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Commentary...

In Praise Of A Rightist Coalition By Mor Altshuler

Netanyahu should keep leftist parties out of his government

Even before all the votes have been tallied, we saw two more spins courtesy of Kadima's publicists. Firstly, Netanyahu is seemingly trying to "steal" the elections; secondly, should Netanyahu form a narrow rightist government, it would upset Barack Obama and disconnect us from Western Europe and from the civilized world.

The new spins may be used as a pretext by President Shimon Peres, the master of political tricks and creative shticks, for tasking Tzipi Livni with forming the next government or promoting a coalition comprising Likud, Kadima, and the Labor party.

However, even if fairness and commonsense will prevail, and the task of forming the government will be assigned to Likud, as is appropriate, Netanyahu must not fear a narrow rightist government. The opposite is true – he should prefer it over a terrible and fragile coalition with two leftist parties. In such coalition, these two parties, Kadima and Labor, may constitute a government majority and neutralize the possibility of outlining the realistic policies desired by most voters.

As opposed to the common perception regarding the Left's collapse in the elections, Kadima is an inseparable part of the old Israeli leftist camp, and its 28 mandates show that hundreds of thousands of Israelis have not yet overcome the "Oslo syndrome." This syndrome is the result of the illusions and delusions that struck extensive sectors within Israeli society in the previous decade. This led to hollow agreements with declared terrorists and the baseless vision of a new Middle East, ultimately resulting in unilateral withdrawals and bringing the violence of Iran and its emissaries to our doorstep.

Labor and Meretz voters are clearly unable to sober up from the illusion of imaginary peace because they lack the courage to admit that they fell victim to their own wishes. They also lack the ability to cope with the violent reality they created with their very own hands. However, Kadima's mandates show that the selling of illusions and the foregoing of national security considerations were not curbed by the traditional leftist camp's disintegration. They continue to take root despite murderous suicide terrorism, the missiles, the rockets, and two worthless wars.

This is the old story under a different guise: Livni's spinmeisters recycled all the hollow clichés of "hope" and "peace" during this elections campaign while conveying weakness of mind and detachment from reality – this would not avert the next war, but rather, bring it closer. Should they join forces with the Labor party in a bogus "unity" government, Likud may end up being a junior partner in such coalition and the desires of the majority of voters will be scorned.

There is no reason to fear a rightist government: It will not disconnect Israel from the Western World, but rather, constitute the frontal defense line of the entire West; a sober warning sign that will wake the West from its delusional dialogue with Iran and her terror emissaries – Syria, Hizbullah, and the Palestinians.

At this time, Western leaders are learning the price of delusions: The economic "bubble" has burst, and the sweet dream of a good and reckless life presents Mr. Obama, Mr. Brown, Mr. Sarkozy, and Ms. Merkel with a hopeless situation. They have no idea how to end the crisis, and as time passes, its price keeps on growing.

The West has paid and will pay an inflated price for its reckless economic behavior. Benjamin Netanyahu and a rightist government can prevent Israel from continuing to pay an inflated price for the reckless delusion that panicky withdrawals shall bring peace and pieces of paper shall bring security. (YNet Feb 12)

Obama's New World Order And Israel By Caroline Glick

As we go to the polls today, the world around us is quickly changing in new and distressing ways. The challenges the international system will present the government we elect will be harsher, more complicated and more dangerous than the ones its predecessors have faced.

Bluntly stated, the world that will challenge the next government will be one characterized by the end of US global predominance. In just a few short weeks, the new administration of President Barack Obama has managed to weaken the perception of American power and embolden US adversaries throughout the world.

In the late stages of the presidential race, now Vice President Joseph Biden warned us that this would happen. In a speech before supporters he said, "It will not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama... [We're] gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy... They may emanate from the Middle East. They may emanate from the subcontinent. They may emanate from Russia's newly emboldened position."

As it happens, Biden's warning had two inaccuracies. Rather than six months, America's adversaries began testing Obama's mettle within weeks. And instead of one crisis from Russia, the Middle East or the Indian subcontinent, Obama has faced and failed to meet "generated crises" from all three.

