

Benjamin Netanyahu Indicted on Bribery, Fraud, Breach of Trust Charges

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was indicted Thursday on corruption charges in three separate cases, according to Israel's Justice Ministry.

The news comes as Netanyahu, leader of Israel's conservative Likud Party, and Benny Gantz, leader of the more liberal Blue and White party, have both tried and failed to form governing coalitions after neither party won a majority in Israel's parliament — the Knesset — during September's national elections.

As Axios reported, this is the first time that an Israeli prime minister will be charged with a crime while he's in office.

The allegations of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust stemming from three cases, known as Case 4000, Case 2000 and Case 1000.

"Case 4000 is considered the most serious," the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported, "and revolves around an alleged bribery deal between Netanyahu and businessman Shaul Elovich, who controlled the Bezeq telecommunications company and the Walla News site."

Netanyahu, who's facing charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust in Case 4000 alone, is accused of using his position as communications minister to benefit Elovich's business interests in return for favorable news coverage.

"The defendant Netanyahu took the aforementioned illicit benefits from the Elovitches, knowing he was taking a bribe as a public official for his actions related to his public role," the indictment against Netanyahu reads, according to The Times of Israel.

"In return for these benefits, the defendant Netanyahu executed his authority while making use of his high-ranking position to carry out actions benefiting the defendant Elovitch in a significant manner, while deviating from orderly conduct."

Netanyahu's defense attorneys have countered by claiming the prime minister

simply pushed for balanced news coverage, and that communications ministry staffers approved of all decisions he made.

Netanyahu is also facing charges of fraud and breach of trust in Case 2000. The Israeli prime minister allegedly met with Arnon Mozes, who publishes the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper and discussed a deal in which Netanyahu would “try to limit the circulation of rival newspaper Israel Hayom, and in return, Mozes would give Netanyahu favorable coverage,” Haaretz reported.

Finally, Netanyahu also faces fraud and breach of trust charges in Case 1000 “for allegedly receiving illicit gifts such as champagne, cigars and jewelry valued at some NIS 700,000 (\$201,000) from billionaire benefactors Arnon Milchan and James Packer, and allegedly reciprocating in Milchan’s case with various forms of assistance,” according to The Times.

But Netanyahu’s attorneys have argued that “it is allowed to receive gifts from friends.”

Netanyahu is the longest-serving prime minister in Israel’s history, having held the position since 2009, and before that between 1996 and 1999.

As things currently stand, any member of the Knesset can, over the next three weeks, become prime minister by accumulating the signatures of a majority of lawmakers in the parliamentary body.

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If that does not happen, then another round of national elections is likely.

According to NBC News, Netanyahu has characterized the accusations against him as a “witch hunt” perpetrated by the left and the media.

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