

The Future of Israeli Politics

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

By **Arthur Goodman** and **Haneul Na'avi**

We analyze the future of Israeli politics with Arthur Goodman, the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Liaison for Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Europe's largest Jewish voice against Zionism. We cover his history with the organization, explicate the process of the recent Knesset elections, and express our knowledge and understanding of the situation happening in Palestine, as well as the international community's shift in support from Benjamin Netanyahu as he engages in further dangerous hardline rhetoric and crimes against humanity.

HANEUL: Can you tell us a little information about yourself?

ARTHUR: I've been handling lobbying for JFJFP ever since it was formed; about 13 years ago. I grew up in a middle-class Jewish family and used to be 100% supportive of Israel. I had always assumed that everything Israel was right and Arabs wrong, without much thought behind it, until my mid-50s. One day, towards the end of the first Intifada, I looked at a newspaper with a picture of Palestinian teenagers throwing stones at Israeli soldiers across barren wasteland. I thought, "It takes guts to throw stones at armed soldiers". That never occurred any time before, but it shows how your psychological preconceptions can color how you look at things.

I thought afterwards that people must have a good reason, and that wasn't a comfortable thought. Eventually, I started reading the New (Israeli) Historians, which was a painful eye-opener; that it wasn't the Arabs fault, but Israel's, and the determination of most Zionists was to have as much control over Palestine as possible, even though Palestinians were the majority when Israelis arrived. It went on from there through the expulsions of the Nakbah and 3/67, with lots of violence. Here I am today, lobbying for JFJFP for 13 years now and we are the biggest Jewish peace group with over 2,000 members.

HANEUL: On your website, there's an article where you respond to the [Financial] Times on the plummet of international support for Israel after [Operation Protective Edge], which killed more Palestinians in 2014 (2200+ dead) than all the death tolls since 1967 combined. What do you think of this?

ARTHUR: It's probably true, and not surprising. I think most people can understand what they see, even through propaganda. Every time an Israeli PM says, "We have no partner", and the next day there are more settlement expansions, people say, "What's going here"? On top of that, there were four attacks on Gaza and the two Lebanon wars, where it's obvious that most casualties were civilians, and Israel provoked them.

HANEUL: During recent elections, we had two parties—the Likud and Zionist

Union—fighting for dominion in the Knesset. Netanyahu won and Israel's PM for a 4th term. How has the international Jewish community reacted to this?

ARTHUR: There's no single reaction, because opinions in the Jewish community are not monolithic. Some people on the right will be pleased, some on the left are not pleased at all, and the biggest group in the middle will not know what to think. The Jewish community has become more polarized. Those on the left are for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, which is legally legitimate. Israel is legitimate *only* within them, and Palestine has a right to a state within all of Mandate Palestine, which is a 78/22 split of the land.

HANEUL: There have been calls to return to the 1967 borders by the international community...

ARTHUR: ...and by many centrist Zionist Israelis, who would like to expand beyond them, but it's not worth it from their own point of view because it would make it difficult for Israel to remain a democratic country and maintain international support. They realize that those two things are important, but the right-wing doesn't, and wants to continue expansion into the occupied territories.

HANEUL: For you, how much of the right-winged Israeli population helped win the election? How does the Israeli electoral system work?

ARTHUR: It's a proportional system with a threshold. As long as a party gets over 3.25% of the vote, it can have some MKs. The votes of those that pass that threshold are calculated and the proportion of seats is allotted to them. This is why Israel has always had coalition governments, because no party could get more than 50% of the votes, which would in turn give them 50% of the seats. You can't say that most of Israel is right-wing; it's split equally between the right wing, center, and center-left. The remaining far-left and Palestinian parties are much smaller.

What happened is that a large majority of right-wing votes went to Likud due to Netanyahu's cynical ploy in the last days of the election, and became the party with the largest vote with 25 seats; Zionist Union received 22 or so seats. Ironically, if all of the Israeli-Palestinians that voted for the [United] Arab List had voted for the Zionist Union, ZU would have formed that government, but it didn't happen that way. I don't blame them for wanting their own party, but it goes both ways. The Arab Union has got 15 seats, but one of the unspoken rules in Jewish-Israeli politics is that no government will form a coalition with Palestinian parties. This is why Israel is not fully democratic.

HANEUL: What exactly was the platform of the Zionist Union?

ARTHUR: It was for a greater redistribution of income from the well-off to the less well-off and middle class. Income distribution in Israel is the most unequal of all OECD countries, which has happened over the last 10 years as a result of Likud policies, especially Netanyahu's. How would that have gone for the Arabs in Israel? I'm not sure, because one fact of Israeli life is that Israeli towns get more resources from the state than Arab ones. There was another part about negotiating with Palestinians, but not precise. Their leader, [Yitzhak] Herzog even stated that he wanted to keep hold of the Jordan Valley. If he was serious about negotiations, he wouldn't have meant that, but overall, there certainly is a difference in policies on negotiations between Likud and ZU.

Another aspect of discrimination is between the Ashkenazi (European) and Mizrahi (North African/ Spain) Jews. They have always been less well-off than the Ashkenazi. I had even read that the Mizrahi earn less in the same professions.

HANEUL: This income disparity is a big problem. I remember that Netanyahu wanted all Jews to return to Israel after the Charlie Hebdo massacres occurred, that he wanted all Jews in France and Denmark to “come home”...

ARTHUR: That’s what he said. He says a lot of things, but you can’t believe many of them. Very few people actually know what’s going on in his mind. The one thing that is certain is that he wants to take over as much of the West Bank as possible without taking too many Palestinians with it. That’s the one constant in his career.

HANEUL: Right, and the international community is changing its perspectives on Israel—Sweden recognizes Palestine as a state, Spain no longer sells weapons to Israel, and Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrats said that he would recognize Palestine because Netanyahu’s callous remarks.

ARTHUR: Part of the lobbying I do is to write to his office in order to make that party policy. I also plan to write to [Labour MP Edward] Miliband... and probably to the Tories. There was a debate in Parliament last November, where the FM [Philip Hammond] intervened while his Middle East minister was talking—waffling around. He stood up and said, “What my colleague means is that the settlements are an impediment to peace and they are intended to be so”. That was extraordinary to hear.

HANEUL: [US President] Barack Obama has changed his point of view on Palestine. If he lifts the diplomatic shield [from Israel], what will result from [future] meetings in the UNGA?

ARTHUR: It will be a very big and important change. I think that Netanyahu’s ultra-cynicism by frightening members of the right-wing has given politicians the cover to say what they’ve wanted to say for years—they want to stop giving Netanyahu protection in the UN Security Council and start talking seriously about [sanctions] due to the occupation. Few people really believed that Netanyahu was willing to negotiate.

HANEUL: There’s a massive worldwide movement through the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign, mainly through the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, JFJFP, and many others. How will this impact Israel’s economy and policy-making in the future?

ARTHUR: It won’t affect it very much, and it’s just begun. It’s at the pinprick stage. Regarding pension schemes, there are only 3-4 of the, but there must be thousands in the Western world. You have even fewer officials ban G4S and Veolia for contracts, whom still work in the Occupied Territories. However, even if that movement becomes big, it won’t impact Israel directly. All it will mean is that an Israeli entrepreneur or company will have to step in for Veolia or G4S, and that will be difficult. It would be another warning shot, but a better method that would hurt Israel directly is if people stopped buying Israeli goods, which we support and campaign against organizations that support Palestine’s occupation directly.

The real thing that would hurt Israel economically is if the EU and US suspended tariff concessions that Israel receives in trade. That is huge money, and one-third goes to the EU and another to the US. If those tariffs were suspended, that would bring a heavy cost, and even Netanyahu couldn’t deny that. However, we lobby for things that are more

feasible—accurate labeling of goods from settlements to help consumers determine if they want to buy them. We also support the banning of Israeli goods into the EU on the basis that, because the settlements are illegal, the EU shouldn't help them prosper.

HANEUL: How do you feel about this, coming from a Jewish perspective?

ARTHUR: I would like, just as everyone else in JFJFP, Palestinians, and many, many other Jewish people, for Israel to become a more *normal* country. We would like an Israeli government that accepts that they cannot expand beyond the 1967 borders and accepts a Palestinian state. Conceding all but 22% of their land was a huge compromise for Palestinians, but they made it. They made it in 1988 and Israel never reciprocated, but I do believe that it will take pressure from the outside to achieve this.

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