

# Why was Netanyahu Elected to an Unprecedented Fifth Term in Israel?

An Interview with Mordechai Nisan

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant (May 2019)



*Israeli Supporters of PM Netanyahu at Likud Party Headquarters, Tel Aviv, April 9, 2019  
(Reuters)*

The April 9, 2019 Knesset election [results](#) granted long term

Israeli Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu an unprecedented fifth term. His election was backed by a mandate of 65 seats held by a mix of right-wing nationalist and religious parties. The race pitted him against a center-left [Blue – White Alliance](#) headed by former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, a former Netanyahu Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon and secularist Yair Lapid of the Yesh Atid party. 39 parties competed for 120 Knesset seats. The actual vote tally between the Blue – White alliance and Likud was one vote, in favor of Netanyahu; 36 to 35. Netanyahu faces the daunting task of [assembling](#) a ruling coalition. Then there is the looming matter of outstanding [indictments](#) brought against him on bribery and fraud charges by his appointed Attorney General Yishai Mandelblit following Israeli Police investigations

The complex election also saw the demise of the New Right Party headed by a former Netanyahu Education Minister, Naftali Bennett and Justice Minister Ayalet Shaked. The New Right party [failed](#) to reach the threshold of 3.25% for inclusion in the new Knesset. That left a hole in the plans for a conservative reform of the High Court led by Ms. Shaked who [announced](#) that she was leaving politics.

The election also saw support from Washington, when the Trump Administration announced that it favored Israeli sovereignty over the strategic Golan plateau overlooking both Syria and Israel's Jezreel Valley. Following his re-election, Netanyahu [announced](#) his intent to name a new Golan settlement after Trump. Israelis were pleased to see the US Embassy move from Tel Aviv in to Jerusalem on the 70th anniversary of the Jewish nation's founding on May 14, 1948. 73% of Israelis [polled](#) viewed President Trump favorably.

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Unlike US Jewish millennials who have evinced troubling views about Israel, their Israeli counterparts voted overwhelmingly for Netanyahu and the center right nationalist coalition. *The Wall Street Journal* in a post-election [analysis](#) noted:

Ahead of the election, Mr. Netanyahu had the support of almost two-thirds of 18- to 24-year-olds and 54% of 25 to 34-year-olds, according to Israel Democracy institute survey.

More than 55% of Israelis now call themselves right wing, up from 40% a decade earlier, the same survey found.

The major story with this Netanyahu victory is the demise of the once powerful Labor governments led by the Israel founding generation with names like David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Perez and Ehud Barak. Except for the short-lived government of Barak in 2000, Labor has been virtually out of power for the past 20 years. Netanyahu has served fully half of that span since 2009. That is a transition of political power in Israel from the Labor Socialists. They were bent on perfecting the failed Oslo Accords of 1993, eviscerating the security and religious national heritage and control of Samaria and especially the

Judean Hills; what the world calls the West Bank. These are the so-called disputed territories left unresolved following the June 1967 Six Day War that unified Jerusalem. An estimated 400,000 Jews live in thriving religious nationalist communities like Ma'aleh Adumim, Efrat and Ariel. The question of what to do with the Palestinians awaits the long-promised delivery of the Trump "deal of the century" this June [following](#) the Muslim month-long Ramadan observances. Based on comments from the White House diplomatic team of Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt, as well as, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at a US Senate [testimony](#) there may not be support for the failed "two states solution".

The once dominant Labor and extreme Leftist Meretz parties in the April 2019 elections were barely able to cross the threshold for representation in the new Knesset. The [WSJ report](#) noted how devastating the turn of electoral events were for the Left in Israel:

The Labor party finished with six seats, a historic low. It garnered just 3% of 18- to 24-year olds in a Smith poll.

"Young Israelis have internalized Mr. Netanyahu's message that the left wing would damage the country if put in power", said Itai Glazer, a teenage supporter of Meretz, a left-wing organization.

