

The Adelsons May Have Cut Ties with Netanyahu More than a Year Ago-And No One Noticed

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*In the days leading up to the Israeli election on Sept. 17, **President Donald Trump** appears to have left **Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu** twisting in the wind.*

While most observers have been attributing Trump’s cooling toward Netanyahu to either rational foreign policy differences—particularly rumors that Trump may make an overture to the leadership of Israel’s arch-enemy, Iran—or Trump’s irrational idiosyncratic irascibility, there’s another factor that is being largely ignored: Trump’s mega-fans, **Sheldon and Miriam Adelson**.

Leaked transcripts of testimony given to police, disclosed by the Israeli media in the past several days and recent weeks, reveal that the Adelsons are no longer backing Netanyahu, and have not been for quite some time. Sheldon Adelson reportedly [testified](#) to police investigators in October 2018, in connection with one of three ongoing corruption probes of Netanyahu, that he had cut his ties with Bibi and had vowed that he would never meet with him again.

In March 2017, in their coverage of the corruption charges for which Netanyahu was under investigation and could potentially be indicted—Israeli media reported that Netanyahu and Israeli media mogul Arnon Mozes, publisher of *Yediot Aharonot* [Latest News], had discussed ways to weaken or shut down the Adelsons’ *Israel Hayom* [Israel Today] newspaper. In exchange, *Yediot Aharonot* would give Netanyahu more favorable coverage and attack his political opponents. Founded in 1939, *Yediot Aharonot* had been Israel’s largest newspaper in circulation in sales and circulation until Sheldon and Miriam Adelson had established *Israel Today* in 2007 with the aim of getting Netanyahu elected and keep him power.

Subscriptions to *Israel Today* and copies in print and online are available at no cost—except to the Adelsons—and it is believed to be Israel’s most widely read newspaper. “Israel Hayom has consistently supported the prime minister,” according the English language Times of Israel. “Its unflinching backing of Netanyahu has been characterized by the playing down of his failures, the hyping of his achievements and the lashing of his critics. It has also shied away from praising his rivals.” The Adelsons don’t appear to be directly implicated in what became known as Case 2000, except insofar as Netanyahu appears to have been more than willing to throw them under the bus by supporting a law that would ban free newspapers—like *Israel Hayom*.

Recent Israeli news coverage of the leaks from Adelson’s testimony has focused on tensions between the Adelsons and Netanyahu’s wife Sara. In early August, Israel’s Channel 13 disclosed that Adelson and his wife Miriam had testified to police that Sara Netanyahu was

media obsessed and “decides everything” in the Netanyahu household, holding sway with regard to key staff appointments and even some political matters, [according to Haaretz](#):

“She’s completely crazy,” said Sheldon Adelson, publisher of the *Israel Hayom* daily. “She was compulsive about photos of herself and how she looked. She said, ‘I’m the first lady, I’m a psychologist and I teach children about psychology.’ ... She would tell my wife that if Iran attacked it would be her fault ... because we didn’t publish good pictures of her...”

According to Channel 13, via the *Times of Israel*, Sheldon [told](#) police that Sara Netanyahu had demanded the firing of Amos Regev, *Israel Hayom*’s editor since the paper’s inception. “She tossed around very rude comments about how [my wife] Miri might be having an affair with Amos,” Adelson recalled. “It indeed was a very rude comment. I intended to get up and go at that instant — but Miri didn’t want to.” Although the news outlet [had given](#) Netanyahu “positive coverage, to the point that some claim it is illegal propaganda,” Regev left *Israel Hayom* in May 2017—two and a half years later—due to ongoing friction with the Prime Minister’s Office over coverage of Sara and Bibi. The Netanyahus wanted Regev replaced with the family’s former media adviser, Nir Hefetz (currently a [witness against the Netanyahus](#)), but the Adelsons did not yield to the pressure.

Miriam Adelson, who officially became *Israel Hayom*’s publisher in May 2018, recounted a dinner party in her testimony [during which](#) “Sara lost her temper and started screaming so loudly that the prime minister asked the Adelsons to leave.” “She screamed that I was sucking her blood. It was awful...” according to the transcripts disclosed by Channel 13 on September 8. She also said that Sara had solicited lavish gifts from her.

The Adelsons’ accounts were corroborated by testimony leaked by Channel 13 on September 11. Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan—a key witness in Case 1000, another corruption probe of Netanyahu investigating whether he solicited and received expensive gifts from his tycoon friends—told police he had been present when Sara Netanyahu verbally abused the Adelsons. [According to Haaretz](#):

“I was present at a dinner with Sheldon and Miri Adelson at the Netanyahus on Balfour [street],” Channel 13 quoted Milchan as saying in his testimony. “Sara started screaming at Miri [Miriam Adelson]: ‘You are spilling my blood, you are all spilling my blood.... You with your ‘Bibi-paper’ don’t help at all, only ruin.’”

