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**To:** 'sullivanjj@state.gov'  
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Interesting reading.

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<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/bibi-connection>

## The Bibi Connection

By Max Blumenthal



US President Barack Obama (R) meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, 20 May 2011. (Photo: AFP - Jim Watson)

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By: Max Blumenthal

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The US presidential election campaign that kicked off January 3 with the Iowa caucuses was the subject of a curious article attacking President Barack Obama in the mass circulation Israeli daily newspaper, *Israel Hayom*.

"US President Barack Obama is 'naïve' and needs to face up to the threat presented by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood across the Middle East, Israel's National Security Council concluded during a strategic discussion several days ago," *Israel Hayom* reported. The Israeli National Security Council consists of Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu's closest advisers. And *Israel Hayom* is not just another right-leaning Israeli tabloid. Referred to by Israelis as the "Bibiton," or Bibi's mouthpiece, the paper is an instrument that gives him extraordinary political leverage. The obviously planted article in *Israel Hayom* rang like a bell sounding the start of Netanyahu's own campaign in helping the Republican Party oust Obama from the White House.

*Israel Hayom's* genesis demonstrates the depth of Netanyahu's connections in Republican circles. It was created by one of Netanyahu's top financial supporters, a Las Vegas-based casino tycoon named Sheldon Adelson, who is also a major donor to the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Adelson's closest relationship is with former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, a longtime ally of Netanyahu who has been running a rancorous campaign for the Republican presidential nomination.

Netanyahu's less than subtle intervention has become an open issue in Israeli politics. Opposition leader Tzipi Livni of the Kadima Party has criticized Netanyahu for damaging the US-Israeli relationship. "Netanyahu spoke about consensus," Livni said in May, "and if there is a consensus in Israel, it's that the relationship with the US is essential to Israel, and a prime minister that harms the relationship with the US over something unsubstantial is harming Israel's security and deterrence."

But Livni's warning has been ignored. Rather than hesitating, the prime minister and his inner circle are moving full steam ahead in their political shadow campaign whose ultimate goal is to remove Obama. Bibi's war against Obama is unprecedented. While Israeli prime ministers have tried to help incumbent presidents, none have ever waged a full-scale campaign to overthrow them.

Netanyahu has engaged enthusiastic allies in the Republican Congress, led by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, and within the right-wing media. His neoconservative allies in Washington are launching a "Super PAC" to generate emotional attack ads against Obama and any candidate that might be an obstacle to his policies. And his campaign has even broadened into an attempt to discredit the *New York Times*, whose editorial page and foreign policy columnists, Thomas Friedman and Roger Cohen, have been critical of him.

Netanyahu's shadow campaign is intended to be a factor in defeating Obama and electing a Republican in his place. He opposed Obama's early demand to freeze settlements on the West Bank as a precondition for reviving the peace process, a process since the Oslo Accord that Netanyahu has attempted to stall or sabotage, despite his signing of the Wye Agreement under pressure from President Clinton. Since his adamant stand against the settlement freeze, Netanyahu has undermined every effort to engage the peace process.

He appears dead set on consolidating Greater Israel, or what many Israelis call "Judea and Samaria," and has signaled a strong desire to attack Iran.

By all accounts, Netanyahu's personal chemistry with Obama is toxic. Obama bristles at his belligerence. But Netanyahu's hostility has reaped rewards from him, having stopped the peace process in its tracks. The latest effort by the Quartet seems doomed to failure. And Netanyahu's rejectionism has put Obama on the defense. Most of the US Jewish establishment has remained a bulwark for Bibi's policies. Obama, meanwhile, has been forced to declare America's "unshakable bond" with Israel, even as Bibi thwarts Obama's initiatives and attacks him in the Israeli press.

As political strategy, by tainting Obama as less than full-throated in support of Israel, Netanyahu bolsters the Republican themes that the president "apologizes" for US power, is weak on national security, and is an agent of "decline." By depicting Obama as "weak" on Israel, Netanyahu's campaign excites right-wing Jews and evangelical Christians, who overwhelmingly accept the biblical claims of the Jewish state's historical right to Greater Israel, Judea and Samaria. Bibi's deepest attack line against Obama merges theology with ideology.

His campaign against Obama is a high-stakes gambit that will almost certainly color US-Israeli relations well past Election Day. Already, Netanyahu has succeeded in polarizing the political debate, as his agenda is singularly aligned with the Republican Party. Yet Bibi's short-term objectives are rapidly turning the US-Israel relationship, at least under his aegis, into a partisan issue, another litmus test of conservative ideology rather than national interest.

