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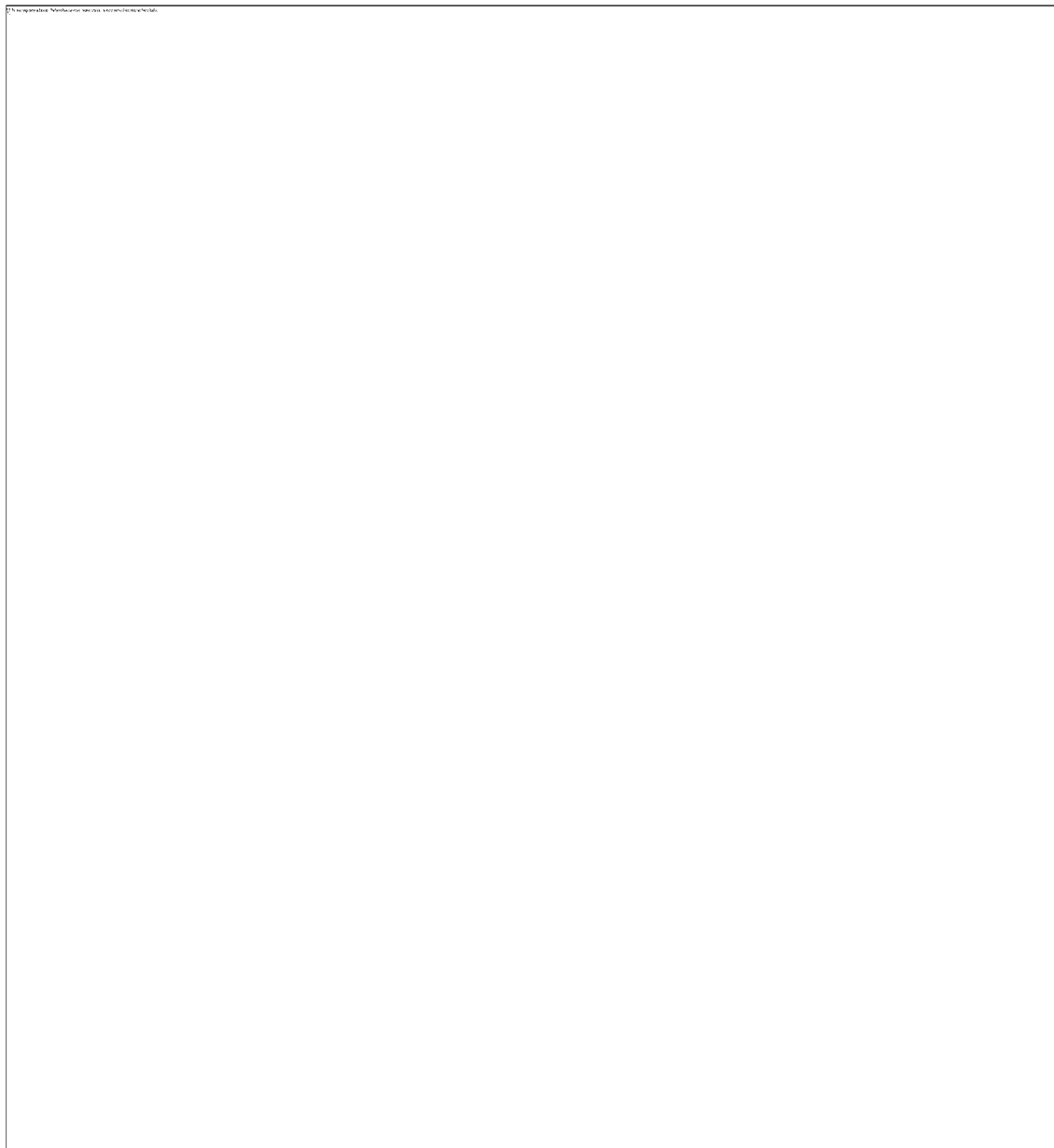
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The Bibi Connection

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)

By: Max Blumenthal

Published Thursday, January 12, 2012

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 Netanyahu into land-for-peace concessions. "The idea that the President can propose a US map [regarding Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank] for a country he does not know is a disaster," Gingrich said. Then he complained, "The Clinton administration has not held [Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser] Arafat's feet to the fire."