"We live in a world in which the left has never been in power and we've never seen what the left can do. We've grown up in the world in which we were told the left is a

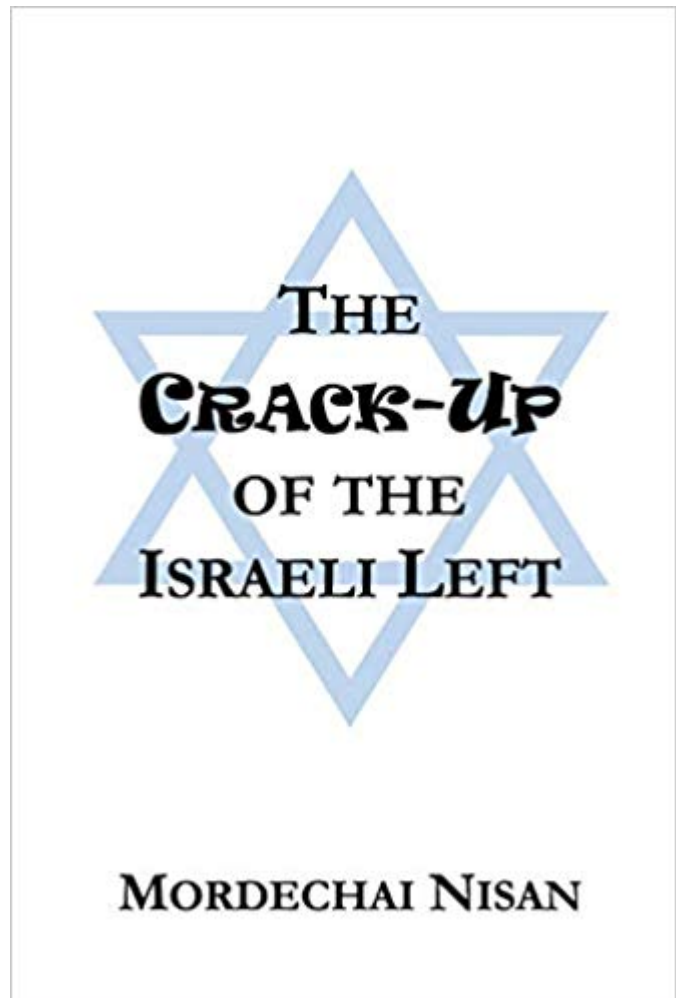
catastrophe," Mr. Glazer said.

And some young Jewish Israeli voters say they can't ever envision voting for parties that advocate engagement with Palestinians.

"I think that basically Arabs hate us," said Elazar Cohn, 20, of Jerusalem. "I don't think there will be peace."

Israeli Arabs virtually boycotted the elections. Less than 20 percent of eligible Israeli Arabs went to cast a ballot in the blue boxes at voting booths. They identify more with the struggle against Israel of their Palestinian brethren across the green line than they do with the democratic values of the Jewish nation state. President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, is the *bete noire* of PM Netanyahu. Rivlin is accused by the right of lavishing economic, education and social aid to Israeli Arab communities despite their disloyalty. The Rivlin and Netanyahu families despite being Likud stalwarts, have s been a veritable feud for three generations.

With this in mind, we interviewed former Hebrew University Professor and expert on Middle East minorities, Dr. Mordechai Nisan, author of [\*The Crack -up of the Israel Left\*](#) just before the recent Knesset elections.



**Rod:** We have been talking politics because of the Israeli election and we want to try to inform you, the listener, about Israeli politics. If you're Israeli, you are probably more informed than you care to admit right now. However, we want to talk about the left in Israel. That is those who lean to the left in politics in Israel. Have they harmed Israel? What is it all about? We have a great person that we are going to be talking to. Jerry, who is our guest?

**Jerry:** He is a former Professor at Hebrew University, an expert on Middle East minorities. He has also been a lifetime observer since he's a Canadian who made Aliyah to Israel. He is Mordechai Nisan. He is the author of a whole host of books, most recently on this issue, [\*The Crack -up of the Israeli\*](#)

Left., published in Canada because it couldn't be done in Israel. Because the left has controlled the cultural mindset of the Jewish nation.

**Rod:** Right. So those people living in the United States who are not Jewish will recognize the tenor of what the left is in Israel because the left in the United States is very much the same ideologically. You almost see it mirrored exactly. Our guest is Mordechai Nisan and we are going to be talking about the left, what the politics of the left is like in Israel. We hope to provide our listeners outside of Israel with an understanding of what Israeli politics are all about.

**Jerry:** Mordechai Nisan, why did you write *The Crack-up of the Israeli Left*?

**Mordechai** I wrote *The Crack-up of the Israeli Left* because it is an accurate description of what has happened to the Israeli left. I have been following Israeli politics for many decades and what became so prominent in my thinking is that the left is out of touch with two basic things. Out of touch with the fundamental definition and identity of the Jewish people, our heritage, our memory, our land, our honor. They seemed to have disconnected from these fundamental aspects of what it means to be a Jewish people in Israel. The second thing that I found was they are out of touch with the region, with the nature of the war with the Arabs, with the character of the Middle East as unstable, vicious and terroristic. They therefore are unable to understand adequately who they are and who the other is, meaning the Arabs within us, around us with whom we must contend.