Take Russia for example. Since coming into office, Obama has repeatedly tried to build an alliance with the "newly emboldened" Russian bear. A week after entering office, he announced that he hoped to negotiate a nuclear disarmament agreement with Russia that would reduce the US's nuclear stockpiles by 80 percent. At a security conference in Munich last weekend, Biden stated that the administration wishes to push the "reset button" on its relationship with Russia and be friends.

Responding to these American signals, the Russians proceeded to humiliate Washington. Last week President Dmitry Medvedev hosted Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbak Bakiyev in Moscow. After their meeting the two announced that Russia will give the former Soviet republic $2 billion in loans and assistance and that Kyrgyzstan will close the US Air Force base at Manas which serves American forces in Afghanistan.

After cutting off one of the US's major supply routes for its forces in Afghanistan, Russia agreed to permit the US to resume its shipment of nonlethal military supplies for Afghanistan through Russian territory. Those shipments were suspended last summer by NATO in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Georgia. And now they are being resumed - on Moscow's terms. The US, for its part, couldn't be more grateful to Moscow for lending a helping hand.

The US itself wouldn't have found itself needing Russian supply lines had the situation in nuclear-armed Pakistan not deteriorated as it has in recent months. Much of the situation in Pakistan today is due to the Bush administration's incompetent bungling of US relations with the failed state. For years the US gave tens of billions of dollars to the military government of Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf in turn used the money to build up Pakistan's military presence along the border with India, while allowing al-Qaida and the Taliban to relocate their headquarters in Pakistan after being ousted from Afghanistan by US forces.

Vigilant in maintaining his power, for years Musharraf repressed all voices calling for democratic transformation. For their part democrats in places like Pakistan's Supreme Court were not friends of the West. They did not oppose the Taliban and al-Qaida. Rather their enemies were Musharraf and the US which kept him in power.

Responding to a sudden urge to encourage the forces of democracy in

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Pakistan, while advocating their abandonment throughout the Arab world, secretary of state Condoleezza Rice compelled Musharraf first to resign as head of the Pakistani military - thus ending his control over the country's jihadist ISI intelligence services and over the pro-jihadist military. Then she forced him to accept open elections, which unsurprisingly, he lost.

The democrats who replaced him had absolutely no influence over either the ISI or the military and realized that their power and their very lives were in the Taliban's hands. Consequently, since Pakistan's elections last year, the new government has surrendered larger and larger areas of the country to the Taliban. Indeed, today the Taliban either directly control or are fighting for control over the majority of Pakistani territory. Moreover, the Taliban and al-Qaida have intensified their war in Afghanistan and are making significant gains in that country as well.

This would have been a difficult situation for the US to contend with no matter who replaced George W. Bush in the Oval Office. Unfortunately, due to Obama's stridently anti-Pakistani rhetoric throughout the campaign - rhetoric untethered to any coherent strategy for dealing with Pakistan - the Pakistanis no doubt felt the need to test his mettle as quickly as possible.

For his part, Obama gave them good reason to believe he could be intimidated. By letting it be known that he intended for his special envoy to the region Richard Holbrook's job to include responsibility for pressuring US ally India to reach a peace agreement with Pakistan over the disputed Jammu and Kashmir province in spite of clear proof that Pakistani intelligence was the mastermind of the December terror attacks in Mumbai, Obama showed that he was willing to defend Pakistan's "honor" and so accept its continued bad behavior.

Last Friday, the Pakistanis tested Obama. The Supreme Court freed Pakistan's Dr. Strangelove - A.Q. Khan - from the house arrest he had been under since his nuclear proliferation racket was exposed by the Libyans in 2004. Through his nuclear proliferation activities, Khan is not only the father of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal - but of North Korea's and Iran's as well.

Khan's release casts a dark shadow on Obama's plan to dismantle much of America's nuclear arsenal, because with him free, the prospect that Pakistan is back in the proliferation business becomes quite real. Already on Sunday Khan announced his plan to travel abroad immediately. For its part, the court in Islamabad specifically stated that Khan is free to resume his "scientific research."