### **The personal connection**

Netanyahu's American orientation is partly rooted in his personal history. Raised in suburban Philadelphia, his father, Benzion Netanyahu, was the former press secretary for the godfather of right-wing revisionist Zionism, Zeev Jabotinsky. Benzion Netanyahu (original name: Benzion Mileikowsky) spent his most consequential years in New York raising money for Jabotinsky and the rightist Irgun militia in Palestine. When he returned to Israel to launch a political career, the elder Netanyahu was rejected by Menachem Begin, the Likud Party leader, who, as right wing as he was, considered him dangerously extreme (Arabs are "an enemy by essence," the elder Netanyahu said recently). But the son triumphed where his father failed, rising at first on his fluency in American political culture, a frequent guest on ABC News' Nightline and other US broadcast news programs, eventually winning the chairmanship of the Likud Party in 1992.

The following year, Netanyahu published a political manifesto in the form of a memoir, *A Durable Peace*, edited with a helping hand from American neoconservative Douglas Feith. The book was tailored to the sensibilities of an American audience, particularly one with conservative Republican tendencies. In a revealing passage, Netanyahu warned readers that the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state could lead Latinos to establish a "second Mexico" in the American Southwest: "These [Latinos] would demand not merely equality before the law, or naturalization, or even Spanish as a first language," he wrote. "Instead they would say that since they form a local majority in the territory [which was forcibly taken from Mexico in the war of 1848], they deserve a state of their own."

In 1996, when Netanyahu launched an underdog bid for Prime Minister against the grand old man of the Labor Party establishment, Shimon Peres, he contracted the services of Arthur Finkelstein, a reclusive New York-based Republican political consultant. Finkelstein

was infamous for orchestrating a come-from-behind victory in 1992 for Jesse Helms, a radical neo-Confederate senator from North Carolina, by race baiting Helms' black opponent. Finkelstein earned a fortune working for anti-gay candidates like Helms, even while planning to marry his long-term boyfriend.

Netanyahu's campaign against Peres was defined by Finkelstein's trademark slashing tactics. Frightening imagery flooded Israeli airwaves. Among Netanyahu's most successful Finkelstein-crafted attack lines was, "Peres will divide Jerusalem." Even the positive slogans had a negative subtext. "Bibi is good for the Jews," hinted darkly at the de facto coalition Peres had constructed with Arab-based political parties. Finkelstein's media assault on Peres, with its suggestion that he and his assassinated predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin, had stabbed Israel in the back, propelled his client to a narrow victory.

The new Prime Minister relied on a kitchen cabinet of advisers from neoconservative think tanks, especially the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Shalem Center. In 1996, two of these advisers, former Reagan administration Pentagon officials, Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, produced a document for Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, a once influential base of neocon activity, called "A Clean Break." The paper advocated overthrowing Saddam Hussein and attacking Syria "as a prelude to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East." (Feith was appointed a Defense Department official in the George W Bush administration and became a fervent defender of the Iraq invasion, leading the effort to fabricate evidence of Saddam Hussein's operational links with al-Qaeda. General Tommy Frank, who led the invasion, called Feith "the f\*\*king stupidest guy on the face of the earth.")

### **Backing down to Clinton**

President Bill Clinton was, according to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)'s then-President Steve Grossman, "the most pro-Israeli [president] in America's history" – and he was committed to fulfilling the Oslo Accords on his watch. He developed an unusually close relationship with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, coming to see him as something of a father figure. When Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing Orthodox Jewish extremist, Peres briefly took over, but was soon defeated by Netanyahu. Clinton demanded that Netanyahu begin to withdraw Israeli troops from small portions of land in the occupied West Bank. With pressure mounting, Netanyahu flung himself into the American political wars.

In January 1998, at the beginning of the impeachment scandal, Netanyahu appeared at a rally organized by Reverend Jerry Falwell, a right-wing evangelical Christian icon, who had produced an elaborate conspiracy video accusing Clinton of drug trafficking and complicity in the murder of Vince Foster, his White House deputy legal counsel and old friend, who had, in fact, committed suicide.

Standing beside Falwell before an audience of hundreds of evangelical activists and right-wing Jews, Netanyahu vowed in his signature basso profundo voice never to "divide" Jerusalem, and proclaimed that the "Jewish people" were being "vilified and scorned and misrepresented." After the rally, Netanyahu shuttled between meetings with conservative pundits and the broadcast studios of Fox News and right-wing Christian TV networks, stirring up his support among America's most zealous opponents of the peace process. The most prominent among Netanyahu's newfound conservative allies was then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich, an instigator of the impeachment. That April, at a meeting of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, Gingrich condemned Clinton's attempts to pressure