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Opinion

Editorial

After the war

As promised by President Obama, last month saw the pullout of the last U.S. troops from Iraq. The war ended not with a flourish, but with what seemed almost like a shrug. Having spent billions of dollars on the “liberation” of Iraq and having witnessed the lost and shattered lives of so many soldiers and civilians — and seeing the country itself revert to civil strife nearly the moment we left — many Americans wondered what we and the world gained from the venture. Certainly, had we known in 2003 the ultimate costs of the war, how many of us would have been behind it?

The war has ended, but not a pernicious line of argument that blames Jews and Israel's supporters for the policies and pressures that brought us there. In a blog post for *The Economist*, a writer calling himself M.S. returns to the old libel that a group of Jewish neoconservatives not only pressed the United States to invade Iraq in 2003, but did so because of their support for Israel. “M.S.” does not go as far as some, acknowledging that “it would be ridiculous, and anti-Semitic, to cast the Iraq war as a conspiracy monolithically driven by a cabal of Jewish neocons and the Israeli government.” But the writer goes on to say that the neocons' analysis and advocacy were among “the important causes of the war.”

Editor's Column

Speak politics the Jewish way!

The dictionary site Merriam-Webster.com actually has advice for people who think they may have coined a word or phrase, or hope to. “If you feel that you have developed or know of a word that could serve to better the English language,” its editors write, “we can only suggest that you use the word as much as possible in your everyday discourse and see if it catches on....”

Okay then: “Kishkes Factor.” “Kishkes Factor.” “Kishkes Factor—”

Back in February 2008, I wrote a column suggesting that then-candidate Barack Obama was struggling to connect with Jews because they weren't sure that he supported Israel's cause in his gut — that is, in his *kishkes*. As far as I can tell, I was the first writer to apply the term “Kishkes Factor” in relation to politics and Israel.

It gained some currency. In November 2008, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk wrote an op-ed asking “whether Obama could pass the kishke test.” There were references to the “kishkes factor” in a March 2011 JTA story on Obama and a June 2011 report in *The Jerusalem Post* about a panel on the state of U.S.-Israel relations.

Obama himself even heard a reference to the term, at least once. In an interview with the candidate, *The Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg began a question by referring to “the *kishke* question, the gut question: the idea that if Jews know that you love them, then you can say whatever you want about Israel, but if we don't know you...then everything is suspect.”

Every so often a writer gives me props. Rob Eshman, editor of the *Jewish Journal of*

Greater Los Angeles, credited me in a “Dear Senator Obama” essay in March 2008. Last month, in an article about Obama and the Jews, *Tablet's* Allison Hoffman linked the phrase to my original column.

Before this sounds as self-serving as it obviously is, I should acknowledge that there was provenance to the “Kishkes Factor.” As I noted at the time, a top official of AIPAC, referring to Newt Gingrich in 1998, remarked that the former speaker of the House “understood [Israel] in his *kishkes*.” And I recently learned that in a 1995 book, Jerome Chanes wrote of a “*kishke* factor,” referring not to politics but to how Jews experience anti-Semitism.

William Safire once wrote that the greatest thrill a writer can experience is “to coin a word or phrase that fills a linguistic void and becomes part of the history of the era.” His “Coinage Hall of Fame” included columnists Herbert Swope (cold war), Stewart Alsop (egghead), and Joseph Alsop (Southern strategy).

I doubt “Kishkes Factor” will ever make it into their company, let alone the dictionary, but a boy can dream. And just in case, I am busy coining new phrases. A sampling:

The Gribines Factor: Named for the fried chicken-skin delicacy, it refers to a candidate's ability to withstand criticism about his Middle East positions and foreign policy experience.

The Gefilte Filter: In many races, the support of Jewish Democratic donors is key to viability. If a candidate successfully runs the gauntlet of pro-Israel PACs and Hollywood fund-raisers, she has passed through the Gefilte Filter.

Cel-Ray Vision: A politician's ability to

look a constituent in the eye and instantly determine whether he or she is a Jew.

Serving Pastrami: A speech to a Jewish audience featuring the phrases “I will move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,” “The bonds between Israel and the United States are unshakable,” or “Iran will not be permitted to obtain nuclear weapons.” See “red meat.”

Stuffing the Derma: When a politician, in an attempt to ingratiate himself with the Jews, simply overdoes it. When Obama promised AIPAC an “undivided Jerusalem” in 2008, or Gingrich referred to Palestinians as “an invented people,” they were Stuffing the Derma. (Also known as “Varnishing the Kasha.”)

Rachmones Republican: Fiscally conservative, socially moderate Jewish member of the GOP. See: “compassionate conservative.”

Nu Democrat: Fiscally conservative, socially moderate Jewish member of the Democratic Party. See: “1992.”

The Borscht Beltway: Refers to the panoply of Washington-based Jewish and pro-Israel groups and their representatives, including AIPAC, JINSA, J Street, Religious Action Center, and the OU's Institute for Public Affairs.

The Chootz-pah Test: How well does a politician — such as, say, Michele Bachmann — pronounce common Jewish or Yiddish phrases? E.g., if you pronounce *kvetch* with two or more syllables, or your *mishpocha* rhymes with “his broker,” you've failed the Chootz-pah Test.

Flanking: (Rhymes with “bonking.”) Not technically a political term, refers to a social media trend in which participants imitate a boiled *flancken* by lying stiffly in weird places and posting pictures of themselves on the Internet.

C'mon, Merriam-Webster! What else does a guy have to do to get a little credit? ■



Andrew
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