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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

RAMZY BAROUD

12.04.2025

## **Netanyahu's Shin Bet Scandal: Who Holds the Power?**



Image by Jorge Fernández Salas.

In just 24 hours, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nominated Eli Sharvit as the new chief of Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, only to quickly retract the nomination.

This episode highlights the lack of coherence in Netanyahu's leadership, reinforcing the perception that decisions at the highest levels of government are made impulsively and without a clear plan.

It also serves as further proof that Netanyahu is easily manipulated—not just by his right-wing extremist allies in the coalition, but also by external forces, foreign governments, and, as reported by Israeli media, even his wife, Sara.

This chaotic decision-making process helps explain the deep lack of trust Israelis have in their leadership. Recent public opinion polls show that a significant percentage of Israelis lack faith in their government and are calling for new elections or Netanyahu's resignation.

This distrust has been attributed to Netanyahu's failure to prevent the October 7 attacks and his inability to win the war-turned genocide in Gaza.

But the issue goes beyond these failures. Israelis have lost confidence in Netanyahu because they do not see him as a leader acting in the national interest. He has become so entrenched in power that he is willing to incite civil strife in Israel just to maintain his position.

As a result, it should come as no surprise that Netanyahu is also willing to sacrifice the lives of over 15,000 children in Gaza, along with tens of thousands of innocent civilians, just to buy himself more time in office.

The Shin Bet scandal, however, is the clearest example to date of Netanyahu's corruption and poor judgment.

Israeli politics are notoriously unstable, and coalitions rarely last long. In that context, Netanyahu's fractious government could be seen as a reflection of Israel's history of political instability.

The ongoing conflict between the government and the military, while unusual, can also be understood as part of a growing trend in which the Israeli right seeks to control all institutions—including the military, which has historically been seen as separate from politics.

The events of October 7, and the failed war that followed—both of which are now the subject of critical investigations—have shattered the fragile balance that allowed Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition to hold power without provoking mass dissent.

Israeli public pressure has proven to be a key factor in this balancing act. For example, the public outcry forced Netanyahu to restore former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant to his position in April 2023.

However, 18 months of war in Gaza, Lebanon, and now Syria have given Netanyahu the leverage to use the state of emergency as a tool to crush opposition, stifle dissent, and ignore calls for the war to end and for a final agreement to be reached.

He has now turned the war into a platform for pursuing an internal political agenda that he had failed to implement in the years leading up to October 7. But Shin Bet is another matter entirely.

Founded by Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, in 1949, Shin Bet has long been the cornerstone of Israel's internal security.

While the agency's primary mission is counterterrorism, intelligence gathering, and providing security for Israeli officials, its role carries much greater significance for the stability of the state.

One of Shin Bet's primary objectives is to prevent espionage and internal subversion. Given the intelligence failures exposed by the October 7 events, any significant restructuring of such a critical agency could be disastrous for Israel.

Though the head of Shin Bet reports directly to the prime minister, it has always been understood that the position should remain above political infighting. Netanyahu's decision to fire Ronen Bar on March 2, therefore, sent shockwaves through Israeli society, even more so than his decisions to dismiss former chief of staff Herzi Halevi or Defense Minister Gallant.

Netanyahu's actions have violated a longstanding taboo, further exacerbating Israel's already unprecedented internal crisis.

Former Shin Bet chief Nadav Argaman has even threatened to reveal secret information, signaling that the agency is prepared to engage in this internal power struggle, which some fear could escalate into a civil war.

But the cancellation of Sharvit's nomination, which would have filled Bar's position, is perhaps the most revealing aspect of this crisis. It underscores Netanyahu's erratic decision-making and empowers his opponents, who are eager to bring him down. As Israel's opposition leader Yair Lapid has put it, Netanyahu has become "an existential threat to Israel".

Some analysts have suggested that Netanyahu's reversal was due to US pressure, especially since Sharvit had written an article criticizing US President Donald Trump.

While some see this as evidence that Netanyahu's agenda is largely dictated by the US, such conclusions are oversimplified. Although the US wields significant influence, Netanyahu's decisions are shaped by a complex array of factors.

Netanyahu is keen on presenting the withdrawal of Sharvit's nomination not as a sign of political subservience, but rather as a strategic concession or overture to Trump. His aim is to win continued full US support for his war agenda in Gaza and across the Middle East.

Ultimately, this perpetual war agenda is not driven by any coherent political ideology. Netanyahu's singular focus remains on maintaining his political coalition and ensuring his political survival—nothing more, nothing less.

APRIL 11, 2025

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle. He is the author of five books. His latest is "These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons" (Clarity Press, Atlanta). Dr. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and

Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul Zaim University (IZU). His website is [www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)