



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, September 4*

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- Before Elections, PM held up to Five Daily Calls with Paper Editor
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- Cabinet Approves Renewal of New Settlement Construction
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# News Excerpts

September 4, 2017

## Ha'aretz

### **Sara Netanyahu Expected to Be Indicted for Fraud**

Sara Netanyahu is expected to be indicted, pending a hearing, on charges of fraudulently receiving items worth 400,000 shekels (\$111,851), Haaretz has learned. Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit is expected to inform Netanyahu, wife of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of the charges against her in a few weeks. Sara Netanyahu is suspected of ordering chef's meals at the prime minister's official residence, which is against regulations, and concealing the fact that she did so. She and her husband have accused the former chief caretaker of the official residence, Meni Naftali, who is currently leading protests against the prime minister, of inflating the residence's expenses. See also, ["Sara Netanyahu undergoes lie detector test in bid to deflect fraud investigation" \(The Telegraph\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Before Elections, PM held up to Five Daily Calls with Paper Editor**

Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke with editors of the Israel Hayom newspaper, seen as staunchly loyal to him at the time, as often as five times in a single day during the run-up to the March 2015 election, according to information provided by the Prime Minister's Office following a freedom of information appeal. Forced by a Supreme Court order to reveal the dates of his phone calls with the owner of Israel Hayom and its then-chief editor, Netanyahu said last week that from 2012 to 2015 he spoke with American Jewish casino mogul Sheldon Adelson almost once a week and nearly double that with editor Amos Regev. See also, ["PM often talked to 'Israel Hayom' editor right before press time" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **PM's Former Chief of Staff Suspect in Submarine Scandal**

Prime Minister Netanyahu's former chief of staff David Sharan was identified Sunday evening as one of the suspects police are seeking to flip into a state witness in the submarine affair, also referred to as Case 3000. Sharan was one of the six people who were detained Sunday morning for questioning over suspicions of bribery in the affair, as part of the ongoing investigation into the purchase of submarines from Germany for the Israeli Navy. The Court extended his arrest Sunday evening by five days after investigators marked him as one of the suspects who possessed critical information on the affair. See also, ["Ex-aide to Israeli PM arrested in submarine probe" \(Washington Post\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Yadlin: Trump Should Attack North Korea if he Can**

The former head of Israel's Military Intelligence said Sunday that the US should launch a preemptive strike against North Korea if it has the capability to do so in the wake of an apparent hydrogen bomb test by Pyongyang. However, he said he was not sure, and didn't know if Washington was sure, whether it had the ability to do so. Maj. Gen. (res) Amos Yadlin, who also served as IDF attaché to Washington and who is currently the director of the Institute for National Security Studies, told 103FM Radio said the military option against North Korea was very complicated and risky. While he recommended that US President Donald Trump "make a preemptive strike" to prevent North Korea from continuing to develop its nuclear weapons capability, he said such a strike would require "excellent intelligence."

## **Cabinet Approves Renewal of New Settlement Construction**

Israel's cabinet on Sunday approved a plan to resume construction of a West Bank settlement to re-house the evacuees from the Amona outpost. Ground was broken for the new community of Amichai in the Shiloh Valley north of Ramallah, in June, and is the first new settlement to be built with government approval since 1992, prior to the Oslo Accords. However construction was frozen after a few weeks due to a disagreement between government ministries as to who should finance the work. In comments to the cabinet on Sunday, Netanyahu thanked Minister of the Interior Arye Deri for "solving the problem of budgetary distribution". See also, ["Ministers earmark \\$15 million to resume construction of new settlement" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

### The Guardian

## **Palestinian Journalists: Abbas Tightens Grip on Media**

The reasons given by Palestinian Authority security forces when they arrested the journalist Tariq Abu Zaid were deeply contradictory. Abu Zaid, a reporter with the Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, was originally told that he was being detained in retaliation for the Gaza arrest by Hamas of a journalist from a media organisation supportive of President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party. But once in jail, Abu Zaid told the *Observer*, the story changed and he was told that he was being pursued under the controversial new Electronic Crimes Law, introduced by Abbas earlier this summer, for posts he had made on Facebook in which he had sarcastically criticised the Palestinian Authority. See also, ["Mahmoud Abbas cracking down on media?" \(PressTV\)](#)

