

Netanyahu Pressured Japanese Regulators to Approve Adelson Casino Bid? Haaretz Removes Report

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Yesterday, Uri Misgav published a bombshell in Haaretz saying that during Bibi Netanyahu's state visit to Japan last spring, he approached a senior Japanese official, asking that he help expedite Sheldon Adelson's application for a Japanese casino license. According to the report, the Japanese official was shocked and dismissed the request out of hand. Bibi's approach was perfectly timed, following by only three months the Sands' application to open Japan to legalized gambling (which is currently illegal).

What's astonishing about this is not just the actual report, which is shocking enough, but what happened to it once it was published. It first appeared in the Hebrew edition last night and a few hours later it was published in the English edition. But shortly afterward, both disappeared from the Haaretz site. But not before I captured screenshots of both (the English is displayed here and the Hebrew is cached [here](#)) and not before other foreign publications published their own knock-offs of the story.

So now the horse is out of the barn and the lawyers who threatened Haaretz have done nothing more than magnified interest in the story. We might hazard a guess as to whose lawyers visited Amos Schocken today and what they said. My suspicion is that it was Adelson's. He's already sent lawyers to Channel 10, after it [aired an unflattering documentary](#) about Adelson's litigious past. In response, the Channel broadcast an unseemly on air apology which led to the resignation of the news director.

So we know that Adelson believes in flexing his muscle, especially when the target is a "leftist" Israeli newspaper gunning for his Golden Boy Bibi.

UPDATE: [Walla! says](#) that the Prime Minister's Office complained to Haaretz and the paper decided to remove the story till it received a formal legal opinion from counsel. In my experience (and I've had some believe me), when an editor tells you a lawyer's needed to vet a story it's a sure-fire way to know your piece will never see the light of day.

Eldad Yaniv, an Israeli anti-corruption activist, [wrote on his Facebook page](#) that he requested that the state attorney general [open an investigation](#) to determine if Bibi broke any laws in approaching the Japanese on Adelson's behalf. Yaniv claims that Bibi, frightened of a potential police investigation, did all in his power to silence the story, including threatening a lawsuit. I have independently confirmed that Bibi's lawyers were involved.

An interesting legal question is: is it permissible for a prime minister to lobby a foreign government on behalf of someone who is not an Israeli citizen and whose main business interests are not in Israel? Adelson is a U.S. citizen and does not have Israeli citizenship.

Another interesting aspect of Misgav's report is that he asked the entirely apt question: for whom does Bibi work? The Israeli people? Or Sheldon Adelson? Of course, to Adelson, they are one and the same. But is it in the interest of the Israeli people for the Sands to gain control of the Japanese gambling market?

I think back to the days after military service when Bibi went into the [home furnishings business](#) (when he wasn't off on assignment for the Mossad, that is). Is he now anything more than a glorified mattress salesman?

Who might the source for this anonymous story might be? The choices are varied: Japan (unlikely), a disgruntled former aide, or the NSA. As far-fetched as the latter may seem, that agency spies regularly on the communications of U.S. allies (Brazil, Germany, among others). It's conceivable it eavesdropped on Japanese diplomats as well. If so, Obama certainly has plenty of motivation to torpedo Adelson's casino bid while wounding a second Bibi-bird with the same stone.

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