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 and lives in 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 war as a conspiracy manifestly 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**

**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: “Kishes Factor.”

“Kishes Factor.”

“Kishes Factor”...

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 kishes. As far as I can tell, I was the first writer to apply the term “Kishes 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 “kishes 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 you don’t know...then everything is suspect.”

Every so often a writer gives me props. Rob Sherman, 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 “Kishes 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 kishes.” And I recently learned that in a 1995 book, Jerome Chanes wrote of a “kiske 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 “Kishes 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 socially moderate Jewish member of the Establishment, from whom Jews don’t expect the kind of kishi endorsement likely to be given by a religious kishes. The Gribines Factor is especially suspect in the eyes of their own kishes. It is “a latke fried in hydrogenated oil” and the kishes aren’t blind enough to be taken in.

**The Gribines Factor:**

So Jews look for someone who expresses their values without being so religious that they can’t be taken seriously as “real Jews.” They want someone who isn’t “a phony” or who “acts more like a Jew.” But why should the kishes care?

**The Gribines Factor:**

The Merriam-Webster dictionary is a kishes factor of sorts, in that it has coined or approved new words such as “chutzpah,” “mos Eisley,” and “Pacman.” The dictionary is not the only place where new words are coined. Bloggers and other writers are constantly creating new words to describe new phenomena.

**The Gribines Factor:**

Jewish writing is a factor, much like the high level of Jewish writing that goes on in the United States today. But the Merriam-Webster dictionary is not the only place where new words are coined. Bloggers and other writers are constantly creating new words to describe new phenomena.

**The Gribines Factor:**

For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary is a kishes factor of sorts, in that it has coined or approved new words such as “chutzpah,” “mos Eisley,” and “Pacman.” The dictionary is not the only place where new words are coined. Bloggers and other writers are constantly creating new words to describe new phenomena.