But, by October 1998, Netanyahu had all but caved to Clinton's pressure. The man who once mocked "advocates of capitulation" now clasped hands with Arafat after a protracted conference at Wye, Maryland. Netanyahu agreed to redeploy Israeli troops from 13 percent of the West Bank, including most of Hebron.

His sudden turnabout cost him key support inside Likud, provoking a Knesset vote for early elections. His right-wing base shattered, paving the path for a decisive victory for the Labor Party's Ehud Barak, a former Israeli general favored and quietly supported by the Clinton administration.

Suddenly in the wilderness, Netanyahu plotted his path back by cultivating the right-wing in the US — the pundits, the Republican politicians, the big donors, Fox News. In 2007, he held a meeting with a small group of conservative activists emerging as key players in the conservative blogosphere. Among those present was Andrew Breitbart, who became a notorious hatchet man staging wild stunts and whose myriad websites routinely carry conspiratorial, racially charged attacks on Obama. Other figures at the meeting included conservative bloggers Scott Johnson, Jim Hoft and Jeff Emmanuel. "At our meeting we talked mostly about the dangers of the Iranian regime acquiring a nuclear bomb," Johnson recalled, revealing his newly acquired foreign policy expertise. "It was a subject to which Netanyahu had obviously devoted great thought."

Two years later, Netanyahu returned to the Prime Minister's office at the head of an even more decidedly right-wing coalition than before government and was determined not to repeat his previous mistakes of "capitulating" to the peace process at the behest of an American president. Now he turned to the movement he had courted to help him undermine and humiliate Obama.

Humiliating Obama

In March 2010, when Obama dispatched Vice President Joseph Biden to Israel in a futile attempt to restart negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Netanyahu appeared in Jerusalem at a massive rally of 1,000 evangelicals organized by Texas mega-church Pastor John Hagee, a leading Christian Zionist and sometime Holocaust revisionist whose End Times theology committed him to the vision of Greater Israel. Seated onstage beside Netanyahu was Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren (a neoconservative former Shalem Center fellow), and Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, who had just snubbed a visiting delegation of leading Democratic members of Congress. Before the rapture-ready audience, Netanyahu proclaimed that Jerusalem would remain "the undivided, eternal capital of the Jewish people."

At once, he authorized the construction of 1,600 new settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem over the stringent objections from the Obama administration. Though the move angered the White House, Ron Dermer, a top Netanyahu aide with close ties to leading Republicans in Washington, reassured the Prime Minister that Republicans would retake Congress. Netanyahu simply rejected Obama's plea to freeze

settlements and then rejected overtures to restart the peace process. In the 2010 mid-term elections, Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives.

While on a trip to New York days after the Republican victory, Netanyahu authorized another 1,000 more settlement units in East Jerusalem, a direct rebuke of Obama. That same day, Netanyahu held a meeting with the incoming House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, the only Jewish Republican in Congress, and a leader of the right-wing in the House Republican Conference. Cantor's office produced a summary of the meeting for the media that contained the remarkably crude statement: Cantor promised Netanyahu that "the new Republican majority will serve as a check on the [Obama] Administration and what has been, up until this point, one party rule in Washington."

In April 2011, Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner personally invited Netanyahu to speak before a joint session of Congress. He was interrupted 36 times by standing ovations – more than Obama during his State of the Union address – despite making such mind-boggling false claims as that the "vast majority" of Israeli settlers live in "neighborhoods in Jerusalem and greater Tel Aviv."

With a rancorous, multi-billion dollar US presidential campaign certainly looming on the horizon, Netanyahu continued his pattern of making friends in the radical right's media machine. Among them was Glenn Beck, a Mormon convert and former Fox News host, who had compared a major liberal Jewish religious denomination to radical Islamists and claimed that Obama has "a deep-seated hatred for white people." Beck was admonished by the Anti-Defamation League and other mainstream Jewish groups for his anti-Semitic rants against George Soros, a major funder of liberal and Democratic Party-related organizations. In July 2011, Beck traveled to Israel to deliver a diatribe against liberal Israelis demonstrating against Netanyahu's economic policies, labeling them patsies in a secret Islamist-Communist plot.