**Rod:** For those people that live outside of Israel, especially people in the United States of America, would you consider the Israeli left somewhat like the left that we have represented in politics in the US?

**Mordechai:** No. the left I think is pretty much of an Israeli brand. Because when we say the left historically in Israel going back to pre-state times the Zionist left was active, pioneering, committed, daring, sacrificing for building up the Yishuv of the Jewish community. Even though some of their political ideas are on the far left, the early leaders were uncomfortable with the very idea of a Jewish state. Yet, they were committed to the Jewish Renewal in the land of Israel. They had a strong patriotic sentiment. What happened over the decades, since 1967 in the aftermath of the Six Day War, is that the left decided that its fundamental commitment to Zionism was no longer extended to Judea and Samaria. That therefore somehow Israel should “normalize itself” by abandoning the ideological national patriotic bedrock of what the enterprise was all about. They abandoned the foundation of what real Zionism meant.

**Jerry:** Mordechai, what is the story about Mantua Books, the Canadian imprint that published your book?

**Mordechai:** The great virtue of Mantua Publishing Company in Ontario, Canada is that it is committed to a conservative outlook and philosophy which is relevant in Canada, the United States and elsewhere. In addition, it made a commitment is to be a pro-Israel publisher. Therefore, my book fit in with their agenda. I think it may be their first book on Israel that they have published. My book fit the outlook of Howard Rotberg the founder and publisher of Mantua.



**Rod:** How did the works of R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. of *The American Spectator* influence the selection of the title?

**Mordechai:** I came across R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. and his extraordinary magazine, *The American Spectator*, many years ago. I subscribed and read it avidly because it is a magazine which combines a conservative outlook on things political and cultural with a very witty humorous satirical writing style. I subsequently got to know Tyrrell from *The American Spectator* and books he wrote, entitled, *The Liberal Crack-up* and *The Conservative Crack-up*. The purpose of the title, *The Crack-up of the Israeli Left* makes it a kind of humorous title on a serious subject. When you say crack-up in English we are kidding or joking. Yet the subject is serious and really that was the combination that I was looking for.

**Jerry:** Mordechai, how totalitarian, in your view, are the precepts of the left in Israel?

**Mordechai:** That's a wonderful question. Totalitarian is a very strong word. We have images of Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and the like in our mind, when we speak of totalitarianism. We think of Hannah Arendt's famous, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. There is nothing comparable in Israel after 1948 and in 2019. Yet the term "totalitarian" suggests the nature of the governing ethic. Their governing ethic was to control, certainly influence, incorporate all areas of life. Somehow the socialist and far left prior governments in Israel sought to dominate and control the economy, the cultural domain, the judicial apparatus, and the media networks. In this way we have a form of a totalitarian regime. However, it

doesn't have the thuggishness, ruthlessness and violence that we know from other places in the world. Therefore, I use the word in a sense to which it only fits the parameters and nuances of Israel.

**Jerry:** What are some of the examples you discuss in your book about how the left in Israel has historically undermined the core nation state Zionist precepts?

**Mordechai:** I think the first and obvious example of the left abandoning or undermining Zionism is when it decided with the military victory in the Six Day War of 1967 that the land of Israel was not going to be settled, controlled, incorporated within the borders of the State of Israel. By that I mean the core of the Jewish homeland from biblical times, Judea and Samaria, were not to remain with the Jewish people. They were to be negotiated away to some Arab partner in some delusional peace deal. Once you agree to give up parts of the land of Israel, the essence of the land of Israel, then I think you are really abandoning Zionism. I used the quote in my book from Ben-Gurion in 1937 where he said, "that no Jew has a right to concede any part of the land of Israel because it is the collective possession of the Jewish people from time immemorial until the end of times". The left decided that they were willing to concede a portion of Judea and Samaria of the land of Israel after 1967, under the leadership of Golda Meir and thereafter under Rabin, Peres and Barak. Then we can say that they abandoned Zionism. I think that is the most staggering example of the left undermining Zionism.

