

# **Attitude Factors in the Search for Israeli-Palestinian Peace: A Comprehensive Review of Recent Polls**

By Alvin Richman

## Overall Summary:

Both the Israeli and Palestinian publics want to reach a peace agreement, but both sides deeply distrust the other and are pessimistic that negotiations will soon resolve their conflict. Negotiators on both sides also are constrained by extremists opposed to major Israeli-Palestinian compromises – Hamas which favors a posture of “resistance” to Israel, and the Israeli settler movement which opposes yielding territory or settlements to the Palestinians.

One of the most telling measures of the Israeli and Palestinian publics’ mutual desire for an accord – besides both sides predominant support of the Middle East peace process – are their attitudes toward a U.S. mediating role. Both Israelis and Palestinians mainly favor a *stronger* U.S. role in the peace process, because the U.S. is seen as a key to reaching an agreement, even though each side perceives the U.S. as partial to the other. There is a growing consensus among Middle East observers that the United States will have to present Israeli and Palestinian negotiators with a two-state peace plan, including at least the basic parameters for resolving the most critical issues – borders/settlements, Jerusalem/Holy Sites, security arrangements and refugees/compensation.

Among the various issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians, the future of Jerusalem appears to be the most difficult to resolve: Not only is the issue of Jerusalem ranked a high priority by both publics – and therefore relatively difficult ground on which to make concessions – but also each proposal tested to resolve this issue was predominantly opposed by both Israelis and Palestinians. These findings are based on analyses of several sets of simultaneous, dual-sample surveys of the Israeli and Palestinian publics taken in 2009 and 2010 which measured support for more than two dozen specific proposals covering eight major issues.

---

The author served for thirty-six years as a senior analyst in the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Information Agency reporting on American and foreign public opinion and now works as a private public opinion analyst and consultant.

## Introduction

This article analyzes recent public opinion surveys in Israel and the Palestine Territories regarding a number of general conditions affecting their negotiations and identifies specific, mutually acceptable proposals for an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. Opinions on general conditions affecting the negotiating process will be examined in **Part I**, including the lack of confidence on both sides about reaching an agreement, divisions within the Palestinian and Israeli publics, the desired U.S. role in the negotiations, and arguments regarding a comprehensive versus step-by-step approach to resolving the conflict. The views of the American public, including American Jewish opinion, about an active U.S. mediating role will also be discussed.

**Part II** examines separately each major issue under negotiation, comparing Israeli and Palestinian views regarding (1) the priority each side gives to eight different issues in the negotiations (i.e., a viable Palestinian state, Israeli security, Jerusalem, the Holy sites, refugees, borders, settlements and natural resources) and (2) the acceptability of various proposals to resolve each of these issues. The main purpose is to determine which issues appear to be most and least resolvable and which proposals to resolve the different issues receive support from both publics. Each side will presumably find it more difficult to compromise on issues its public regards as top priority, which is security for Israel and a viable state for Palestinians, than on issues its public ranks lower in importance.

**Survey Sources:** These analyses of Israeli and Palestinian opinions are based mainly on 2009 and 2010 surveys from four types of survey sources:

(1) Surveys conducted simultaneously in Israel and the Palestine Territories, using identical question wording with each public: The joint surveys by the Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah (6/6-16/10, 3/1-14/10, 12/5-12/09, and 8/9-15/09); PeacePolls.org surveys commissioned by One Voice Israel and One Voice Palestine in collaboration with Dr. Colin Irwin at the University of Liverpool (2/09); and the Pew Research Center's "Global Attitudes Project" (5/18-6/16/09), which included Israel and the Palestine Territories among the 25 nations it surveyed in 2009.

(2) Survey firms based in Israel, including the Dahaf Research Institute (1/10/10); War and Peace Index (5/3-4/10, 3/10/10 and 7/27-28/09); New America Foundation (NAF)/Gerstein-Agne (11/8-15/09); and Smith Poll/Jerusalem Post (Israeli Jews, 7/12-14/10).

(3) Survey firms based in the Palestinian Territories, including the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (4/10-15/10 and 6/20-24/09); the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (6/10-13/10 and 5/09); An-Najah National University (4/8-10/10); International Peace Institute (6/23-7/17/09); Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD – 6/21-22/10 and 12/8-10/09); the Palestine Center for Public Opinion (PCPO – 6/17/10-7/2/10 and 1/10); the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies (Fafo – 5/10 in Gaza and 2/10 in West Bank); and Near East Consulting (NEC – 7/24-26/10 and 4-5/10).

