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ISRAEL NEWS

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From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

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membership in the NATO alliance. He's also a virulent anti-Semite and enemy of Israel, who would—if he is allowed more influence in the region—inflame the conflict with the Palestinians and undermine efforts to create an alliance between the Jewish

Commentary...

The Dark Side of 'America First' Should Worry Israel

By Jonathan S. Tobin

In retrospect, no one should be shocked by the news that the United States has given the green light to Turkey for a military incursion aimed at sweeping Kurdish forces out of northern Syria. Trump has been very clear about wanting to cut and run from the conflict in Syria once the ISIS terrorists that he had vowed to defeat were beaten. Moreover, he campaigned for the presidency by promising to end U.S. involvement in the wars of the Middle East. Nor, as a general rule, has he demonstrated much sympathy with the plight of small nations and peoples who are threatened by their larger neighbors.

But while this desire to avoid American involvement in wars like the intractable conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan lies at the heart of his "America First" foreign policy, there have always been two exceptions to his neo-isolationist instincts: Israel and Iran. The question now as the region assesses the long-term implications of the tragedy that is about to unfold in northern Syria is whether this will leave Israel, as well as the regional Arab states, to the tender mercies of Tehran and its allies the same way he has betrayed the Kurds after they proved to be courageous and invaluable allies in the struggle against ISIS.

Trump may think that the plight of the Kurds is simply not his problem. Yet he has demonstrated a real affinity for Israel, overturning seven decades of U.S. foreign policy, such as recognizing Jerusalem as its capital, moving the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv, annexing the Golan Heights and demanding accountability from the Palestinians for their support of terrorism and unwillingness to make peace.

Similarly, the president's position on Iran flatly contradicted all of his other stands on the Middle East.

Trump railed against President Barack Obama's 2015 nuclear deal with Iran as the worst bargain in history and made good on his vow to scrap it. He has reimposed economic sanctions on the Islamist regime with devastating effect on its ability to go on funding its terrorist. The goal of this "maximum pressure" policy is not merely to renegotiate a pact that essentially gave Iran a legal path to nuclear weapons, but also to halt its support of terrorism and its illegal missile program. Trump deserves praise for sticking to this line.

His stance on Israel and Iran were also identical to those of more traditional conservatives who were leery of his "America First" instincts on other fronts. But as Iran sought to escalate tensions in the region with attacks on shipping vessels in the Persian Gulf in order to scare the Europeans and the United States into thinking that war was the only alternative to a return to Obama's deal, Trump refused to take the bait and respond militarily to their provocations. That wasn't a mistake. Still, the fact that his decision not to retaliate for the shooting down of an American drone or to attacks on two major Saudi oil facilities seemed to have more to do with the advice of isolationists like Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) than a sober assessment of the situation remains troubling.

Trump's announcement about Turkey's attack on the Kurds, however, puts those concerns in an even more worrisome context.

There is so much that is wrong with this decision.

Letting Turkey have its way in Syria at the expense of the Kurds isn't just an atrocity in the making, but a huge gift to one of the worst actors in the region: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan and his Islamist party are working to destroy the last vestiges of Turkish democracy, rendering the country unfit for continued

state and the Arab regimes that are threatened by Iran. Nor is it possible to believe that this American favor to Turkey will cause Ankara to help isolate Iran.

Moreover, the betrayal of the Kurds isn't just immoral. It strips the United States of any credibility for those nations that look to America as a counterweight to the influence of Iran and Russia's efforts to recreate the old Soviet sphere of influence.

Trump's promise that he will stop Turkey from abusing the Kurds is disingenuous. If he pulls out U.S. troops from the region, how will he keep his word? The answer is that he cannot, and his comments about Syria not being America's fight give the lie to his assurances.

It's in this light that several other reports from the region must be understood.

The fact that Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz is negotiating with several Gulf States on non-aggression cooperation is very good news and another sign that Israel's isolation in the region is a thing of the past. The Gulf states, however, wouldn't be considering this if they weren't scared stiff that Trump will leave them on their own to face Iran.

Similarly, the news that Saudi Arabia is considering a rapprochement with its Iranian archenemy is another shocking development that has to worry Israel and the other Gulf States. While it's hard to imagine those two nations being anything other than enemies, what Trump is doing in Syria is potentially comparable to Obama's actions that caused the Arab world to stop thinking of the United States as an ally they could count on.

Trump is a volatile and inconsistent foreign-policy player, so this move doesn't necessarily guarantee a betrayal of Israel on Iran. But by following the isolationist logic of "America First," he seems to be repeating his predecessor's mistake in bugging out of Iraq and once again appeasing Iran. That is a tragedy for the Kurds, for American honor and certainly for the rest of the Middle East. (JNS Oct 10)

שבת שלום וחג שמח

Still not a Partner for Peace By Yossi Kuperwasser

In his annual speech to the UN General Assembly, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warned that Israel's annexation of the Jordan Valley would be met by the Palestinians with the cancellation of all agreements with it, this without explaining what the practical significance of such a step would be on, for example, the PA's very existence.

The Palestinian leader further cautioned that the continued treading of water in efforts to forge peace on the basis of a two-state solution based upon the 1967 borders would exacerbate the sense of desperation among the Palestinian public and increase its willingness to support a one-state solution. Abbas rejected the US peace plan as well as the possibility of Washington serving as a mediator in talks between Israel and the Palestinians, attacked recent moves by Israel and the US, and promised his people would continue its fight against the occupation with all means at its disposal, including popular struggle.

Yet Abbas also reiterated his call to hold an international peace conference and his unwavering commitment to fighting terrorism. In an attempt to challenge Hamas and deal with criticism over the lack of democracy in the Palestinian territories, Abbas promised to work toward holding elections in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and east Jerusalem. The initiative's chances are slim, to say the least.

Abbas' remarks, which were less acerbic in tone than those he

made in previous addresses to the General Assembly, reflected a concern over the ineffectiveness of his policies and the sidelining of the Palestinian issue from the international, regional, and Israeli agenda.

It is also nevertheless evident from Abbas' remarks that he does not intend to bend as far as his fundamental positions on the conflict are concerned. This was given clear expression in Abbas' stated enthusiastic commitment to continue to pay salaries to Palestinian terrorists and their families, despite the fact that Israel has deducted this amount from the tax revenues it transfers to Ramallah. While there is nothing new about this declaration, Abbas' decision to repeat it in a major international forum is indicative of the PA chairman's commitment to the expectations of the Palestinian street, as he perceives and shapes it.

In practice, despite the cuts in the transferred funds and the Palestinian decision to avoid accepting a further installment of payments Israel is willing to transfer, the PA continues to pay these terrorist salaries as usual. According to the PA budget implementation report for 2019, the Palestinian Authority transferred 276 million shekels (around \$79 million) in payments – i.e., salaries – and another 75 million shekels (around \$22 million) in "social" payments to families, family expenses, medical insurance coverage, and legal expenses, among other things. In total, the PA Prisoner Affairs Ministry spent some 364 million shekels (\$105 million) on these terrorist payments.

These numbers reveal that the PA's payments to terrorists in 2019 were similar in scope to those made the previous year. The significance of this is that despite increasing pressure, the Palestinians are sticking to their guns, as it were, and as a result, the chances of the PA becoming a partner for peace under Abbas' leadership continue to be slim to none. (Israel Hayom Oct 6)

The BDS Movement: Sinister Ramifications for Israel

By Jerrold L. Sobel

Most people over the past 15 years have heard or read about the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Founded by two virulent antisemites, Omar Barghouti and Jamal Juma, it's a propagandist campaign conducted against the State of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide. However, relatively few understand its history, and its ramifications for the Jewish state.

The roots of BDS date back to the Arab League's boycott of Israel in 1950, two years after the successful War of Independence. The purpose of the boycott was to starve the Jews out of their new homeland. Failing this but with varied success, other incarnations such as blacklisting of countries, organizations and corporations doing business with Israel were attempted throughout the ensuing years.

As an example, in 2001, under the tutelage and sponsorship of Yasser Arafat, a Jew named Adam Shapiro and his Palestinian wife, Huwaida Arraf, created the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). Ostensibly created as a pro-Palestinian peace movement, Shapiro and Arraf called for a combination of violent and nonviolent resistance to bring down the Jewish state. Arraf admitted such in a letter to *The Washington Post*, stating that the group works in cooperation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (the PFLP), Palestinian Islamic Jihad and even Hamas. As one of a myriad of precursors to BDS, Arraf and Shapiro managed to create a worldwide network to delegitimize the Jewish national homeland throughout the US and Canadian college systems and in Europe.

Another example is Al-Awda.

Al-Awda is a founding member of the Global Palestinian Right of Return Coalition (GPRRC), a group of 12 organizations advocating for "Palestinian refugees internally displaced in Palestine and in exile."

The GPRRC is a member of the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), which coordinates the anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions movement worldwide. The central organization in the BNC is the Palestinian National and Islamic Forces (PNIF), which includes five US-designated terrorist organizations: Hamas, the PFLP, the Popular Front – General Command, the Palestine Liberation Front and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

It's important the uninitiated recognize that BDS does not exist in a vacuum or just on American campuses. It is part and parcel of an insidious movement of coordinated organizations grouped together with one focused goal, the destruction of the State of Israel by any means.

With tentacles spread throughout the world, often aided by left-

wing media and academia, they have insinuated themselves on campuses, youth groups, board rooms, labor unions and even pro-Palestinian Jewish organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJP).

Most assuredly, BDS is not an innocuous movement of a bunch of rowdy college kids acting stupid. In reality, it's a poison replete with every antisemitic trope and libel that has haunted the Jewish people for millennia. It's an attack not upon Israeli policy vis a vis the Palestinians, or settlements or statehood. It's an assault against Israel as a Jewish state and an antisemitism movement against Jews throughout the world.

What's the answer? How do Israel and Jews in general counter accusations by the UN, the EU and all the faux-liberals in and out of government that buy into BDS propaganda? It's a daunting task that may defy an answer. As a truly antisemitic movement, there is no way of convincing people of that predilection otherwise.

To explain the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital is the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people falls upon deaf ears, as do the numerous attempts of sharing the land in peace with the Palestinians predating 1948. Would clarifying that the wall and checkpoints separating both people were put in place not to create apartheid but to stem school attacks, bus bombings and mass murdering of Jews in restaurants and theaters change anything? Could Israel bring about modification within BDS by explaining Gaza was abandoned in 2005 while leaving all infrastructure in place as a gesture of peace? The answer to these questions is quite obvious.

What Israel and all those that support the Jewish state can do is remain strong and united against the onslaught of this sinister movement. They must continue building an economically strong nation of innovation and science, be open to peace but not acquiescence and have faith in the Creator who led them back to their ancestral homeland. (Jerusalem Post Oct 6)

The writer is the founder of the ZOA of Southwest Florida and has been its president for the past 10 years.

Examining the Boundaries of Power By Oded Revivi

The second round of elections in Israel seemed to focus only on the question of "Bibi" – yes or no. However, the results of the election show that the actual main issue was about the boundaries of power. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a distinguished statesman who, for the past decade, has led Israel to many achievements. However, some of the voting public felt alienated and not duly represented. They felt as if one man had a monopoly on the job of prime minister.

Netanyahu, who admires Winston Churchill and sees him as a role model, must now remember the blow Churchill received in 1945 when he wasn't elected and the necessary amendments he made in order to be reelected in 1951. The results of our second elections present a last opportunity for reflection and change.

There are no winners and apparently no real losers in the current elections. Blue and White is the largest political party; the Likud Party headed by Netanyahu, who – for good or bad – was the focus of the campaign, has one less mandate, but enjoys wider support from the various Zionist parties. When facing a standoff, it is necessary to take a deep breath, forget the campaign slogans and examine what the elections were truly all about.

Churchill is quoted as having said "time is a lousy ally." In the case before us, the period of time that Netanyahu has been prime minister has created the feeling of a monopoly, both among his supporters and among the opposition. People don't like monopolies. They do not like monopolies in the financial world and apparently not in the political world either. Therefore, when a strong oppositional force like Blue and White was presented, it was easy for people to relate to the alternative.

Churchill is also quoted as having said "responsibility is the price of success," which is also relevant to the last election. Netanyahu has many successes historically and internationally; leading battles in an "international jungle," economic growth, relatively quiet borders, relations with Russia, the US, and India, as well as improving relations with neighboring Arab countries and forging international ties.

But alongside these successes, there are areas where – emphasized by his opponents – where Netanyahu wasn't successful: deterrence, the cost of living, as well as his personal behavior.

Emphasizing these areas is the job of the opposition, and these

issues are presenting a difficult challenge for Netanyahu and a difficult test of his power. In my opinion he passed the test but must now be open to hear what the people are saying, as exemplified by the results of the election.

Another point regarding the allocation and boundaries of power as ordained by the election result has been the subject of many discussions in the YESHA Council. During these discussions, I opposed my more idealistic friends by saying that their expectations in realizing all their ideological aspirations – which we all believe in – is not relevant at this time. There is great difficulty in realizing them immediately, due to the lack of support among all of the Israeli people and the international community.

As a result of the position I took, there were those who attacked me both on a personal level as well as publicly. When I attempted to explain the boundaries placed on a state, the obligation to act according to court rulings, and the limitations of international law, I was told that I do not understand the concept of a government with the ability to rule and that it is our goal to change the laws, the judicial advisers and the judges.

Among the Right, there has evolved a competition over who is more right wing and who can implement more right-wing aspirations. Everyone participates in this “competition”: political candidates, political lobbyists, members of Knesset and even occasionally the prime minister. While we were busy competing among ourselves concerning who is more right wing, we lost the center. A governing party cannot represent the farthest extremes only. In order to work our way into the hearts of the people, unite them and lead the nation, it is necessary to reach out and touch the hearts of the center.

When the Labor Party chose left-wing Meretz as its “twin,” they almost didn’t get enough mandates to be elected. I don’t know what Blue and White’s political position is on many topics. They have a collection of good and talented people who individually hold contradictory and opposing ideas. They used the slogan “Israel Before All” but what they meant was “just not Bibi.” It seems this was attractive enough to turn them into the biggest party. What they will do with the mandates in their “cockpit” is yet to be seen.

For my political home, the Likud Party, the election symbolized the urgent need for self-examination. Do we appeal only to the extremes of the political spectrum or do we want to continue to be the governing party that needs to work its way into the hearts of all the people? (Jerusalem Post Oct 6)

The writer is mayor of Efrat and chief international envoy of the YESHA Council. He is a member of the Likud Central Committee.

The ‘Annexation’ Scare By Stephen M. Flatow

What would a Jewish holiday be, without an op-ed in The New York Times demanding that Israel make more concessions to the Palestinian Arabs?

On Rosh Hashanah, the Times published “Shrinking the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” by the Israeli journalist Micah Goodman. In it, he called for five new concessions by Israel: “paving a network of roads connecting all the Palestinian autonomous areas”; turning over control of the roads to the Palestinian Authority; “eliminating Israeli checkpoints”; giving the P.A. “more land for development”; and providing “support [for] the construction of new Palestinian towns.”

If acted upon, these steps would go a long way towards turning the current P.A. autonomy regime into a de facto state. Since that state would obviously include Tulkarm and Qalqilyah, which are on the western edge of the P.A. areas, it means Israel will be just nine miles wide at its mid-section. That’s not even as wide as Washington, D.C. Or the Bronx.

What would Israel receive in exchange for making such risky concessions? Nothing, apparently. Goodman does not make a single demand for any action by the P.A.

The P.A. wouldn’t have to disarm or even outlaw terrorist groups that operate in its territory. It wouldn’t have to stop paying monetary rewards to terrorists and their families. It could allow terrorist groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—the terror group behind the deadly attack at a West Bank natural spring that took the life of 17-year-old Rina Shnerb—to continue serving as members in good standing of the P.A. and the PLO.

In short, Goodman’s plan to “shrink the conflict” turns out to be just another plan to shrink Israel. There is no shortage of those plans around.

The one-sidedness of Goodman’s plan is made worse by his tricky

method of arguing. He uses an unsavory old tactic: If you can’t defeat your opponent’s argument, change his words so that they sound more extreme or unreasonable, and then argue against the new version.

Here’s how he did it. He wrote in the Times that “the Israeli right” is pushing “annexation of swaths of the West Bank.” Then he said doing that would be awful because “annexing the territories would jeopardize [Israel’s Jewish] majority.”

But the “swaths” that everyone is talking about are the areas that include very few Arabs and thus would not affect Israel’s Jewish majority. Goodman conflated the two issues: annexation of the Jewish areas and annexation in general. Apparently, the idea was to make Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s recent comments on the subject seem like something they are not.

In pre-election comments, Netanyahu said he favors applying “Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea.” Those areas have only a very small Arab population. Netanyahu also said he would like to “extend Jewish sovereignty to all the settlements.” That would not impact any Palestinian Arabs.

Questions about whether or not Israeli sovereignty should be applied to the Jordan Valley or whether Israeli law should be extended to Jewish communities in Judea-Samaria are serious issues. They should be debated on their merits—not with scare tactics about demographic “dangers” that do not exist.

No significant Israeli political leader is proposing a blanket “annexation” of “the territories.” Nobody is talking about incorporating large numbers of Palestinian Arabs into Israel. Whether you agree or disagree with Netanyahu’s position, let’s discuss what he actually said—and not be intimidated by scare tactics and phony arguments. (JNS Oct 7)

A State that Threatens Jewish Genocide isn’t Normal

By Jonathan S. Tobin

Gen. Hossein Salami, the commander-in-chief of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, gave a speech last month in which he celebrated Iran’s military might and its goals. As is Tehran’s policy, the IRGC commander refused to use the word “Israel,” but had plenty to say about the Jewish state. According to the state-controlled IRNA news agency, Salami said that 40 years after the Iranian revolution that put the Islamist regime in power, it had “managed to obtain the capacity to destroy the imposter Zionist regime.” And lest anyone think that the amassing of military might was purely defensive in nature, Salami also maintained that, “That sinister regime must be wiped off the map” and this is no longer ... a dream.” It was, he boasted, “an achievable goal.”

Salami isn’t the first Iranian leader to make such threats. They have been a staple of Iranian political rhetoric for decades, including from the country’s top ayatollahs who run that theocracy. But the fact that the IRGC—the terrorist group that runs Iran’s international terrorist network, as well as the entity that exercises a great deal of influence over its economy through the companies it owns—is still spouting talk about wiping out the sole Jewish state on the planet does raise some interesting and painfully obvious questions to which there are no good answers.

The first concerns the unwillingness of Iran’s European trading partners to confront the fact that they are still seeking to cultivate good relations with an Iranian regime that embraces genocide of Jews as a legitimate policy goal.

For instance, Germany is working hard to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal that enriched and empowered Tehran while also giving it a path to acquiring weapons that would make good on its threats to wipe Israel off the map.

Yet when asked directly whether Salami’s statement was proof of the regime’s anti-Semitism, the German Foreign Ministry, which said it opposed “anti-Israel rhetoric,” had nothing to say.

Nor is Germany alone in that respect. The leading countries of Western Europe are up in arms over the Trump administration’s efforts to isolate Iran and force it to renegotiate the nuclear deal. France recently floated the idea of offering a \$15 billion loan to Tehran, which was, in effect, a proposal for a ransom payment that would cause Iran to stop attacking shipping vessels in the Persian Gulf and oil facilities in neighboring countries. Despite Iran’s provocations, the European Union and its foreign-policy minister, Federica Mogherini, speak as if efforts by the United States to end the nuclear threat are the obstacle to peace, rather than a government that remains the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism and which

continues to speak of genocidal attacks on Israel.

Despite the inconsistencies in his foreign policy—with the betrayal of the Kurds to Turkey this week being the most egregious example—President Donald Trump remains the only world leader committed to actually stopping Iran rather than enabling it.

Some in Israel and America were worried by Trump's refusal to respond with military force to Iran's provocations and by his willingness to meet with Iranian representatives to talk about strengthening the nuclear deal. But it appears as if Iran now has no intention of talking to Trump. It may be that they were never serious about dialogue, or that the Democrats' impeachment efforts have convinced them that Trump is doomed to defeat in November 2020. They appear to be listening to the advice of those who have advised them wait until January 2021, when any one of the Democrats running against him will reinstate the disastrous pact promoted by President Barack Obama and lift Trump's sanctions, which have had a devastating impact on Iran's economy and its ability to spread terror.

Supporters of Obama's deal argue that at the time, it was the best way to forestall an imminent Iranian nuclear threat, and that the only alternative was a war that no one wanted. But Trump has proven the falsity of that claim. The alternative to appeasement of Iran is Trump's policy of "maximum pressure" to strangle the Iranian economy, which will eventually force the Iranians back to the negotiating table. Or at least it would if the West sticks to it, whether or not Trump is in the White House.

While the Democratic presidential field has shown little interest in foreign policy other than to speak of Trump's unfitness for office, the candidates ought to be asked about what they intend to do about Iran's continuing genocidal threats and why a pact that offered it a path to a nuclear bomb should be reinstated.

Iran isn't a normal country, and neither Europe nor America's opposition party should speak as if it were.

Mere antipathy for Trump and respect for Obama's legacy isn't a good-enough answer as to why support for the nuclear deal's reinstatement is still a consensus issue among Democrats. The same applies to Europe's belief that the profits it would continue to make from doing business with Tehran is more important than isolating a terror-supporting regime that wants to kill millions of people.

(JNS Oct 8)

Why the Right Lost Israel's Do-Over Election By Evelyn Gordon

It's still unclear whether Israel's next election will be in four years or four months. But either way, if the center-right wants a better outcome, it needs to learn the lessons of September's election. So here are two: First, while center-right voters realize that many things leftists deem "anti-democratic" actually aren't, they dislike behavior that's genuinely anti-democratic. Second, though the Arab parties are shunned deservedly, treating all Israeli Arabs as anti-Israel is both wrong and counterproductive.

In April's election, the nonreligious center-right parties (Likud and Kulanu) won a combined 39 seats running separately. But in September, running together, they won just 32 seats. Moreover, most of those lost votes didn't stay in the center-right/religious bloc: Though the bloc as a whole lost only five seats, that was mainly because fewer religious Zionist votes were wasted on parties that didn't make it into the Knesset.

Some voters migrated to Benny Gantz's Blue and White or Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, now rebranded as an anti-haredi and anti-Netanyahu party. But an estimated three seats' worth simply stayed home in an election where overall turnout rose.

So why did center-right voters desert? Primarily, because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu crossed lines in the latest campaign that he never crossed before.

I've defended Netanyahu for years against false charges of anti-democratic conduct. For instance, there's nothing undemocratic about the nation-state law, proposals to rein in Israel's hyper-politicized Supreme Court or requiring NGOs funded mainly by foreign governments to say so openly. But during the latest campaign, he unquestionably adopted undemocratic tactics.

Take, for instance, his claim that Arab voter fraud "stole" April's election from the right. Undermining faith in the validity of an election is extremely dangerous because no democracy can survive if people don't trust elections to be free and fair. Thus election results should be called into question only in extreme cases, like the 2013 Beit Shemesh mayoral election, which a court invalidated because massive and well-

documented fraud coupled with a very close result made the outcome genuinely dubious.

April's election, however, produced neither evidence of large-scale fraud nor a close result. In fact, parties explicitly pledged to support a rightist, Netanyahu-led government won 65 of the Knesset's 120 seats. If Arab voter fraud produced that outcome, Israeli Arabs are the world's most incompetent fraudsters.

True, Netanyahu nevertheless failed to form a government, but Arabs weren't responsible for that. The culprits were Lieberman's abandonment of his pre-election promise to support such a government; Naftali Bennett's desertion of the main religious Zionist party to start his own, which wasted almost four seats' worth of votes when it failed to cross the electoral threshold; and Netanyahu's impending indictments, which made center-left parties unwilling to join his government. In short, he undermined faith in the fairness of Israel's elections to divert blame for the right's own failures.

Or consider his proposal to allow cameras in polling stations to monitor voter fraud, which he tried unsuccessfully to ram through the Knesset a week before September's election. The idea itself wasn't illegitimate; even some leftists support it in principle. But the timing undeniably was.

Major changes in the rules of the game shouldn't be made one week before an election, when neither election officials nor the parties have time to prepare properly for their implementation. That's Democracy 101. Nor should they be hastily passed in a party-line vote without serious consideration.

The same goes for Netanyahu's desire to enact legislation granting sitting prime ministers immunity from prosecution—something he vowed not to do before April's election but then demanded during post-election coalition negotiations. Again, the idea itself isn't illegitimate; many democracies grant immunity to sitting chief executives, including America (the Justice Department's longstanding position is that sitting presidents can't be indicted) and France. But such a major systemic change requires careful consideration, especially since Israel, unlike America and France, lacks term limits. It shouldn't be a party-line decision made solely to save one man from imminent indictment.

Yet Netanyahu's disregard for democratic norms wasn't his only problem. He also forgot the critical distinction between the Arab parties and the Arab electorate.

The parties are a collection of Islamists, Communists and radical Palestinian nationalists whose Knesset members actively work to undermine the Jewish state. They at best justify terror and at worst abet it; they spread vicious lies about Israel; they oppose rapprochement between Israel and Arab countries, and support anti-Israel terror groups. They aren't legitimate partners for any Israeli government, and this must be said clearly.

But most ordinary Israeli Arabs aren't anti-Israel; in fact, 65 percent say they're proud to be Israeli. Granted, most oppose Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state, but they're nevertheless willing to be good citizens. And while identity politics still drives most to vote for Arab parties, the majority is dissatisfied with those parties. Thus not only do they not deserve to be tarred as enemies, but Israel has an interest in encouraging them to desert the Arab parties.

Instead, Netanyahu drove them straight into those parties' arms by repeated invective against "Arabs," which Arab voters naturally interpreted as referring to themselves even when he presumably meant the parties. One over-the-top post on his official Facebook page, for instance, warned that the left would ally with "Arabs who want to destroy us all—women, children and men."

As a result, 82 percent of Arab voters backed the Arab parties' Joint List, up from 70 percent in April (when the parties ran two separate tickets), and Arab turnout soared. Those two factors combined to give the Joint List potentially unprecedented clout: Its chairman will become leader of the opposition if a unity government is formed.

That Netanyahu's behavior didn't cost Likud even more votes is because he has been a superb prime minister, and above all, because too many Israelis still have traumatic memories of soaring terrorism under other premiers. But as September's election shows, that alone isn't enough for victory. If the right wants to win next time, it must resume its traditional regard for genuine democratic principles. And it must stop treating Arab voters as indistinguishable from their parties.

(JNS Oct 10)