israel. Late last year, Netanyahu struggled to get anything done in an extremely divided Knesset, which prompted him to call for new elections in April. Netanyahu’s Likud Party and the Blue and White Party of Netanyahu’s chief political rival, Benny Gantz, ended up tied with the remaining vote split up among 10 smaller parties. Since no governing coalition could be formed, the country ended up holding another election in September.

The September election saw the Blue and White Party winning by one seat over the Likud Party, but the same problem still exists. Neither the Blue and White or Likud Party is able to cobble together the 61 seats needed to form a new government.

The indictments come at an unprecedented time in Israeli politics — a 21-day period in which any member of the elected Knesset may try to rally the 61 members needed for a majority so that they can be the prime minister and form a new government. But the only real contenders, at this time, remain Gantz and Netanyahu.

Should no one be able to gain the 61 seats necessary for a new government, a third snap election will be triggered for next year.

Following the announcement of the indictments, Gantz says that Netanyahu “has no public or moral mandate to make fateful decisions for the state of Israel.” Gantz then said that, under the circumstances, Netanyahu “will make decisions in his own personal interest and for his political survival and not in the national interest.”

The indictments are the culmination of a nearly three-year investigation initiated by Israeli police in December of 2016.

With Iran attempting to dig in and [maintain a large military presence](#) just over the border from Israel, now is not a good time for Israel to be essentially leaderless. If Netanyahu is compromised, the Israeli people will need to replace him soon, and with someone just as strong.

*James Murphy is a freelance journalist who writes on a variety of subjects with a primary focus on the ongoing anthropogenic climate-change hoax and cultural issues. He can be reached at [jcmurphyABR@mail.com](mailto:jcmurphyABR@mail.com)*



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