Pakistan's open contempt for the US and its weakness in the face of the Taliban's takeover of the country has direct consequences for the US's mission in Afghanistan - and for its new dependence on Russia. This week the Taliban bombed a bridge on the Khyber Pass along the Pakistani border with Afghanistan that served as a supply line to US forces in Afghanistan. As US Brig.-Gen. James McConville stated in Kabul, the latest attack simply underlines how important it was for the US to resume its shipments through Russia.

Many have pointed to Pakistan as an example of why Israel and the West have no reason to be concerned about Iran acquiring nuclear arms. To date, they claim, Pakistan has not used its nuclear arms, and indeed has been deterred by both India and the West from doing so.

While it is true that Pakistan has yet to use its nuclear arsenal, it is also true that since its initial nuclear test in 1998, Pakistan has twice brought the subcontinent to the brink of nuclear war. In both 1999 and 2002, Pakistan provoked India into a nuclear standoff.

Moreover, due to its nuclear arsenal, Pakistan successfully deterred the US from taking action against it after the September 11 attacks showed that al-Qaida and the Taliban owed their existence to Pakistan's ISI. Although Pakistan's government is not an Islamic revolutionary one like Iran's, the fact is that since it became a nuclear power, Pakistan has moved away from the West, not toward it. Indeed, its nuclear deterrent against India - and the West - has empowered and strengthened the jihadists and brought them ever closer to taking over the regime in a seamless power grab.

Far from arguing against preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, the Pakistani precedent argues for taking every possible action to prevent Iran from acquiring them. After all, unlike the situation in Pakistan, Iran's regime is already controlled by jihadist revolutionaries. And like their counterparts in Pakistan, these forces will be strengthened, not weakened in the event that Iran acquires nuclear weapons.

Indeed, since Obama came into office waving an enormous olive branch in Teheran's direction, the regime has become more outspoken in its hostility toward the US. It has humiliated Washington by refusing visas to America's women's badminton team to play their Iranian counterparts. It has announced it will only agree to direct talks with Washington if it pulls US forces out of the Middle East, abandons Israel and does nothing to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It has rudely blackballed US representatives who are Jewish, like House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Howard Berman, at international conclaves. And it has announced that it will refuse to deal with Obama's suggested envoy to Iran, Dennis Ross, who is also a Jew. In all of its actions, Iran has gone out of its way to embarrass Obama and humiliate America. And Obama, for his part, has continued to embrace Teheran as his most sought-after negotiating partner.

Moving ahead, the question of how our next government should handle America's apparent decision to turn its back on its traditional role as freedom's global defender becomes the most pressing concern. It is clear that we will need to embrace the burden of our own defense and stop expecting to receive much from our alliance with the US. But it is also clear that we will need a new strategy for dealing with the US itself.

In formulating that policy, the next government should draw lessons from fellow US-ally India. Once it became clear to the Indians that the Obama administration intended to treat them as the strategic and moral equivalent of Pakistan, they struck back hard. When the administration signaled that it would agree to Pakistan's assertion that its problems with the Taliban were linked to India's refusal to cede Jammu and Kashmir to Islamabad, New Delhi essentially told Washington to get lost.

In an interview on Indian television last week, ahead of Holbrook's first visit to the area this week, India's National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan said that Obama would be "barking up the wrong tree" if he were to subscribe to such views. He added that India would be unwilling to discuss the issue of Jammu and Kashmir with Holbrook and so compelled Obama to remove the issue from Holbrook's portfolio.

At the same time, the Indian government released a dossier substantiating its claim that the December attacks on Mumbai were planned in jihadist terror training camps in Pakistan and enjoyed the support of the ISI. Moreover, in response to Khan's release from house arrest on Friday, India called for the international community to list Pakistan as a terror state.

In acting as it has, India has made two things clear to the Obama administration. First, it will not allow Washington to appease Pakistan at its expense. Second, it will do whatever it believes is necessary to secure its own interests both diplomatically and militarily.

