

reality for once and thrown in the towel on this issue.

Meanwhile, in Israel, Abbas's Arab cousins—who are citizens of Israel—have moved in an unexpected direction of rapprochement with Zionist party leaders.

Since 1992, the Arab parties have never backed a Jewish party's leader for Prime Minister. That ended last week, when Arab Joint List alliance chief Ayman Odeh endorsed Benny Gantz of the "Jewish" Blue-and-White party to form a ruling coalition.

The addition of the 13-seat Joint List delegation would put Gantz quite close to the 61-seat majority needed to constitute a government, with Gantz as Prime Minister.

But—as with most things in Israeli politics—things aren't nearly as simple as they seem at first glance.

Upon Odeh's announcement of the Gantz endorsement, one of the Arab parties in his bloc rejected the move and withdrew its three new Knesset votes from the United List bloc.

The recommendations for Gantz now totaled 53 votes, while the mixture of Likud, minor right-wing parties and religious Jewish parties gave Netanyahu 54 recommendations to continue as Prime Minister.

Israel's President Reuven Rivlin thus gave Netanyahu the mandate to try to create a government, since he had one more vote than Gantz in the area of endorsements—and, at any rate, the Arab Joint List members would not actually join a Gantz coalition to create a Knesset majority.

But the move by the Joint List to endorse a Jewish candidate for Prime Minister was stunning in itself. In 1992, the last (and only) time the Arab parties had endorsed a candidate to head the government, their designee was Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party. At issue was the ratification of the Oslo Accords, championed by Rabin.

Arab endorsement of Rabin enabled the passage of Oslo and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. So the 1992 Israeli Arab decision to break with precedent made a good deal of sense for Israel's Arab community and their brethren in the disputed territories. (You're welcome to question whether Oslo was good for Israel, but it was certainly embraced at the time in Israel and abroad.)

No such urgent issue is presenting now. Gantz is as passionate a Zionist as Netanyahu. His policies on the handling of the territories and the security needs of Israel are largely indistinguishable from Netanyahu's. So why has the Arab Joint List endorsed Gantz? What does it say about Israel's Arab community, roughly 20% of the country's population?

Partly, it is a matter of pure Arab hatred of Netanyahu. Netanyahu's stark policies for the past decade—as well as his verbal attacks on Israeli Arabs—have motivated an "anyone-but-Bibi" attitude among Israeli Arab leaders. Gantz just happens to be the vehicle that might be able to drive Netanyahu out of power.

But the Arabs' participation in Zionist politics also says something about the

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evolving condition of Israel's Arab minority. Polls reveal that most Israeli Arabs have no desire to leave. Prospects for education and employment in Israel dwarf those of any other Middle East country.

As flawed as Israel may be in the eyes of Israeli Arabs, it is clearly far superior to the illiberal and corrupt kleptocracy of the Palestinian Authority, or the bloody terrorist dictatorship of Gaza's Hamas.

It seems to be dawning on them that fuller inclusion in the benefits of Israel involves fuller participation in "Zionist" politics. It's hard to be heard when you refuse to take a place at the table. This was the message that was evident in the Joint List's explanatory op-ed in the *New York Times*.

The schism in the Joint List reveals that everything hasn't changed, but there may be a thawing in the attitudes of many Israeli Arabs toward the "Zionist entity" and the society it has built.

In the turbulent waters of Israeli politics and statecraft, any signs of positive movement should be celebrated. It may be that Israel has finally convinced all (or most) Arab leaders that it is there to stay and has much to offer.

If the Joint List's willingness to participate in the Israeli post-election jostling with the Zionists extends beyond Bibi-aversion; Abbas' willingness to "accept" Israel's payments indicates an understanding that Israel must be dealt with using a modicum of respect; and the Arab world's collaboration with Israel continues—Israel may have finally set the Middle East on paths to peace and mutual support.

In discussions with friends, family and colleagues, emphasize to them that the willingness of the Arab world to play civilized roles in relation to Israel might indicate that Israel's policies and many assets have created a true path to peace—in Israel and abroad.

I hope you'll also take a minute, while you have this article front and center, to visit FLAME's lively [new Facebook page](#), as well as review the P.S. immediately below. It describes FLAME's new hasbarah campaign—a refutation of the myth of "Palestinian territories."

Best regards,

Ken Cohen

Editor, Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. Critics of Israel, from the *New York Times* to BDS and the United Nations, usually base their condemnation of Israel on accusations that Israel's settlements (or its "occupation of Palestinian territory") are illegal. These accusations are false and deserve to be exposed once and for all. That's why FLAME has created a new *hasbarah* message called "What Is 'Palestinian Territory'?" I hope you'll review this hard-hitting paid editorial, which ran a few weeks ago in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. It provides a plain-English explanation of the legal issues surrounding Israel's historical and entirely legal presence in its Biblical homeland. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, Vice President Pence and President Trump. If you agree that

this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a donation now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate](#) now. Now, more than ever, we need your support to ensure that the American people, the U.S. Congress and President Trump stay focused on Israel's critical role in protecting U.S. interests in the region—as well as protecting itself.

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