Milchan then said that Sheldon Adelson responded to the verbal assault by saying: “Calm down, we’re doing the best we can. I lose 40-50 million dollars a year [on *Israel Hayom*] ... We regularly write in your favor and you keep shouting at me.”

Despite the reported verbal abuse, it was only after the Adelsons learned of Bibi conspiring against *Israel Hayom* with its competitor that they broke off their relationship with him. The leaked transcripts of Adelson’s police interview disclose that the Adelsons’ relationship with Netanyahu was “never the same” after they learned of his betrayal. The *Times of Israel* reports that Sheldon [told](#) investigators, “I will never meet [Netanyahu] again because of what I read.”

Indeed, an examination of news stories about the Adelsons in the Israeli press over the past

year and a half, Netanyahu has been conspicuously absent at major Adelson-honoring events. He was not present at the ceremonies at which U.S. Ambassador David Friedman [presented](#) Miriam (who is a medical doctor) with an honorary doctorate on behalf of Bar-Ilan University on June 4, 2019, nor at one at which one was [conferred](#) on Sheldon by the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) of Herzliya—an Adelson-funded academic think tank—on July 5.

When the Adelsons were honored for financing the establishment of a controversial medical school at Ariel University in the northern West Bank on August 19, 2018, Netanyahu was [not among](#) the 200 invited guests, which included Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and numerous government ministers and dignitaries. Also of possible significance: photos taken in May 2018 at the dedication of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem—a top priority for the Adelsons—show Miriam Adelson sitting next to U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, while Netanyahu, a few seats down in the same row, is seated next to Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

If they have in fact cut Bibi loose, whom might the Adelsons be supporting in the future?

In the leaked transcripts, Miriam Adelson mentions Sara's role in Bibi's disdain for Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, formerly of the *Bayit Yehudi* (Jewish Home) party, both of whom had formerly worked as Netanyahu aides. "I was furious after the previous election when he [Netanyahu] was refusing to not [SIC] build a coalition with Bennett because she [Sara] hates him," the Times of Israel [quoted](#) Miriam telling investigators. She criticized Netanyahu's reluctance to include the Jewish Home party in the coalition negotiations that followed the 2015 election. "I mean, the fate of the Jewish people is doomed because the lady hates Bennett and Shaked, so he does not make a coalition with the right man who fits."

While no outright declaration of support favoring any party or candidate has been forthcoming from the Adelsons, it is perhaps noteworthy that the Adelson-funded Jewish News Syndicate (JNS)—which provides right-slanted content to local and regional Jewish newspapers in the U.S. and Canada (competing with the more centrist Jewish Telegraphic Agency)—seems to be positively focused on Ayelet Shaked, who heads the list of the *Yamina* [Right] alliance of Israeli right wing parties in the upcoming election. Under Shaked's leadership, *Yamina* is predicted to do well, attracting votes from settlers and right-wing Israeli nationalists. Shaked is expected to be a major player in the formation of any right-wing coalition government after the election.

A [profile of Shaked](#), still prominent on the JNS website since its publication on September 4, approvingly describes Shaked's *Yamina* alliance as "a hodgepodge of right-wing parties that come from different backgrounds, but share a nationalist agenda." These include Shaked's own New Right party, her previous Jewish Home party, and the even further right National Union party:

All three identify themselves as to the right of Likud, though they differ when it comes to religious issues. Shaked and the New Right include secular candidates and are more liberal; Jewish Home is religious and conservative; and National Union is more extreme.

But all three unified behind the leadership of Shaked, a secular woman."

Shaked, who was Minister of Justice in Netanyahu's cabinet from 2015 until its dissolution earlier this year, has called for radical judicial reform that would make the Israeli High Court subservient to the Israeli Knesset. She has vowed to curb the "judicial activism" of what right wingers consider to be the "left-leaning" Court. Although her detractors consider her political outlook to border on fascism, an independent judiciary being the indispensable hallmark of a democracy, Shaked, young (age 43) and attractive, is already being recognized by her admirers as a future prime minister.

If her star power succeeds in brightening the Israeli political sky darkened by the Netanyahus, Shaked may be just the sort of politician to appeal to the Adelsons—particularly Miriam, who recently ranked number one on the 2019 list of the wealthiest Israelis compiled by Haaretz's "The Marker." She is considered the driving force behind the couple's investments and philanthropic projects in Israel and in Israeli politics since their marriage in 1991. The [conclusion of Shaked's JNS profile](#) may well be reflecting Miriam's own view that, "A new leader has emerged within the Israeli right—one who is determined to continue leading for the long term."

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Featured image: Sheldon Adelson, left, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, center, and Adelson's wife, Miriam (photo by Eyal Warshavsky)

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