



'Police have evidence of money laundering against Lieberman'

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Yaakov Lappin , THE JERUSALEM POST

Police have amassed sufficient evidence to link Israel Beiteinu chairman Avigdor Lieberman with money laundering charges, a former National Fraud Unit investigator told *The Jerusalem Post* Thursday, citing a senior police source.

Police suspect Lieberman used Cypriot bank accounts registered to his daughter's name for money laundering purposes, and possibly to also carry out fraud and bribery offenses.

"The police source said there was no doubt about money laundering," Dep.-Cmdr. (ret.) Boaz Guttman said. "But he refused to talk about bribery."

Guttman, who served in the National Fraud Unit for 21 years, said a future indictment would be a long way off, since prosecutors needed to overcome a series of complex hurdles before the case could reach trial.

These include a legal hearing before an indictment, in which Lieberman could try to torpedo the proceedings or play for time, and an attempt by prosecutors to get a Knesset committee to vote in favor of stripping Lieberman of his parliamentary immunity.

"The hearing will be drawn out - Lieberman could complete half a term in government by the time it's over," Guttman said.

And there are no assurances that the Knesset committee would agree to remove Lieberman's immunity, especially if such a move would threaten a future coalition's stability, Guttman noted.

"Knesset members could try to save a government from collapsing by upholding Lieberman's parliamentary immunity. If prosecutors decide to indict, they must receive approval from a Knesset committee to proceed," Guttman explained. "This indictment won't happen tomorrow."

There could be little doubt that Lieberman discussed the police investigation against him with Kadima chairwoman Tzipi Livni and Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu during his recent meetings with them, while looking out for hints that his parliamentary immunity could be assured, Guttman stated.

Lieberman's attorney, Yaron Koteli, said in response, "We have nothing to say, since we don't even have the case material. What I can say is that Avigdor Lieberman has not been summoned by police to

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an interrogation. When he is invited, he will arrive."

Koteli said the case had "a long way to go" before it reached prosecutors, adding that police "could change their minds" along the way.

Koteli is awaiting the state's reply to a High Court petition he filed on behalf of Lieberman in July 2008, in which he demanded that police either close the case against Lieberman for good, or complete it and hand it off to prosecutors for trial.

On January 22, the state informed the High Court in response that "due to the scope of materials, we can't know at this stage when the investigation will end."

Lieberman's excellent memory and fearless encounters with previous police interrogators pose an additional challenge to the authorities, Guttman said, speaking from experience. Guttman interrogated Lieberman in 1997 over suspicions that Lieberman had forged protocols of government meetings, before concluding that there was no evidence of any wrongdoing.

"Lieberman does not hide behind his right to remain silent. He won't confess, either. He will give full answers and send police abroad looking for evidence," Guttman said. "He does not stutter, and he is not like Olmert, saying he doesn't remember this or that. He has all the facts in his head, and he does not refer to documents when answering questions."

Guttman said the image of Lieberman portrayed in the press was very different from the man he had encountered in person. After being warned by Bennie Begin, who was a witness in the 1997 investigation, that Lieberman was a formidable opponent during interrogation sessions, Guttman prepared for the meeting "like a first-year student in university."

Now, Lieberman is "getting ready" for his next encounter with the National Fraud Unit, Guttman said, adding, "The man is, in my opinion, the fastest-thinking suspect politician the police have had to face. He will come prepared. This is a fight for his life."

Another challenge facing the National Fraud Unit could lie in Cyprus, where detectives will fly to collect evidence and interview witnesses. The Cypriot legal system and the attempt to coordinate inquiries with the Cypriot authorities could prove cumbersome, Guttman warned, even though the National Fraud Unit conducts an average of 80 overseas investigations a year.

If the obstacles to indicting Lieberman prove to be insurmountable, prosecutors have a worst-case option of indicting Lieberman's daughter, Michal, and his former attorney, Yoav Mani, who is suspected of trying to invoke lawyer-client confidentiality to prevent police from accessing case materials.

In such a situation, details of the case and Lieberman's alleged role in the offenses would reach the media, and the resulting political damage to Lieberman could be significant, Guttman said.

"This is the prosecution's last card," he added.

As far as Lieberman is concerned, if he does succeed in joining the government, he would be limited in the number of posts available to him, thanks to a precedent set by Attorney-General Menahem Mazuz when he placed restrictions on the ministerial jobs available to Kadima MK Tzahi Hanegbi - also the target of a police investigation.

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A conflict of interests would prevent Lieberman from taking up the post of public security minister, due to that job's direct oversight of the police. The same would apply to the post of justice minister. The Finance Ministry would also be off-limits to Lieberman, since police need approval from the finance minister to access bank accounts and other information belonging to Knesset members who are under investigation.

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