A sound example for the next government to follow. (Jerusalem Post Feb 9)

The Jihad against Britain's Jews By Melanie Phillips

I am hearing ever more alarming accounts of the deepening attrition against British Jews in the wake of the incitement against Israel provoked by the war in Gaza. In addition to the record number of attacks upon Jewish individuals and institutions and murderous incitement displayed on the anti-Israel demonstrations and riots as reported by the Community Security Trust, Jewish parents report that their children – some as young as eight – are now running a gauntlet of attack from their Muslim classmates at school who accuse them of ‘killing Palestinian children’. Comments by adults about ‘Jews controlling all the money/the media/the BBC’ (yes, really! All because it allowed Israel’s spokesman to put the case for Israel from time to time) are now commonplace in both private and public discourse. Today’s Jewish Chronicle reports that a 12 year-old Birmingham schoolgirl was terrorised by a mob of 20 youths chanting ‘Kill all Jews’ and ‘Death to Jews’ on her way home from school last week:

She said: ‘One of my friends said an Asian girl from the year above asked her why she was talking to me because I am Jewish. I asked the girl in a friendly manner if she had a problem with me being Jewish. She said “yeah, I do”. I managed to punch her before she hit me but then she grabbed me by the hair and swung me around shouting “f****** Jews, I hate Jews”. But then another Asian girl rounded up a whole gang. They were all in school uniform and they came running towards me shouting “death to Jews” and “kill all Jews.”’

A reader has sent me the following account of what happened to him when, travelling on the Tube in London, he started to read a copy of The Case for Israel by Alan Dershowitz:

After a time, I became aware that a man sitting diagonally in front of me near the doors at the end of the carriage was looking a bit agitated and had a disgruntled expression on his face. However, he didn't meet my eye, so I thought nothing more of it and continued reading as before...When the train reached St Paul's, the man I had noticed stood up to get off. But instead of leaving by the end doors, he made to pass me. In the process of doing so, he deliberately shoved into me and made to crush me against the side of the carriage and the passengers sitting behind me. Despite already knowing exactly what had actuated this behaviour, I asked the question anyway - and received the following response: 'You shouldn't be reading that, you f***ing [indecipherable].'...The whole confrontation had taken place in the time it took for the tube doors to wheeze open and shut.

Other than in the Jewish press, such incidents are barely being reported. Last week, for example, there was virtually no coverage of the violent demonstration organised by the Stop the War coalition which prevented the deputy commander of Israel's Gaza operation from speaking at London's Jewish student centre, Hillel House, when a crowd of about 60-80 students attempted to storm the building.

One of the most troubling developments is the way in which the universities have become an extension of the Middle East conflict, with a simulacrum of the aggression, intimidation and violence from which Israel is under attack by the Arabs being directed at Jewish students on British campuses, who now routinely run a gauntlet of intimidation and abuse from Arab and Muslim students. But even more worryingly, some universities are spinelessly choosing to give in to such bullying.

Throughout last week, after the cease-fire was declared in Gaza, there was a series of anti-Israel sit-ins and demonstrations organised by the STWC at some 17 universities: in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the London School of Economics, Queen Mary College and King's College, as well as at Bradford, Sheffield Hallam, Warwick, Leeds, Oxford, Cambridge, Sussex, Essex, Nottingham, Birmingham, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Strathclyde. Some of these protests led to criminal damage and forced the universities to pay thousands of pounds to deal with the disruption, rearrange lectures, hire extra security guards and repair the damage.

The demonstrators took control of lecture halls and made a series of demands: that the universities should issue a statement condemning Israel's actions in Gaza; offer scholarships to Palestinian students; send surplus educational materials to help rebuild Gaza (presumably its Islamic University, said by Israel to be a fount of terror); dedicate some of their time to fund-raising for Gaza; and take no action against the demonstrators.

Some of these universities responded robustly to such disorder and intimidation. Manchester Metropolitan, Birmingham, Nottingham and, after some delay, Leeds and Cambridge reportedly refused to accept any of these demands. At Nottingham and Sheffield Hallam, the demonstrators were forcibly evicted.

But the LSE, King's College London, SOAS, Bradford, Strathclyde and Oxford reportedly gave in to some or all of these demands. According to the JC, the LSE agreed to waive application fees for Gaza and West Bank students 'directly affected by the conflict', while Bradford agreed to investigate the 'ethical background' of food and drink served on campus, and promised to 'explore the feasibility of a twinning link with the Islamic University of Gaza'.