The other example is in terms of the nature of the state. The state is called in the Declaration of Independence from May 14, 1948, a Jewish state. That is how Ben-Gurion confirmed the

formulation in the document and as he stated it on that May 14th before Shabbat in 1948. It is a Jewish state. Once we say a Jewish state it means that the state is the property or the repository of a Jewish national vision. It belongs to the Jewish people. How can it not belong to the Jewish people from our own point of view? If the land of Israel doesn't belong to the Jewish people, it means we have no land. Meaning we are without any territory on the surface of the globe. Our claim to the land of Israel is natural, permanent, and consistent and founded on our texts, our history, our memories. However, the left decided that the State of Israel, though it is the home of the Jewish people, it somehow belongs in the same sense to non-Jews as well. Now I have no rejection of non-Jews in the State of Israel. We must embrace those non-Jews in Israel who accept the idea that Israel is the state of the Jewish people. It is a Jewish state and should be recognized as such and one should be loyal to it. Their idea that somehow the State of Israel is not only a Jewish state but, let us say, also a Jewish Arab state. If you say Jewish-Arab, that Arab part tells me that it is not my state anymore. Or if you say it is a state of the citizens of Israel then that is saying it is not the state of the Jewish people. When we say the state belongs to the Jewish people, we mean the Jews of Israel and the Jews all over the world. It is their Jewish state, as Jews have a claim and a right to that state. However, if we say it is the state only of the citizens of Israel then somehow a non-Jew and Arab in Israel have a claim to the state perhaps more than a Jew outside of the country. That is unacceptable.

**Rod:** As most of us know Israel has a very long history of those people that are not Jewish living within the state and living as part of a citizenry. It totally makes sense what you just said, Mordechai. How could someone could go about purchasing your book?

**Mordechai:** *The Crack-up of the Israeli Left* is available on Amazon.com. In addition, you might visit local bookstores to see if they will order copies.

**Jerry:** Mordechai what currently constitutes the liberal left versus the conservative right ideologically in Israel?

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**Mordechai:** There are several issues which differentiate the left from the right in Israel. Let's take as an example, the question of the infiltrators from Africa who came into Israel in very large numbers, tens of thousands from Egypt's Sinai into the Negev, Southern Israel and then penetrated throughout the country. All of this happened until the Netanyahu government built a wall that President Trump sometimes refers to as the Israeli wall which works. This wall runs from the Mediterranean Coast near Gaza across to the vicinity of Eilat in Southern Negev. government built the wall to prevent infiltration by people who have no right to be in the country and certainly didn't come in any legal way. These African smugglers and infiltrators who came in were welcomed by the Israeli left because this was an opportunity for Israel to show its humanitarian, moral, compassionate policy towards non-Jews, non-Israelis, Africans who have no right to be in the country. They have no claim to be in the country and came

here illegally. The left developed an outlook and established various organizations to assist them and welcome them. It promoted the opening of nurseries for their children, let them have hospital and medical care and schools where their children could attend. All of this without any legal standing in the country. Here we have a way in which the left wanted to de-Judaize Israel by allowing in tens of thousands of non-Jews thereby weakening the Jewish character of the country over time. What I referred to earlier as a country of its inhabitants or a country of its citizens alone and not the country of the Jewish people. This is a very soft, moralizing sense of what the Jewish people are about. Now this has been an issue which has bothered the country for nearly a decade. The right has been accused on this issue of being racist but obviously that has no bearing. The Jewish people are not racist. The Jewish people are for Jews. It doesn't mean they are against non-Jews. It just means that they care about their own people. In terms of color it has no place. After all many of our Jews are dark skinned, be they from Yemen, Iraq or Ethiopia.

**Rod:** Asian as well.

**Mordechai:** This is one of these examples which divides the left from the right. We are hopeful that there will be a more effective government on the issue of the infiltrators that this problem can be resolved. The African infiltrators have brought crime, Jewish fear for their well-being in the face of Africans who control the public space in the Southern Tel Aviv neighborhoods. Another issue which divides the left from the right is the place of Arabs in the country. The power of the left in Israel is that they define the narrative. They define what we call the politically correct conversation. The left has promoted the idea that the Arabs should be the Arab

citizens of Israel—those who live in the Galilee, Jaffa, Haifa who are indeed citizens of the country should benefit from affirmative action, inverse discrimination. They should be promoted more. They should be given more opportunities, benefits and privileges than even the Jews. In this sense the left has promoted this agenda. The right or the conservative camp in Israel has been virtually unable or unwilling to confront this policy. Even Likud, the center right political party, carrying the nationalist vision in Israel, has not offered an alternative to placating the Arab population in the country. The Likud government has been very generous in providing budgetary outlays for the Arab community. The Arab population in Israel are citizens who were eligible to vote on April 9th. However, many Israeli Arabs may not vote because they are not committed to the idea of Israel as a Jewish state

