

The Bibi Files—Israel's crisis not the product of Netanyahu but of the entire Zionist project

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Recently screened at the Toronto International Film Festival as work in progress, *The Bibi Files*, edited and updated, is now on general release, but only in art houses. Because, as Alex Gibney, one of the producers, said, “No mainstream outlet will show the film in the US”.

Within Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought and failed to get the film banned, it has still not been screened. Despite this, the film has been shortlisted for the Academy Awards best documentary.

The film was directed by South African Alexis Bloom and produced by, among others, Alex Gibney. Bloom had earlier collaborated with Gibney on *We Steal Secrets: The story of WikiLeaks* (2013), a character assassination documentary of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange characterised by numerous distortions and omissions. It essentially adopted the media and US government's campaign against the WikiLeaks website.

The picture *The Bibi Files* film paints is that Israel has been brought to the brink of disaster, fighting a war that has no achievable objective, by Netanyahu, who is driven by the need for his own political survival in the face of his ongoing trial for corruption that could put him behind bars for years.

Speaking at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, Bloom said, “It's an old-fashioned truth-to-power film. And he [Netanyahu] is in power.” Gibney agreed, saying, “We're dealing with a conflagration in the Middle East where people are dying every day. So, to be able to have a platform where you can plant a stake in the ground and also start, you know, serious discussion about Netanyahu and his motives, I think was important.”

The Bibi Files opens with Israel's war on Gaza, implying that it was the result of Netanyahu's efforts to remain in power and avoid or delay his trial. It features leaked footage of Israeli police interrogating Netanyahu, his wife Sara and ultra-right-wing son Yair, as well members of his inner circle, on corruption allegations.

Netanyahu is currently giving evidence three times a week in his long-delayed trial on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three separate cases that largely relate to

his efforts to secure favourable media coverage. If found guilty, he could serve up to 10 years in jail. Notorious for his luxurious tastes and hobnobbing with the financial elite, he has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, claiming to be the victim of a left-wing “coup” orchestrated by liberal media and a biased justice system.

Police investigations, reported verbatim in the press, demonstrated open and shut cases of bribery. The thousands of hours of the police's taped interrogations, recorded between 2016 and 2018, were leaked to Gibney in 2023. They reveal little that is new. They show a smirking Netanyahu who responds to most of the questions, as in his trial, with, “I don't recall” and “What a liar”.

The film shows the expensive gifts—champagne and cigars—that the late billionaire Sheldon Adelson and his wife Miriam, Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and his former aide Hadas Klein, and Iris and Shaul Elovitch showered on Netanyahu and his family, often at their request, along with expensive jewellery for his wife, Sara. She tells the police, “I did not personally ask for a ring and a necklace,” while her husband denies all knowledge of it.

Milchan, it is claimed, gave gifts to Netanyahu to get former US Secretary of State John Kerry to reverse the decision to deny him a US visa, and received tax breaks after Netanyahu put pressure on his finance minister to change the law.

Telecoms businessman Shaul Elovitch, it is claimed, was rescued from bankruptcy by loans arranged by Netanyahu in return for the Netanyahu family's de facto control of his media outlet *Walla!* The takeover resulted in a change in editorial line, with reporters fired and favourable coverage of Netanyahu and his son Yair—who Uzi Beller, Netanyahu's childhood friend—said was being groomed to succeed him.

The leaked footage includes a recording of Arnon Mozes, editor of an Israeli newspaper, made by Netanyahu from a cell phone in his pocket that he said he could not recall making.

The film claims that Netanyahu's lawyer advised him to resign after he was charged. But he refused to do so, fearing

more of his activities would be exposed.

The second half of the film focuses on how Netanyahu's fight to evade his trial and potential jail term drove his political strategy, including his alliance with far-right ultra-nationalist forces he had previously shunned to ensure a parliamentary majority for his Likud Party bloc, and his emasculation of the judiciary aimed at giving his government untrammelled powers and the war in Gaza.

Raviv Drucker, an investigative journalist and one of the film's producers who provides a commentary throughout the film, said, "He didn't try and cover it up. He tried to dismantle the whole system."

Dominating the last part of *The Bibi Files* is the October 7 Palestinian attack on Israel, with Gili Schwartz, a survivor of the attack on Kibbutz Be'eri blaming Netanyahu for the attack and the war and many people holding Netanyahu responsible for keeping Hamas in power in Gaza to undermine the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Once the Gaza war began, Netanyahu sought to keep it going until "total victory", refusing a hostage deal involving a ceasefire with Hamas, because his far-right cabinet ministers threatened to pull out of the government, triggering new elections Netanyahu would lose. Losing the premiership would cost him his immunity from jail. "That would be a disaster for him," Drucker said. "He will do everything he needs to keep on going with the war, and he will keep on going until there is a situation when it endangers his political survival. And then he will stop the war."

This view ignores the fact that the war on Gaza was coordinated with the Biden administration, which dispatched warships to the Middle East just days after the October 7 attack, signalling this was part of a broader effort to reorganise the region in the interests of US imperialism. Since then, Israel has carried out a devastating military campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, hundreds of strikes against Syria and the occupation of its territory following the fall of Assad, attacks on the Houthis in Yemen and murderous provocations against Iran, while intensifying its brutal occupation of the West Bank.

The Bibi Files, although alluding to the US relationship with Israel, does not develop this issue, including massive aid to the Zionist state without which it could not function as the guardian of Washington's interests in the resource-rich Middle East.

The filmmakers' opposition to Netanyahu is not different from that of the leadership of Israel's mass popular opposition, unprecedented in the country's 75-year history, against Netanyahu's judicial coup. Made up of former military, security and intelligence chiefs as well as former ministers who had all at some time served under Netanyahu, they are no less committed to Israel's expansion at the

Palestinians' expense. Fearing that the turn to open dictatorship would jeopardise the interests of Israel's corporate and financial elite, they begged Netanyahu to "compromise" and abandon his efforts to neuter the judiciary. When Netanyahu declared war on Gaza, they all supported the move, with three opposition leaders joining Netanyahu's war cabinet.

Netanyahu's political trajectory is not so much the product of his personal motivations, but the inevitable outcome of the Zionist project that established the state of Israel 75 years ago, through the forcible expulsion and brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

Such a state, based upon capitalism, was always incapable of developing a genuinely democratic society. It functions as a garrison state for US imperialism, repeatedly at war with its Arab neighbours, in a state of perpetual war with the Palestinians, and dependent upon US military subventions. Pursuing an expansionist "Greater Israel" policy, it rests ever more firmly on the right-wing settler population in the Occupied Territories. It has acute levels of social inequality, among the highest in the world—42 Israelis were featured in Forbes' World Billionaires list for 2024, with a total wealth of \$205 billion, up 7.8 percent on last year's list. Getting a good job is dependent upon having "Protekzia" or the right social connections.

These are the conditions that have paved the way for Netanyahu and his fascistic government. Indeed, Netanyahu is only one of many Israeli politicians to have been indicted for financial skullduggery: former prime minister Ehud Olmert served a prison sentence while Ariel Sharon's son Gilad took the hit for bribes channelled through him for his father. At least seven ministers and 12 members of the Knesset have been convicted for financial crimes.

As elsewhere, the turn by Israel's ruling elite toward dictatorship and war is rooted fundamentally in the extreme growth of social inequality and the escalation of war that are the twin products of capitalism in its death agony. It will not be halted by substituting Israel's "opposition" leaders for Netanyahu, but only by unifying Palestinian and Jewish workers and developing the expanding class struggle throughout the world into a conscious political movement for socialism.



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