Strathclyde agreed among other things to cancel a contract with an Israeli water-cooler company. Oxford – which fined each demonstrator the princely sum of £20 – nevertheless started negotiations with them with indecent haste, and a mere few hours later had agreed to pretty well everything. In a craven letter to colleagues the Vice-Chancellor, John Hood, having stated that unlawful action of this kind cannot be condoned proceeded to reward it by giving the perpetrators what they had demanded.

The Oxford demonstrators also demanded that the title of the series of lectures on 'world peace' at Balliol, recently inaugurated by Israeli President Shimon Peres and named in his honour, be changed; the Senior Proctor, Professor Donald Fraser -- who oversees disciplinary matters and who recommended 'a relatively lenient course of action against the demonstrators '-- duly wrote to Balliol drawing its attention to the students' concerns.

Thus the trahison des clercs as they crumble in the face of criminality, violence and intimidation.

And so now at British universities --which should be the most protected of all environments for free discourse and inquiry -- British Jews no longer feel safe. At Nottingham, one such student said:

The sit-in has created an atmosphere where we do not feel comfortable going into shared buildings on campus.

At King's, another Jewish student said: "Someone from my course wrote 'kill the Jews' on my Facebook profile. Later he said he didn't know I was Jewish. In public someone said to me, 'I think all the Israelis are crazy and so are the f***ing Jews'."

And at Oxford, the JC reports: "One University Reader reportedly told a meeting that 'within five years, Oxford will be a Jew-free zone' " and a student wrote to Professor Fraser warning that "for Jewish students, the university and the city have developed a toxic atmosphere in which I and many others feel increasingly alienated and unwelcome."

Meanwhile, of course, as Sky's Tim Marshall pointed out the other day on his blog, the government of Sri Lanka is also attempting to eradicate terrorism by a military campaign in which, according to the UN, 'many civilians are being killed', thousands made homeless, hundreds of thousands trapped, and to which, as food shortages grow, the government refuses to allow access to journalists. Yet there are no sit-ins on campus against the Sri Lankans, no violent riots outside its High Commission, no calls to boycott Orange Pekoe tea. As Marshall observed: "And yet somehow the lives of the 1,300 Palestinians killed by the Israelis causes far more outrage, in certain quarters, than the 2 million dead in Congo, the tens of thousands of Iraqis killed by Sunni and Shia terrorists, or the growing number of Sri Lankan dead to add to the 70,000 killed over the past 25 years (far more than the number of Palestinians and Israelis killed in the same period)."

Of course – because the protests in Britain have nothing to do with humanitarian concerns for the innocent they are part of the jihad against the Jews – and those in the universities and other parts of the establishment who are capitulating to or even endorsing this are accomplices to a great evil that is now consuming British public life. (Spectator (UK) Feb 6)

Kristallnacht in Caracas? By Kathy Shaidle

Is it a coincidence that in an authoritarian socialist state that has sidled up to the world's most dangerous Islamist state is home to an increasing spree of violence targeting the Jewish community? Is it a spree being directed by Hugo Chavez out of bigoted or self-aggrandizing reasons? Or is any collectivist nation dominated by a strongman an inevitable incubator of anti-Semitism and scapegoating of its Jewish minority?

Whatever the answers, Venezuela is providing the evidence. Observers like the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Latin America expert Andres Oppenheimer cite "a well-orchestrated [anti-Semitic] campaign" that has been taking place on Venezuela's government sponsored radio and television stations, newspapers and websites such as Aporrea. Stoking anti-Semitic fervor, such outlets frequently compare Israel to Nazi Germany and denounce "international Jewish conspiracies." Meanwhile, an association of reporters urged Venezuelans to boycott local businesses owned by Venezuelan Jews. And the media is not alone in fueling anti-Jewish incitement.

As in any authoritarian state, the media parrot the line originated by their leader, President Hugo Chavez. His bombastic condemnation of Israel's invasion of Gaza shaded into overt anti-Semitism, and the nation is aware of his increasingly close ties with Iran's Islamist regime.