### AP

## **Israel Welcomes UN Lebanon Mission Under New Mandate**

Israel is welcoming the extension of a U.N. peacekeeping operation under tougher directives in southern Lebanon adding it must act to maintain stability there. The Foreign Ministry said Friday UNIFIL must act in a "significant and decisive way" to stop Iranian-backed militants Hezbollah from strengthening near its frontier. The Security Council renewed the mission known as UNIFIL this week, with new orders for more patrols and detailed reports when peacekeepers run into roadblocks in Hezbollah strongholds. The U.S. and Israel pushed for the changes, saying UNIFIL wasn't doing enough to stop a Hezbollah buildup. Iran is suspected of sending weapons to Hezbollah via Syria, where the militant group is fighting alongside President Bashar Assad. Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets at Israel during a month-long war in 2006.

### Ha'aretz

## **Canada's Largest Private-sector Union, Adopts BDS Motion**

According to reports from the Canadian Jewish News, Unifor, Canada's largest private-sector union, adopted a BDS motion at its convention two weeks ago. The motion, which passed "easily," was entitled "Palestinian Self-Determination and the Movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" and calls for the organization to utilize BDS with regard to "sectors of Israel's economy and society which profit from the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories." Unifor has over 310,000 members across Canada. After the convention, Unifor published a press release saying that it was following in the footsteps of the Palestinian trade union movement.

## The Submarine Affair: A Clueless Netanyahu Is Just as Bad as a Complicit One

*The deeper the investigators dig, the more suspects they find in senior positions in the security establishment, the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office and in Netanyahu's inner circle*

By Barak Ravid, diplomatic correspondent at Ha'aretz

- Inside the large building housing the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, on the first floor, is a small, even more protected area. Transparent glass walls separate it from the rest of the structure, giving it its nickname, the "aquarium." That is where the prime minister meets with all his top advisers, and also where the security cabinet meets. In the "aquarium," at the end of the hallway, in the last office on the right, the desk closest to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office belonged for more than a year and a half to David Sharan, who [was arrested Sunday](#) on suspicion of taking a bribe in the submarine affair. The latter is shaping up as the most serious corruption affair in the history of the state.
- Sharan was Netanyahu's chief of staff and one of the people closest to him. He was responsible for the prime minister's schedule, he took phone calls and filtered them, he said who got through Netanyahu's door and when. He sat in on sensitive meetings, was exposed to classified material and attended political meetings. At a certain point Netanyahu informed Sharan that he intended to give him the senior post of cabinet secretary, but backtracked at the last minute. To this day the reason he did so is not entirely clear. Not long ago, Netanyahu was even considering making Sharan civil service commissioner – the regulator of all public service in this country.
- Sharan is the third close associate of Netanyahu suspected of involvement in corruption in [the submarine affair](#). Before him came Netanyahu's personal attorney, [David Shimron](#), considered Netanyahu and his wife Sara's go-to man for political and personal matters, and Brig. Gen. (res.) [Avriel Bar-Yosef](#), one of the main suspects in the affair. Netanyahu had planned to appoint Bar-Yosef to the high-ranking and sensitive position of National Security Council head.
- Bar-Yosef and Sharan have known each other for a long time, since back when Bar-Yosef was the director of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and Sharan was political adviser to that committee's chairman, MK Yuval Steinitz. A few years later, they both served together in senior positions in Netanyahu's bureau.
- In November 2016, after the submarine affair was brought to light by Channel 10 journalist Raviv Drucker, Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit quickly announced that the affair involved no suspicion of criminal acts. Among Netanyahu's mouthpieces in the media there were some who also declared that "the ceremony was over," that there was no corruption or bribery in the affair, that it was all a fabrication. Today, it's clear that at best, these remarks were hasty, and at worst, simply foolishness. Not only is the ceremony not over, it's at its height.
- The more sewage water flowed to the sea, the clearer it became that there is not one suspicion of criminality but many suspicions, which just keep multiplying, piling up and getting stronger.

