

The week ending March 20, 2015

ISRAELI ELECTIONS

Final count: Likud boosted to 30 seats, Meretz up to 5

After some 200,000 additional ballots were counted from IDF soldiers, absentees, prisoners and the hospitalized between Wednesday and Thursday night, the final count of votes in Tuesday's election shows that the Likud has risen from 29 to 30 seats and Meretz has gained another seat, totaling five mandates. In addition, according to Israel's Central Election Committee, out of a total of 5,878,362 eligible voters, 4,253,336 participated in Tuesday's election, or 72.3 percent of the electorate. Furthermore, the electoral threshold for any party to participate in the next Knesset was 136,808 votes with 33,482 votes to equal one mandate. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), the final counts of the election were: Likud, Benjamin Netanyahu's party, winning with 30 seats followed by The Zionist Union, led by Isaac Herzog, with 24 seats; The Joint (Arab) List with 13; Yesh Atid with 11; Kulanu with 10; Bayit Yehudi with 8; Shas with 7; Yisrael Beytenu with 6; UTJ with 6; and Meretz with 5.

Netanyahu: Still Invested in Two States

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was invested in a two-state solution and could tolerate a number of Iranian uranium enrichment centrifuges. Netanyahu's first major post-election interview Thursday, on [MSNBC](#), appeared aimed at calming the Obama administration's anger at his retreat just before the election from a two-state solution, telling Israeli media that it would not happen on his watch. According to [JTA](#), in his latest interview, Netanyahu said that what he meant was that the Palestinians and the region was not ready for two states, citing among other things the Islamist-fomented turmoil in neighboring lands and the nominal working arrangement between the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas terrorist group. "I don't want a one-state solution, I want a sustainable peaceful two-state solution, but for that circumstances have to change," he said. Netanyahu also said he did not mean to disrespect President Barack Obama with his March 3 speech to Congress, organized in secret with the congressional Republican leadership. He said he expected to continue working closely with Obama. "America has no greater ally than Israel, and Israel has no greater ally than the United States," he said. Netanyahu in the speech had opposed the Obama administration's backing for nuclear talks underway between Iran and the major powers. In the MSNBC interview, however, he made a significant concession, saying Israel could tolerate a limited uranium enrichment capacity for Iran, although with a number lower than the 6,500 reported to be part of an emerging deal. "A smaller number is something Israel and its Arab neighbors wouldn't love but could live with," he said. Previously, Netanyahu had insisted on zero enrichment capacity for Iran. Netanyahu sidestepped a question about his warning in a video to his supporters on Election Day that "droves of Arab voters" were heading to the polls. The White House condemned the call as "divisive." Netanyahu said he "was trying to counter a foreign-funded effort to get votes to topple my party," although he would not identify who funded this effort.

David Horovitz: King Bibi and His Divided People

In an editorial in [The Times of Israel](#), David Horovitz states that, most Israelis went to sleep late on Tuesday night concluding from the TV exit polls and the subsequent party

leaders' speeches that Benjamin Netanyahu had narrowly won the elections, and would almost certainly head the next government. They woke up on Wednesday morning to discover that the supposedly ultra-sophisticated surveys had failed, and that Netanyahu, far from squeaking back into office, had defeated Isaac Herzog's Zionist Union by a margin of some six seats (with almost all votes counted), dramatically elevating Likud's share of the 120-seat Knesset (from 18 in the outgoing parliament to 30 this time), and thus recording what by Israeli standards constitutes a crushing victory. The question now is what Netanyahu will do with what he called this victory "against all odds." And therein lies his new challenge. The near-final arithmetic suggests that he can muster a majority coalition composed solely of ultra-Orthodox and right-wing parties, including ex-Likud minister Kahlon's Kulanu. The early indications are that he does not want Yesh Atid or Zionist Union in government with him, and that the feeling is mutual. But will he now rule in the no-holds-barred spirit that carried him back into office? Will he, not without good reason, conclude that Tuesday's vote was a firm mandate from the Israeli electorate to govern the country in the spirit of those frenzied last few days of the campaign? Or will he seek to introduce nuance to those hardened positions, and tone down the sense of *gevalt*? We'll know soon enough.

U.S. – ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

Congressman Praises Israel's Neuroscience Innovations at Tel Aviv Conference

Top congressional science appropriator Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA) hailed Israel as a neuroscience world leader at the BrainTech 2015 conference in Tel Aviv. "The U.S. and Europe may have more breakthroughs in neuroscience, but you have to put that in perspective," said Fattah. "The U.S. has 350 million people, and there are 28 countries in the European Union. Israel is third behind these countries in its neuroscience developments, but per capita it is way ahead of everyone." As the only U.S. elected official invited to speak at the March conference, Fattah joined international neuroscientists, entrepreneurs, government leaders and other stakeholders to emphasize increased global neuroscience collaboration to analyze and mend the human brain. "The most important factor in neuroscience progress is going to be international cooperation," he said. "The U.S., Europe, Japan, China, and many others are contributing to this. That, President Peres told me, is part of his vision as well. But there's no denying the great contributions Israel has made in neuroscience, which is why I am here—and plan to keep coming back until some of these big questions and problems are solved." Known for leading congressional initiatives to grow neuroscience research, Fattah serves as the senior Democrat on the House appropriations subcommittee on commerce, justice and science. Using his Israel trip to foster more partnerships in the neuroscience field for the U.S., Fattah met individually with Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro and Director-General of Israel's Ministry of Science, Technology and Space Ido Sharir. "We are here, and we will always be here, because this is the work that will change the world." Reiterating his endeavors to expand the United States' commitment to brain research and neurotechnology, Fattah has worked with Israel to develop neuroscience technology. "I've seen with my own eyes what the effects of Israeli neuroscience research are," said Fattah. "It was in my congressional district in Philadelphia that ReWalk, the Israeli company that makes the exoskeleton suit that enables paraplegics to walk, carried out their trials. I saw an IDF veteran who was in a wheelchair for 20 years get up and walk. That was an amazing thing to see."