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International Poll: Most Publics—Including Americans—Oppose Taking Sides in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Israeli, Palestinian, American and Arab Leaders All Get Low Marks On Efforts to Resolve Conflict

Most Favor UN Playing Robust Role in Peace Enforcement

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College Park, MD—A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 18 countries finds that in 14 of them people mostly say their government should not take sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just three countries favor taking the Palestinian side (Egypt, Iran, and Turkey). No country favors taking Israel's side, including the United States, where 71 percent favor taking neither side.

World publics give low marks to Israel, the Palestinians, the United States and the Arab countries when asked how well they are doing their part in the effort to resolve the conflict.

Publics in most countries think the United Nations should play a greater role in the conflict in the Middle East. Majorities say the UN should offer to send peacekeepers to the region not only to enforce an eventual agreement but also to guarantee the security of both Israel and its Arab neighbors.

“Publics around the world are not cheering for either side and want their governments to take an even-handed approach,” said Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. “All of the key actors are seen as failing to do their part to break the impasse and most want the UN Security Council to step in and offer peacekeeping forces and even security guarantees to help resolve the conflict.”

The poll of 18,792 respondents was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland.

Interviews were conducted in 18 countries, including most of the largest nations—China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia—as well as Mexico, Peru, Great Britain, France, Spain, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Thailand and South Korea. The Palestinian Territories were also polled. The nations included represent 59 percent of the world population. Not all questions were asked in all nations. The survey was fielded between January 10 and May 6. Margins of error range from +/-2 to 4 percent.

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On average 58 percent of those polled around the world say that they believe their country should not take either side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only 20 percent say their country should favor the Palestinians and just 7 percent say the Israelis.

Large majorities of about 70 percent or more prefer a neutral stance in eight countries, including the United States (71%), as well as Mexico (88%), South Korea (82%), Great Britain (79%), France (79%), Peru (76%), China (74%), and Ukraine (69%).

World publics give low marks to international actors when asked to evaluate how well they are “doing their part in the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Israel receives the worst ratings. In thirteen out of the fifteen countries asked this question, majorities say the Israelis are “not doing very well” or “not doing well at all.” On average, 54 percent say Israel is not playing a positive role while just 22 percent say it is. Those giving Israel poor grades include three out of five Americans (59%). Only in India do more view Israel’s role positively (35%) than negatively (25%). The Chinese are divided.

Palestinians do not fare much better than Israelis. In 10 out of 15 countries, most say the Palestinians are not doing their part in the effort to resolve their conflict with Israel. On average, 47 percent view the Palestinians’ role negatively while 28 percent view it positively. Americans have the largest majority with this negative view (75%), followed by South Koreans (74%) and the French (66%). Those viewing the Palestinian role most favorably are the Palestinians themselves (75%), followed by Egyptians (63%), Indonesians (49%) and Nigerians (46%).

Twelve of the countries polled say the United States is not doing its part very well. On average, 59 percent view the US role negatively while only 20 percent view it positively. In the United States itself, only 44 percent say their country is doing its part well while 46 percent say it is not.

Evaluations of the Arab countries are negative in 11 out of the 15 publics asked. On average, 48 percent say they are not playing a constructive role while just 23 percent say they are. A majority of the Palestinians (57%) also rate efforts by their Arab neighbors negatively.

Publics around the world think the UN Security Council should take a robust role in resolving the conflict. In 16 of 17 countries asked about this issue, majorities or pluralities think that if Israel and the Palestinians reach an agreement, the UN Security Council should send peacekeepers to enforce it. On average, 67 percent favor this idea while just 20 percent oppose it.

Most UN Security Council members support sending UN peacekeepers to enforce an eventual Israeli-Palestinian agreement, including majorities in China (81%), France (74%), Great Britain (67%), the United States (61%), and a plurality of Russians (47%).

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Predominantly Muslim publics in the Middle East also support this proposal, including Turks (65%), Egyptians (64%), and Palestinians (63%).

Most publics polled would support an even higher level of UN commitment: that if Israel and the Palestinians reach a peace agreement, the UN Security Council should offer security guarantees to both Israel and its Arab neighbors. Eleven of the 16 countries polled said the Security Council should make a commitment to protect Israel if it is attacked by its Arab neighbors, while 13 of the 16 thought it should do the same for Arab countries in case of an Israeli attack. On average, 45 percent favor providing such guarantees to Israel and 55 percent providing them to Arab countries.

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