(4) Survey firms based in the United States, including the Gallup Poll (2/9-12/10 and 5/29-31/09); World Public Opinion (WPO – 1/08); Zogby International (3/17-19/10); J Street/Gerstein-Agne (3/17-19/10 -- Jewish Americans); and American Jewish Committee (AJC – 9/8-21/09).

## I. Factors Influencing the Negotiating Process

Six general factors affecting the Middle East peace process are discussed below:

- (A) The absence of confidence on both sides about reaching an agreement,
- (B-C) divisions within the Palestinian and Israeli camps,
- (D) the role of the United States,
- (E) the debate over a comprehensive versus step-by-step negotiating process in which the most difficult issues are engaged last, after a presumed build-up of trust in resolving less intractable issues, and
- (F) support for different proposed comprehensive peace accords.

### A. Trust Lacking on Both Sides for Reaching an Accord

**Both the Israeli and Palestinian publics want to reach a peace agreement, but both sides are pessimistic that negotiations will soon resolve their conflict. This pessimism is linked to deep suspicions about the long-term objectives of the other side.**

Most Israelis and Palestinians support the idea of Middle East peace negotiations with the other side. Two-thirds of Palestinians (65%) say they support the “peace process,” compared to 17 percent opposed and 17% with mixed views (Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research, PSR, 12/09). Nearly three-fourths (73%) believe “Palestinians should return to peace negotiations with Israel” (vs. 26% opposed – Fafo Institute, 2/10 West Bank and 5/10 Gaza). When specific negotiating conditions are introduced into the question, two-thirds of Palestinians support either “unconditional” direct peace negotiations with Israel (30%) or negotiations with Israel that are conditioned on its halt of settlement expansion (37%). One-third of Palestinians flatly reject any negotiations with Israel (NEC, 7/10). When presented with three basic options for best achieving the goals of ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state, a plurality of Palestinians choose the path of “peaceful negotiations” (44%), compared to 30 percent for “non-violent resistance” and 22 percent for “armed resistance” (JMCC, 4/10).

Among Israelis, four-fifths (80%) support negotiations with the Palestinians (War and Peace Index, 3/10), and nearly two-thirds (64%) believe it is “urgent” for Israel to resume talks with the Palestinians (War and Peace Index, 5/10).

However, despite their mutual majority support of peace negotiations, most Israelis and Palestinians are pessimistic that negotiations will soon resolve their conflict. According to Truman Institute polls taken in June 2010, two-thirds of both Israelis (66%) and Palestinians (67%) believe the chances of establishing “an independent Palestinian state next to the state of Israel in the next five years” are either *low* or *non-existent*, compared to less than a third of Israelis (29%) and Palestinians (31%) who rate the chances as *high* or *medium*.

Pessimism about the success of negotiations is linked to deep suspicions about the long-term objectives of the other side: Nearly four-fifths of Palestinians (79%) believe Israel aspires to annex Palestinian lands, while denying political rights to Palestinians or expelling them from the West Bank, compared to one-fifth (19%) who believe Israel’s objective is to ensure its security

(PSR, 6/10). Israelis mainly believe Palestinians want to conquer Israel (54%), not just regain *some* (14%) or *all* (26%) territories lost in the 1967 war (Truman Institute, 12/09).

The absence of trust has led to proposals to take parallel confidence-building measures to set the stage for more difficult negotiations to follow. But the limited Israel response to the proposed settlement freeze has hardened attitudes. With seemingly little prospect of ending the occupation and regaining their territories through negotiations, many Palestinians are willing to consider other options. For example, most Palestinians support Prime Minister Fayyad's declaration that the Palestinian Authority will unilaterally "declare in August 2011 the creation of the Palestinian State" (71% support vs. 25% oppose – An Najah University, 4/10). Also, if peace talks collapse, a majority of Palestinians say they would be drawn to a confrontational stance, including 39 percent armed resistance. The Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) asked this question last December: "If peace talks stop, what in your opinion is the most important option available to Palestinians to secure their rights [from a list]?" (See Table 1)

**Table 1. Palestinians' Preferred Option if Peace Talks with Israel Collapse**

Return to armed intifada and confrontations	39%
Resort to popular non-violent and and unarmed resistance	17
Unilaterally declare a Palestinian State	18
Go to the U.N. Security Council	16
Abandon two-state solution and demand establishment of one state for Israelis and Palestinians	6
Other, don't know	<u>4</u>
	100%

