

RELEASE IN PART B5

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**From:** Russo, Robert V <RussoRV@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 30, 2012 8:12 AM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Hanley, Monica R  
**Subject:** Netanyahu's father passed away

In case you haven't already heard, PM Netanyahu's 102-year old father, Professor Benzion Netanyahu, passed away this morning.

David Hale and Amb. Shapiro are recommending that you  call Netanyahu. Monica and I raised the call with Jake, and I've added it to your grid. B5

New York Times story below:

**Benzion Netanyahu, Hawkish Scholar, Dies at 102**

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Published: April 30, 2012

Benzion Netanyahu, the father of the two-time Israeli prime minister Benjamin, who fought for the creation of the Jewish state by lobbying in the United States and went on to write an influential history of the Spanish inquisition, died on Monday. He was 102.

His death was announced by the prime minister's office. Mr. Netanyahu was at various times a journalist, encyclopedia editor, professor, historian and lobbyist — not to mention a behind-the-scenes adviser to his son, the most powerful person in Israel. Throughout, his views were relentlessly hawkish: he argued that Jews inevitably faced discrimination that was racial and not religious, and that efforts to compromise with Arabs were futile.

In the 1940s, as the executive director of the New Zionist Organization in the United States, he met with influential policymakers like General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He also wrote hard-hitting full-page advertisements that appeared in The Times and other newspapers.

The goal of his group, which was part of the movement known as revisionist Zionism, was to prevent dividing Palestine between Jews and Arabs to create the new Israel. The group wanted a single, bigger state that would have included present-day Jordan.

Ultimately, Israel was created as a result of the partition the revisionists opposed. Nonetheless, Rafael Medoff, director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, said in a letter to The Jerusalem Post in 2005 that Mr. Netanyahu was instrumental in building American support for the smaller Israel that did emerge.

Mr. Medoff said Mr. Netanyahu persuaded the leadership of the Republican Party to put a call for a Jewish state in its 1944 platform. It was the first time a major party had done this, and the Democrats followed suit.

In his 1995 book, "The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain," Mr. Netanyahu offered a radical new way of viewing the Inquisition. Rather than seeing it as the persecution of Jews for secretly practicing their religion after pretending to convert to Roman Catholicism — which had been the predominant view — Mr. Netanyahu offered evidence that most Jews willingly became enthusiastic Catholics. Jews were thus burned at the stake, he concluded, for being perceived as an evil race rather than for anything they did or believed.

Mr. Netanyahu said this persecution was fueled by jealousy over Jews' success in the economy and at the royal court. In his 1,384-page book, he traced what he called "Jew hatred" to ancient Egypt, long before Christianity.

The book garnered praise for its insights and criticism for ignoring standard sources and interpretations. Not a few reviewers noted that it seemed to look at long-ago cases of anti-Semitism through the rear-view mirror of the Holocaust.

Indeed, in 1998, Mr. Netanyahu said in an interview with *The New Yorker* that "Jewish history is a history of holocausts." He suggested then that Hitler's genocide was different only in scale.

Mr. Netanyahu believed Jews remain endangered in today's Middle East. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* in 2009, he said, "The vast majority of Israeli Arabs would choose to exterminate us if they had the option to do so."

He further said that Arabs are "an enemy by essence," that they cannot compromise and that they respond only to force.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly denied that his father was a one-dimensional ideologue. He further emphasized that he himself was a different person from his father.

Benjamin has dismissed conjectures about Benzion's influence on his decision-making as "psychobabble." (He has, however, acknowledged that his father called to correct grammatical mistakes in his speeches.)

The author of the 1998 *New Yorker* article, David Remnick, reported that Israelis seemed in the dark about the extent of paternal influence on their leader. Benzion Netanyahu, he said, was "nearly a legend, a kind of secret." But, Mr. Remnick added, using the younger Netanyahu's nickname, "To understand Bibi, you have to understand the father."

Benzion Mileikowsky was born on March 25, 1910, in Warsaw, then part of the Russian empire. His father, Nathan, was a rabbi who toured Europe and America making speeches supporting Zionism. After Nathan brought the family to Palestine in 1920, he changed the family name to Netanyahu, which means God-given.

The young Mr. Netanyahu studied medieval history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He became involved with the right-wing revisionist Zionists who had split from their mainstream counterparts, whom they believed were too conciliatory to the British who then governed Palestine and the Arabs who lived there.

The revisionists were led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose belief in the necessity of an "iron wall" between Israel and its Arab neighbors has influenced Israeli politics since the 1930s. Jabotinsky is the most popular street name in Israel, and the ruling Likud party traces its roots to his movement.

In 1940, Mr. Netanyahu went to the United States to be secretary to Mr. Jabotinsky, who was building American support for his militant brand of Zionism. Mr. Jabotinsky died in a car accident that same year, and Mr. Netanyahu became executive director of Mr. Jabotinsky's New Zionists, a post he held until 1948.

When not lobbying, Mr. Netanyahu found time to earn his Ph.D. from Dropsie College in Philadelphia. He wrote his dissertation on Isaac Abrabanel, a Jewish statesman who unsuccessfully opposed the banishment of Jews from Spain.

After Israel declared its independence in 1948, Mr. Netanyahu returned to Jerusalem, where he tried without success to get into politics. He became editor of the "Encyclopedia Hebraica," in Hebrew. During the 1950s and 1960s, Mr. Netanyahu and his family lived alternately in Israel and in the United States, where he taught at Dropsie, the University of Denver and Cornell University.

In the 1960s, Mr. Netanyahu edited two more major reference books, these in English. They were the "Encyclopedia Judaica" and "The World History of the Jewish People."

Mr. Netanyahu's eldest son, Jonathan, commanded the spectacular rescue of more than 100 Jewish and Israeli hostages on board an Air France jet at Entebbe Airport in Uganda in 1976. He was the only Israeli soldier killed.

In addition to Benjamin, who was Israel's prime minister from 1996 to 1999 and from 2009 to the present, Mr. Netanyahu is survived another son, Iddo, a radiologist and writer. His wife, the former Cela Segal; died in 2000.

An early example of Mr. Netanyahu's uncompromising spirit occurred when he was a university student and won a poetry contest with a prize of \$20. When he went to claim the prize, he was given just \$10.

When he protested, he was told that he wasn't getting the full amount because his poem was short. He never wrote another.