They are a militant community whose identification is with the Palestinians. The Arabs in Israel identify as Palestinians. In that sense they feel part of the Palestinian struggle even though they don't necessarily play a role, in a violent sense, in terms of the Palestinian struggle. They are more against us as they identify and have solidarity with them in many ways. For example, the Arab Muslims from the north of Israel often come to Jerusalem to pray on the Temple Mount at the Al Aqsa Mosque while accusing Israel of threatening the free Muslim access to the Aqsa Mosque. All of which is just a falsehood. These Arabs who are citizens of Israel join with the Palestinian Muslim Campaign to deny the Jews their rightful claim to the Temple Mount. You have this militant dimension of the Arab citizenry of Israel. The left has promoted solidarity with these Arabs for all intents and purposes. The right has not mounted a campaign against them in any way, so the Arabs were able to advance in Israel without paying the price as it were to show solidarity and support for Israel. They overwhelmingly do not join the IDF, the Israeli

Army, they overwhelmingly do not do Civilian National Service. Many Arabs in Israel do not raise the Israeli flag. When they have militant demonstrations, they raise and hold on high the Palestinian flag. In that sense therefore they are not with Israel, but they benefit from Israel. To give you another example, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where I taught for many years, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, virtually almost all the Universities in Israel are home to thousands of Arab students. However, these Arab students in no way show solidarity with the country. When there is fighting in Gaza or some terrorist campaign against the Jews and there is an Israeli military response Arab student on university campuses show solidarity with the Arab side of the struggle. They demonstrate and raise the Palestinian flag on university campuses in Israel., Universities from which they enjoy a first-class education, and which accepts them in very large numbers. They don't show any sense of involvement on behalf of Israel, supporting Israel in any way. The leftist agenda has promoted this. The President of the State of Israel Reuven Rivlin is very outspoken on behalf of the Arabs and in favor of equal rights and equal opportunities and a democracy for all and rules against any signs of what is racism. He is one of those who always promotes assistance for the Arabs but never demands from the Arabs any role on behalf of the state.

**Rod:** How serious do you think the left is to possibly fundamentally changing Israeli's nationalist view of themselves as the state of the Jewish people. Do you think this is a serious threat?

**Mordechai:** The threat is very real. At the same time most of the Israeli population has an instinctive sense of Jewish pride and Jewish identity. We are not spiritually adrift at all. As I write about it in *The Crack-Up of the Israeli Left*,

they are spiritually adrift. They have really decided to cross the lines and abandon the classic Jewish national agenda. In effect they have joined forces with the other side. One example has to do with the military conduct of our army facing Arab violence and terrorism. It is an ongoing issue in Israeli discourse as to how the army should respond in the face of Arab violence. This is a great concern on the part of the left. It became part of the national conversation that the Arabs are innocent. Moreover, that they are victims, while Jews are victims of Arab violence and terrorism. The debate is the Arabs are the primary victims and that we should be sensitive to their difficult situation living under what the left calls 'Israeli occupation' in the territories, Judea and Samaria, the West Bank. The language has been manipulated by the left that this is occupied territories when it is the land of Israel. It is our peoples' land. It is where we came from. It is where we returned to, where we live. It is where we have rejuvenated this extraordinary Zionist renaissance in modern times. It is not occupied territory. The left stresses 'the occupation', 'the occupied territories' calling the Arabs Palestinians, even though historically there is no Palestinian people.

They adopted the name Palestinian for themselves. It doesn't necessarily mean that we have to recognize them as a 'people of national rights.' Not so whatsoever. However, you see the left has manipulated the language in these ways. They have referred to the settlers almost as strangers alien to the land of Israel, Judea and Samaria, whether be it Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim or Ariel. The military has been to a degree handcuffed to show extraordinary restraint in the face of Arab violence. We have seen this for the past year on the Gaza frontier with Israel with southern Israeli communities in Northwestern Negev victimized by the Arabs violence. Yet the army continues to act with extraordinary restraint. While



there is room for restraint, yet our people have suffered from that military restraint. The left has dominated the mindset. Part of that is Jewish humanity, but part of it is the Arabs have somehow more rights than the Jews have there. Therefore, we have gone out of our way to show extra caution in how we deal with them in contentious violent situations. This is a big issue. It hasn't been resolved.