Tensions escalated sharply in early January, when Chavez expelled Israel's ambassador to protest Israel's military offensive in Gaza. Shortly thereafter, approximately 15 individuals attacked the Tiferet synagogue in Caracas. According to Paul Hariton of the Caracas Ashkenazi community, the January 30 attack "was a well-organized event. The attackers were heavily armed. They jumped a wall and overcame two guards. They even took the videotape out of the security camera before they left." The president of the Jewish Organization of Venezuela says that "the hoodlums occupied the building" for five hours, during which time "they profaned the holy Sefer Torah, which is the Jewish holy book of prayer and laws." In an ominous sign for the rest of Venezuela's Jewish community, the hoodlums also stole a computer database containing the names and addresses of all the synagogue's members.

At first, Chavez condemned the attack. However, his government now seems intent on blaming the synagogue's desecration on Venezuelan Jews, depicting the vandalism as "deliberately self-inflicted act aimed at discrediting the regime." This Sunday, Venezuelan authorities arrested a local rabbi's former bodyguard and ten others in connection with the attack. In a televised interview following the arrest of the 11 suspects, Chavez remarked sarcastically, "What a coincidence, the gang leader is a metropolitan police officer who for the last four years was the personal bodyguard of the synagogue's rabbi." When announcing the names of the suspects, Chavez's Interior and Justice Minister Tarek El Aissami (who happens to be Muslim), similarly alleged that the synagogue's rabbi had "directed" his former bodyguard and his compatriots to carry out the vandalism. Thus did an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory become the official position of Venezuela's government.

There are even reports that Venezuela's Jews have been punished for the attack on their synagogue. Examiner.com's Aimee Kligman reported on January 31 that "without fanfare or publicity, three of the most important rabbis in the community were expelled from the country. Their names for the record are Rabbi Mizrahi, Rabbi Cohen, and Rabbi Brenner."

Kligman added this may have been a cynical ploy of Chavez himself. Kligman noted, "the political message indicated that if Chavez does succeed in getting a constitutional amendment to lift term limitations, that this would mean that allegedly, Jews might have to leave lest they be killed."

It is not only in Venezuela that Latin America's Jews are becoming more concerned for their safety. Jewish groups in both Argentina and Bolivia say they feel increasingly under attack in their respective countries. According to leaders of the 250,000-person-strong Jewish community in Argentina, swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti have recently become more commonplace, while demonstrators recently targeted the InterContinental Hotel because it is owned by Eduardo Elsztain, a Jewish businessman. Argentina hasn't witnessed such public displays of anti-Semitism since 1994, when the offices of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association were bombed by suspected Iranian and Hezbollah operatives. Bolivia, too, is becoming more dangerous for Jews. Like his Venezuelan counterpart, Bolivian President Evo Morales expelled the Israeli ambassador during the Gaza invasion; anti-Semitic graffiti is reportedly becoming more common in Bolivia.

So far, the U.S. State Department's response has been muted. At a February 9 press conference, State Department spokesman Robert Wood said, "We expect that the government of Venezuela will do what it can to make sure that that type of activity doesn't continue and to...arrest any perpetrators who may have carried out any type of anti-Semitic activity."

Coming from an administration that has made a cardinal virtue of "diplomacy," such a cautious statement was not surprising. But in the absence of more definitive condemnations, there is every reason to believe Hugo Chavez's Venezuela will become an ever-more dangerous place for its besieged Jewish minority. (FrontPageMagazine.com Feb 11)

The writer blogs at FiveFeetOfFury.com. Her new book exposing abuses by Canada's Human Rights Commissions, The Tyranny of Nice, includes an introduction by Mark Steyn.

A Yom Kippur for the Left By Gil Troy

Regardless of who ends up as prime minister after what seems to be emerging as the Israeli equivalent of the George W. Bush-Al Gore deadlock of 2000, Election Day 2009 was "a Yom Kippur for the Left," as one Meretz activist called it. The once-dominant Labor Party and once-rising Meretz Party have both been humiliated. The elections' three winners, Tzipi Livni, Binyamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, all launched their careers from the Right, while Lieberman's aggressive campaign demonizing Israeli Arabs set the election tone.