There are suspicions of bribery, suspicions of fraud and suspicions of corruption to the extent of harming state security. The deeper the investigators dig, the more suspects they find in senior positions in the security establishment, the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office and in Netanyahu's inner circle.

- Last February, when Mendelblit finally ordered a criminal investigation launched in the affair, he stressed that the prime minister himself was not a suspect. Indeed so far there is no evidence that Netanyahu was involved, in knowledge or action, directly or indirectly – in the alleged corruption of his three close associates in the submarine affair. However, the accumulation of suspects among people in his bureau and inner circle raises disturbing questions about Netanyahu's conduct in the most sensitive issues of national security.
- If Netanyahu knew about Shimron's involvement in the submarine deals, or the alleged connections between Bar-Yosef and Michael Ganor – the middleman in the submarine affair – then this is a case of suspected offenses that violate ethical standards. On the other hand, if this whole affair took place behind Netanyahu's back, then the prime minister doesn't know what's going on around him, and surrounded himself unknowingly with a bunch of allegedly corrupt people, appointing them to the highest and most sensitive positions in government. It's hard to decide which of these possibilities is worse.

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## **In Practice, Netanyahu was *Israel Hayom*'s Editor-in-Chief**

By Nahum Barnea Columnist at Yediot Ahronot

- Raviv Drucker is a credible, courageous and resolute investigative journalist. His reports on Channel Ten have exposed major problems in Israeli society, without treating powerful people with kid gloves and without fear of their power. Yesterday he could chalk up another accomplishment: he compelled Netanyahu to disclose the dates of his phone calls with the owner and editor-in-chief of the freebie *Israel Hayom*. I hope that this achievement does not get the baby thrown out with the bathwater.
- In order to comprehend the significance of this discovery, you have to know a little more about how things work in the media. Prime ministers rarely call newspaper owners. They call newspaper editors even less often, usually to protest something that was reported or to attempt to block something that is about to be reported. They feed information to the media—feeding information is an essential component of their work—but they do so through reporters, commentators and columnists. These are the rules of the game in most democratic countries.
- The frequency and the timing of Netanyahu's phone calls to the owner and editor of *Israel Hayom* are indicative of different rules of the game: in practice, Netanyahu was the freebie's editor-in-chief.
- *Israel Hayom* is not a newspaper and it is not a business. It is a gift to the man whom the casino mogul from Las Vegas wishes to honor. Everyone in the media and political establishments knew it. The readers, at least some of them, did not care.
- Until the elections came. The freebie mobilized all its propaganda power to get Binyamin Netanyahu elected. It looks like an election gift, one that deviates from everything permitted by law during elections. A petition was filed with the Central Elections Committee to prohibit distributing the freebie. Shlomo Filber, Netanyahu's election committee chief and afterwards his director general in the Communications Ministry, signed a deposition that denied that Netanyahu had any link to the freebie.
- That was a lie. Gatekeepers, politicians, journalists knew it was a lie, but they preferred to shut their eyes. Drucker, through his journalistic and legal work, compelled them to look. By so doing, Drucker did the public an important service. At some point, the state comptroller will revisit the false deposition. Should he decide that [*Israel Hayom*] was a prohibited gift, the Likud will have to pay it back in money, which it will collect from the public. The Israelis will learn, once again, that there are no free gifts.
- The danger lies further down the road. The demand to reveal records of meetings and phone calls will not end with Netanyahu and Adelson. Coalition Chairman MK David Bitan is now seeking to reveal the talks between publishers and other editors with Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert. He believes that he is helping Netanyahu that way. Great, let him. Next time someone will ask why only publishers and editors are receiving such treatment. Why should the reporters

be deprived of it? The commentators? The investigative journalists? If you're going to have transparency, the petitioners will say, then go all the way with it.

- If reporters cannot guarantee confidentiality for their sources, the media will not be able to continue to fulfill its function. It's as simple as this: there is no democracy without a free media that is alive and kicking. There is no media without confidential sources.

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