When the right-wing Zionist Organization of America honored Beck this November with a prize named after Sheldon Adelson and his wife, Miriam, Netanyahu displayed his gratitude in a videotaped tribute. "Glenn, you can be sure that if Sheldon and Miri Adelson put their name to something, it must stand for a lot. You stand for a lot...And I want to tell you how deeply we appreciate this stand of courage and integrity."

Dear Sasha

In December, Thomas Friedman, the Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times*' former Jerusalem Bureau Chief and one of the few American columnists whose opinions seriously register in the Israeli media, published an uncharacteristically pointed critique of Netanyahu's leadership. In Friedman's column were two lines that incited the wrath and fury of the Prime Minister's office. "I sure hope that Israel's prime minister,

Benjamin Netanyahu, understands that the standing ovation he got in Congress this year was not for his politics. That ovation was bought and paid for by the Israel lobby."

Neoconservative opinion makers exploded with orchestrated rage accusing Friedman of being a self-hating Jewish anti-Semite. In response, the *New York Times* gave Netanyahu an opportunity to respond on its opinion page.

But rather than accept the *Times*' offer, Netanyahu dispatched Ron Dermer, his key emissary to the American political scene, especially to the conservative movement, now serving as a senior advisor on his staff, to issue what amounted to a declaration of war against the American newspaper of record. Dermer's letter was extraordinary in its vitriolic, hostile and contemptuous tone. Nothing like it had ever existed before — a vicious official attack from the Prime Minister of Israel on the credibility of the *New York Times*. Perhaps only a little less surprising was that this major event received nearly no coverage in the American press. In his scathing letter, Dermer accused the *Times* of "cavalierly defam[ing] our country," claiming that 19 out of 20 op-eds published in the *Times* were "negative" (Dermer did not challenge their factual basis). He concluded, "it would seem as if the surest way to get an op-ed published in the *New York Times* these days, no matter how obscure the writer or the viewpoint, is to attack Israel."

One of the remarkable aspects of Dermer's letter was that it was addressed, "Dear Sasha." Who is Sasha? Sasha Polakow-Suransky, a staff editor at the *Times* editorial page, is in charge of assigning pieces on foreign policy. Why did Dermer address his letter to Polakow-Suransky instead of to Andrew Rosenthal, the director of the *Times* editorial page? Was he singling out Polakow-Suransky because he revealed in his 2010 book, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship With Apartheid South Africa*, that Israel offered to sell nuclear warheads to South Africa's apartheid government, a bombshell revelation that prompted furios denials from Israeli President Shimon Peres and Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor, embarrassing a country that still refuses to discuss its nuclear program in any public forums, and punishes those who do?

Netanyahu's attack on the *Times* represented a significant new stage in his shadow war. He was drawing sharp new lines. By rebuking the paper, Netanyahu attempted to define its liberal Zionist, pro-peace process editorial line as hostile to Israeli security needs. And by default, he positioned Rupert Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal*, with its relentlessly anti-Obama, pro-Bibi op-ed page, as the only respectable forum for true friends of Israel.

Bibi's man in Washington

More than any other candidate in the Republican presidential contest, Newt Gingrich has hewed to Netanyahu's line on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In an interview with the cable TV Jewish Channel, Gingrich declared, "We've had an invented Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs and are historically part of the Arab community and they had a chance to go many places." He added, "I see myself as, in many ways, to be pretty close to Bibi Netanyahu in thinking about the dangers of the world."

In May 2010, when Gingrich's presidential campaign was no more than the subject of guarded speculation, *Israel Hayom*, Bibi's house organ, provided Gingrich with a Hebrew-language forum to assail Obama's policies. The tabloid splashed a full page photo of a smiling Gingrich on its front page accompanied by the caption: "The former Chairman of the House of Representatives attacks the blindness of the Western Elites: 'Evading the confrontation with Evil may bring a second Holocaust, the mistakes made by the White House will exact a terrible price.'"

Israel Hayom's owner, Las Vegas Sands casino corporation chairman Sheldon Adelson, is America's eighth wealthiest man. At the same time he was bankrolling Netanyahu's career, Adelson also became Gingrich's leading financial angel. The casino kingpin was introduced to Gingrich in 1996 through George Harris, a right-wing anti-tax activist and Clark County, Nevada Republican chairman who helped Adelson block a unionization bid at one of his casinos. Gingrich resigned from Congress in disgrace in 1999, forced out by Republicans, hiding his extramarital affair with a congressional staffer. Adelson stepped in as his financial godfather, pumping millions into the coffers of American Solutions for Winning the Future, an independent political committee that covered Gingrich's extravagant travel expenses.

When Gingrich embarked on the presidential trail, George Harris became his campaign finance co-chair, representing Adelson by proxy. (Adelson's Sands corporation is currently facing a federal criminal probe for allegedly bribing foreign officials). And when Gingrich provoked a hailstorm of criticism for claiming the Palestinians were "invented," Adelson publicly defended him. "Read the history of those who call themselves Palestinians, and you will hear why [Newt] Gingrich said recently that the Palestinians are an invented people," Adelson told a group of American Jews visiting Israel on a program he funds, Taglit-Birthright Israel.

Despite Gingrich's dismal finish in the Iowa caucuses, the opening contest in the Republican contest, Adelson has staunchly remained on his side, donating US\$5 million to a Super PAC created to support Gingrich's campaign in the key primary state of South Carolina, his Armageddon.

Bibi's Super PAC

When Gingrich quits the race, Netanyahu will not be without a candidate. He can count on former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney to carry the neoconservative banner all the way to Election Day. Of Romney's 22 campaign foreign policy advisers, 15 worked in the administration of George W Bush, and six were original members of the Project for the New American Century, the neoconservative group that called for regime change in Iraq.

Romney's own Super PAC, Restore Our Future, credited with destroying Gingrich's hopes in Iowa through a relentless barrage of negative ads, is financed in part by Mel Sembler, a Florida-based multi-millionaire shopping mall developer and veteran Republican fundraiser, appointed the US ambassador to Italy by President George W Bush. Sembler was mired in scandal when the federal government revoked the license of a chain of adolescent treatment centers he founded after former teenage patients complained they were sexually abused, psychologically tortured and humiliated during sadistic behavior modification programs. Less well known is the financial largesse Sembler has bestowed on neoconservative outfits supporting Netanyahu's policies. He is also a close friend of Adelson.

In November 2011, President Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy commiserated about Netanyahu, unaware that their voices were picked up by a live microphone. "You're fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you," Obama complained to Sarkozy. Romney seized on the episode as proof of Obama's disqualifying leadership and proof of his own fitness for office. "We have here yet another reason why we need new leadership in the White House," Romney declared. (Joining the chorus of pro-Bibi attacks on Obama were the Netanyahu-approved bloggers Breitbart, Hoft, and Johnson). In ramping up the effort to turn Israel into an anti-Obama wedge issue, a group of neoconservative Netanyahu allies have started an independent political committee called the Emergency Committee for Israel (ECI). The group's name was inspired by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, an organization that Netanyahu's father, Benzion, helped lead during World War II in part to raise money for the right-wing Irgun militia in Palestine. The group's board comprises a Who's Who of Washington neoconservatives. It is directed by Noah Pollak, a former assistant editor of Azure, the in-house journal of the Adelson-funded Shalem Center, several of whose fellows are now in Netanyahu's inner circle of advisers. Pollak was credited with helping the Israeli army launch a YouTube channel to rebut accusations that it committed war crimes in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere.

This month, the ECI established a Super PAC in order to use unlimited corporate contributions for political attack ads. The group's first major presidential campaign ad buy targeted Representative Ron Paul (R-

Texas), a fervently anti-war libertarian candidate who has called for an end to the special relationship between Israel and the United States. Scheduled to air in the key primary state of South Carolina, where the Republican electorate is dominated by right-wing evangelicals, the ad features Gary Bauer, an ECI board member, Christian right leader and failed presidential candidate staring into the camera, warning that "Ron Paul's conservatism is isolationist and conspiratorial." (Bauer endorsed former Senator Rick Santorum, a right-wing Catholic, who has declared, "All the people that live in the West Bank are Israelis. They are not Palestinians. There is no Palestinian. This is Israeli land.")

Jewish concerns

While Obama and the Democratic Party elite have kept silent in the face of Netanyahu's American shadow war, its polarizing effects have prompted resistance from an unexpected place: the Jewish-American establishment. Weeks of Republican attacks on Obama for his supposed molly-coddling of Israel enemies caused deep discomfort in the offices of mainstream Jewish groups, which have lobbied for decades to consolidate support for Israel in both major American political parties. With Israel deliberately being shaped into a campaign wedge issue, some Jewish leaders worried that rank-and-file Democratic voters would begin to sour on the US-Israel special relationship.

In October, two of the US's oldest and most prominent Jewish organizations, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, released a "National Pledge for Unity" urging politicians, religious leaders and other Jewish groups aimed at preserving bipartisan support for Israel. "We want the discourse on US support for Israel to avoid the sometimes polarizing debates and political attacks that have emerged in recent weeks, as candidates have challenged their opponents' pro-Israel bone fides or questioned the current administration's foreign policy approach vis-a-vis Israel," declared Anti-Defamation League national director Abraham Foxman. "The last thing America and Israel need right now is the distractions of having Israel bandied about as a tool for waging political attacks."

The Emergency Committee for Israel and the Republican Jewish Coalition, an Adelson-funded, pro-Netanyahu group that claims to raise "tens of millions" of dollars for Republican candidates each election cycle, not only rejected the unity pledge, but accused its authors of attempting to suppress pro-Israel activism. In a defiant statement by its chairman, neoconservative activist William Kristol, the ECI proclaimed, "This attempt to silence those of us who have 'questioned the current administration's foreign policy approach vis-a-vis Israel' will re-energize us." Thus the show went on. The effort to lower the temperature only became another occasion for the pro-Netanyahu operation to raise the heat. As their anti-Obama

campaign intensifies, Israel is being merged seamlessly with traditional right-wing wedge issues such as abortion, gay marriage and the menace of immigration.

The deepening wedge

In his writings and in the company of his inner circle, Netanyahu has expressed almost as much disdain for liberal Jewish supporters of Israel as he has for the professed enemies of the Jewish state. His book, *A Durable Peace*, is filled with attacks on Israeli advocates of a negotiated peace with the Palestinians, accusing them of “cloying sentimentalism” and falling victim to the “relentless Jewish desire to see an end to struggle.” Netanyahu was said to privately fume about Obama’s Jewish senior advisor, David Axelrod, and his then-Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, an ardent liberal Zionist whose father was born and raised in Israel. Netanyahu reportedly called them “self-hating Jews.”

After two decades of cultivating the culture warriors of the American right as allies against those seeking “an end to struggle,” Netanyahu is beginning to see results. He initiated and propelled a polarization process that has enabled Republicans to use Israel as a cudgel for attacking their opponents, and did so over the objections of powerful mainstream Jewish-American interests. Haim Malka, a senior fellow for the center-right Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, predicted in a recent paper: “The partisan wedge is likely to deepen, posing considerable challenges to Israel and the US-Israeli partnership.” In the past, America’s Israel lobby sold the US-Israel alliance as a marriage of two vibrant democracies united by shared liberal values. In the current environment of heightened polarization, the special relationship is increasingly marketed to Americans as a united front of besieged bastions of Western civilization against an incipient Islamic onslaught. Rapture ready evangelicals, right-wing ultra-nationalists, and Republican Jews are far more likely to be attracted to this sort of alliance than cosmopolitan liberals. And this may be exactly the way Netanyahu wants it.

But he is far from confident that he can dislodge Obama. Steeling himself for a possible second Obama term, Netanyahu has signaled his intention to move up the date of Israel’s national election. Hanan Krystal, a political analyst for Israel Radio, explained Netanyahu’s possible motives to Reuters: “At the highest echelons, they have long been saying that if Obama is elected for a second term, the carrot will be replaced by a stick.”

Message Headers:

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