As Israel's critics around the world and at home mourn this "rightward shift" and the rise of the "ultra-nationalist" Lieberman, as they fret about dimming prospects for a two-state solution, instead of further demonizing the country they should apologize, in the true spirit of Yom Kippur. The rightward shift resulted from the failure of the Left's ideas at home - and the betrayal by liberals from around the world.

Israelis have turned rightward because the failure of territorial concessions has been compounded by a broken covenant with the world. For decades liberal critics pounded two ideas into Israelis' heads. The first was that if the country withdrew from the territories it conquered in 1967, Palestinians - and the rest of the Arab world - would make peace. The second, related, assumption was an implicit compact that whatever security risks Israel took by ceding territory would be compensated for by the world's friendship.

Tragically, neither the Oslo peace process nor the Gaza disengagement produced the desired results. In fact, many Israelis feel that the more they risked for peace, the more they suffered from those risks, the greater was the world's disapproval. Of course, Israel is not blameless. But whatever missteps it made pale in comparison to the three tragic truisms now dominating the political consciousness: Oslo's concessions resulted in terrorists murdering more than 1,000 people; disengaging from Gaza resulted in thousands of missiles raining on the South; and both times, when the country finally defended itself, the worldwide chorus of denunciation was so intense it fanned the flames of anti-Semitism.

It may be a reflection of living in a small, embattled democracy surrounded by autocrats and terrorists demanding your destruction, but Israelis are particularly sensitive to world opinion. Moreover, the mainstreaming of rhetoric that "Hitler didn't finish the job" and that Jews are "apes and monkeys" is particularly painful for a people still healing from the Holocaust. True, talking about "the world's" attitude vastly oversimplifies. But the shorthand works, considering how monolithic the criticism seems to be and how lethal previous rhetoric proved to be.

It is particularly demoralizing to see how anger at Israel's behavior absolves Palestinians of responsibility - and seems to sanitize terrorism. "The world" should denounce Palestinians for harming the possibility of a two-state solution, first in turning away from negotiations and toward terrorism in September 2000, then again for choosing to build Gaza into a base for launching Kassams rather than a model for a future state. "The world" should be furious at Hamas's rise, with the Islamists once again murdering supposed infidels while killing or maiming fellow Muslims who dare to disagree. "The world" should demand Palestinians change their culture of martyrdom, taking some historic responsibility for their failures to compromise.

"The world" should note that Israel's Arabs fueled Lieberman's campaign against them by applauding demagogic leaders like Azmi Bishara who spew hatred against the Jewish state. Instead, Palestinians' crimes or excesses are tolerated and rationalized; "the world" gives Palestinians a free pass.

Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that so many remain willing to risk for peace, that so many former rightists like Tzipi Livni and Ehud Olmert now champion the two-state solution. Even Lieberman is open to territorial compromise. This willingness reflects how ingrained the culture of peace is. For all the talk we hear about the "rightward shift," Kadima, Livni's centrist party, seems to have won the most votes. The estimated Right-Left breakdown in the Knesset of 64 to 56 remains quite balanced - and Israel remains the only liberal country in the Middle East, judging by its commitment to equality, to democracy, to social justice, of sensitivity to women, to homosexuals, to racial diversity.

Over the next few weeks, as politicians use the votes they earned to bargain like peasant merchants at a Middle Eastern shouk, world opinion should note the subtleties amid the crudity. No matter what the ruling coalition's constellation, no matter who leads, the country will still seek a true peace.

While its critics will always look - almost exclusively - at the cards it holds and scrutinize whatever it does, Palestinians will remain far more in control of their destiny than their enablers admit. If Palestinians want a state - and want peace - they need to build a political culture devoted to nation-building, not martyrdom. And if leftists want to see progress in the Middle East, they must push for Palestinian reforms while rebuilding the world's covenant with Israel.

Yom Kippur is a day of atonement and thus renewal. Perhaps this "Yom Kippur of the Left" will lead to a new Middle East dynamic that replaces the "bad Israel, blameless Palestinians" paradigm with one of mutual responsibility leading to mutual trust, with gradual steps toward stability, not headlong rushes into one-sided blame games. (Jerusalem Post Feb 11)

The writer is professor of history at McGill University. He is the author of Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today and Leading from the Center: Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents.