

26 September 2006

PRESS RELEASE

Joint Palestinian-Israeli Public Opinion Poll*

In the Aftermath of the War in Lebanon, Palestinian Support for Hamas Unchanged with Greater Pragmatism among Israelis Regarding Negotiations

These are the results of the most recent poll conducted September 10-19 jointly by the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah.

The joint poll examined Israelis' and Palestinians' attitudes on the conflict in the aftermath of the second war in Lebanon. It tracked both publics' attitudes regarding the resumption of a political process and their assessments of the impact of the war on the propensity for further violence in the Israeli-Palestinian arena.

67% of the Israelis support negotiations with a Palestinian national unity government which includes Hamas if needed to reach a compromise agreement. Even when a Hamas-led government is concerned, we observe increased moderation among Israelis: 56% support and 43% oppose talks with a Hamas government if needed in order to reach a compromise agreement with the Palestinians. In our June 2006 poll before the war, 48% supported such talks with 49% opposing it. Among Palestinians, however, we observe some hardening in this regard. Before the war, in our June poll, 70% thought that a Hamas-led PA should negotiate with Israel and 26% believed it should not; after the war, 59% support such talks while 38% oppose them.

As to the impact of the war on attitudes towards violence, our findings suggest that Hizballah tactics provide an attractive model for Palestinians' armed resistance. A majority of Palestinians (63%) agree that Palestinians should emulate Hizballah's methods by launching rockets at Israeli cities, compared to 35% who disagree. Similar levels of support for emulating Hizballah's methods were obtained in July 2000, following Israel's evacuation of Southern Lebanon (65% of the Palestinians supported it with 27% who opposed). However, the context of the question we asked in 2000 was quite different from the present context. The model of violence then implied mainly guerrilla war directed against the Israeli army. Regarding other modes of violence, following the war, there is no change in Palestinian support for armed attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel. 56% of the Palestinians supported it before the war in March 2006 compared to 57% who support it now. When the abduction of Israeli soldiers for exchange with Palestinian prisoners is concerned, 75% of the Palestinians support such operations compared to 23% who oppose it. Despite the militant views of the Palestinians in the aftermath of the war in Lebanon, 77% of the Palestinians support the call for a ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis and 74% believe that Palestinians can not depend on armed action only and must reach a political settlement.

The poll also examined the sentiments of Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel toward the war in the context of public criticism regarding Arab sympathy towards Hizballah and its military goals during the war.

The results show both discrepancies and agreements in Jewish and Arab respondents' assessments of the degree of solidarity between Hizballah and the Arab citizens of Israel. While only 24% of the Israeli Jews believe that Nasrallah cares for the fate of the Arab citizens of Israel, 70% of Israel's Arab citizens believe that he cares for their fate. Looking at it the other way around, both sectors are much more in agreement. 77% of the Israeli Jews and 68% of the Arabs believe that the Arab citizens of Israel care for the fate of Hizballah in Lebanon.

In a separate Israeli omnibus survey conducted August 28-30, we followed up on Israeli attitudes towards a settlement with Syria, previously studied in August 2000 following the collapse of the Syrian-Israeli talks that year. This allows us to assess the extent to which the second war in Lebanon produced changes in Israeli attitudes with regard to a political settlement with Syria.

The findings indicate that Israelis' attitudes regarding a settlement with Syria have not been affected by the war and remain remarkably similar to those held six years earlier in August 2000. In our recent survey, 56% of the Israelis oppose full evacuation of the Golan Heights in return for a full peace agreement with Syria, 32% support it, and 12% are somewhere in the middle. Six years earlier, in August 2000, 55% opposed such a settlement, 34% supported it, and 10% were in the middle. Israelis' expectations with regard to the feasibility of such a settlement however changed drastically. While 49% of the Israelis believed in August 2000 that within five years such a settlement will take place, only 26% thought so in our recent survey.

Total Palestinian sample size is 1287 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 127 randomly selected locations between September 14 and 16, 2006. The margin of error is 3%. The Israeli data are based on telephone interviews with a representative sample of 500 Israeli Jews and a representative sample of 401 Israeli Arabs. The Israeli sample was properly weighted according to the proportion of the respective sectors in the population to produce the overall Israeli estimates (overall sampling error of 3.9%). The interviews were conducted in Hebrew, Arabic and Russian between September 10 and 19.

The poll was planned and supervised by Dr. Yaacov Shamir, the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University and Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR).

*This joint survey was conducted with the support of the Ford Foundation Cairo office and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Ramallah.