**Rod:** I'm not sure that it is going to be resolved anytime soon.

**Jerry:** Mordechai, Israelis will shortly go to the polls to elect a new Knesset. The choice is between the Blue White center-left alliance versus the Likud center-right coalition. It is a tight race. What in your view is how one might choose to put a ballot in that blue box to represent the priorities of Israeli voters?

**Mordechai:** The Blue White center-left party led by former IDF Chief of Staff General Gantz is not necessarily left as they have certain candidates who are not at all on the left. So, it is a bit of a mish mash. The classical left running in the election today is Meretz, on the far left, and the Labor Party. Gantz's party is hard to define. The Israelis have kept Likud and its allies in power now for ten years. If we go back to 1977 Likud has been in power for far more years than any of its political competitors. The Israeli people have moved to the right over the years. The upcoming elections the polls now show Gantz's party ahead of Likud. They were running in the polls about eight or nine seats ahead of Likud now they are down to three or four seats ahead of Likud. However, I would point out that it is part of the historic pattern that Likud has won more seats on the day of the election than it

showed in polls preceding the election. I'm assuming, based on the past, that whatever number of seats Likud is accorded by the polls today, I would foresee Likud receiving a mandate above thirty. I would say it's not at all unreasonable to assume that both Likud and Gantz's party may show results over thirty seats. Because there are so many different parties running in the Knesset election you need a program to understand what the differences are.

It is hard to say that any party wins an election wins sixty seats of a hundred and twenty seats in the Knesset. It has never happened in our history. If Likud won, the election it would need more than sixty seats in the Knesset to have a majority supported government. You need a coalition of parties whose sum of Knesset members gives you at least sixty so that you can control the Knesset and pass laws to form a ruling government. Israel's proportional representation electoral system and coalition politics is very complicated. When we go to the polls, the people will decide if they feel safer with the country in the hands of Netanyahu and Likud. That is in more responsible hands, more Zionist committed hands, than in the hands of Gantz, Lapid and Ashkenazi and the other leading members of the Blue White alliance party. It will come down to that. Who do you really feel comfortable with when you go to sleep at night and get up in the morning? For most of the people who have a very patriotic spirit they don't want to go to sleep at night knowing the country is hanging together well and get up in the morning and hear that the Israeli government negotiated with Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah through the intervention of the French President and the German Chancellor during the night some kind of deal whereby Israel will withdraw from Judea and Samaria.. That we will be forced to abandon settlements and expel several hundred thousand Israelis. This is part of the ongoing Oslo charade and delusion that if you withdraw you get peace and security. That

is what the left has been promoting for decades: withdrawal equals peace and security. Withdrawal means insecurity and no peace. Israel left Gaza and there was no peace. Instead we had instability and violence. Israel left parts of Judea and Samaria initially in Oslo to Arafat in 1993. Instead, we got Palestinian terrorism and the murder of thousands of Israelis. Withdrawal equals instability. Withdrawal equals the loss of Jewish life. So, this is going to be the issue on April 9th. If you vote for Likud and Netanyahu, we have a reasonable assurance that when we go to sleep at night, the country is okay, and we get up in the morning and it is okay. If Gantz became the Prime Minister with his colleagues, we don't know what they are liable to do. Whether they are in some secret negotiating session with the Palestinians on withdrawal from territories. Who knows where they will be the next day, if they are elected with a ruling majority?

**Rod:** Mordechai, you are telling your fellow Israeli citizens to be informed, do some reading, know the facts. We are almost out of time before we must close out. Why don't we give Mordechai an opportunity to sum up his book.

**Mordechai:** *The Crack-Up of the Israeli Left* shows how the left diverged from the classical Jewish, Zionist, Israeli values and policies and how the hard core left has turned against the state. Part of the left's campaign is to call Israelis 'Nazis', 'racists', to call Israel 'an apartheid state', to condemn Israel for the continuation of the conflict with the Arabs. They are part of the BDS worldwide campaign. We must put the left in its place, expose it in its own words and therefore choose a healthy, sane, national Zionist Israel.

**Rod:** Thank you so much for coming on the show Mordechai. We

really appreciate it. You have been listening to Beyond the Matrix here on Israel News Talk Radio and we will see you next week.

**Mordechai:** Thank you so much.

[Listen](#) to the Israel News Talk Radio–Beyond the Matrix interview with Mordechai Nisan.

[Watch](#) this brief post-Israeli election *NewsMax* interview with Mordechai Nisan, author of [The Crack -up of the Israeli Left.](#)

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