#### B. Divisions within the Palestinian Camp

**The Fatah-Hamas split is a top concern among Palestinians. Recent Palestinian polls show Fatah more popular than Hamas, but future support for the two factions is tied to the outcome of negotiations with Israel: As the party of "resistance," Hamas would fare well if negotiations break down.**

The widespread desire of Palestinians to heal the Fatah-Hamas breach in order to enhance their security and economic well-being is matched by Israeli's reluctance to include in negotiations an adversary committed to violence against it. Nearly all Palestinians believe that "the price toll imposed on the Palestinian public by the continuation of the Fatah-Hamas split" is either *very high* (70%) or *high* (20%), compared to only one-tenth who say the split imposes either a *medium* toll (6%) or is *quite bearable* (4% -- PSR, 5/09). "Lack of national unity" is the top concern expressed by Palestinians in a recent survey: Thirty-three percent mentioned it as the "main problem facing Palestinians," compared to 24 percent who cited poverty and unemployment, 18 percent the closure of the Gaza border crossings, 11 percent corruption in some public institutions, and 10 percent continuation of the occupation and settlements (PSR, 6/10). Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip rate "Palestinian reconciliation" as far more important than "negotiations with Israel for achieving peace and the establishment of the Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital" (51% vs. 11% with 36% saying both are equally important – PCPO, 1/10).

Most Palestinians believe that Fatah and Hamas eventually will be reconciled and a national unity government “resumed after a long time” (55%). Few are optimistic that reunification of Gaza and the West Bank will take place “soon” (16%), while about one-fourth are pessimistic that Gaza and the West Bank will ever be unified (26% -- Truman Research Institute/PSR, 6/10).

Some have advised Israel to work with Fatah while trying to isolate the more radical Hamas rulers (e.g., David Pollock, *Foreign Policy.com*, 6/11/10). On the other hand, unless Israel deals with both groups, Fatah’s willingness to make concessions may be constrained by the more radical positions offered Palestinians by Hamas (e.g., see Robert Blecher, *Foreign Policy.com*, 6/3/10 and posts by Y. Alpher and R. Pundak in *Bitter Lemon.org*, 10/26/09). Moreover, an international force created by a two-state agreement to provide security over a transitional period is more likely to be effective if both Fatah and Hamas support the agreement. The Israeli public prefers negotiating with a Palestinian unity government: Israelis are divided about their country negotiating with the Hamas government, if necessary, to reach a compromise agreement with the Palestinians (49% in favor vs. 47% opposed – Truman Institute, 6/10). But, a better than two-to-one majority of Israelis favor negotiating with “a national unity government comprised jointly of Hamas and Fatah” to reach a compromise agreement with the Palestinians” (67% in favor vs. 27 oppose – Truman Institute, 12/09).

Recent polls show Fatah remains more popular than Hamas among Palestinians, despite the Gaza flotilla incident. A PSR survey (6/10) taken shortly after the incident showed Fatah leading Hamas by a 45 to 26 percent margin in hypothetical voting for a Palestinian Legislative Council – slightly greater than the margin PSR recorded last March (42% Fatah vs. 28% Hamas). A similar poll conducted by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD, 6/10) found Fatah leading Hamas by 43 to 14 percent “if PLC elections were held today.” When asked about their political affiliation, 35 percent of Palestinians said they supported Fatah, compared to 19 percent for Hamas, two percent for Islamic Jihad, and five percent for other parties, while 39 percent said they were independent or did not answer (PSR, 6/10). When asked about their confidence in the political leadership of Fatah and Hamas, 46 percent said they have confidence in Fatah, compared to 34 percent for Hamas, while 17 percent said they lacked confidence in both parties’ political leadership (PCPO, 6-7/10).

The level of tension in Israeli-Palestinian relations has a clear impact on Palestinians’ support for Fatah versus Hamas. According to IPI and other recent polls, Fatah received higher ratings than Hamas on the issues of reconciliation, peace-making with Israel and handling the Palestinian economy. Hamas received a higher rating on resisting Israel. As the “party of peace and governance,” Fatah should fare well when negotiations with Israel show promise. As the “party of resistance,” Hamas should fare well when negotiations with Israel break down (International Peace Institute, 6-7/09; PSR 6/10; and Fafo Institute, 2/10 West Bank and 5/10 Gaza).

### C. Divisions Within the Israeli Camp

**One of the sharpest divisions in Israeli society concerns the issue of “dismantling most settlements” as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. A majority of the Israeli public mainly supports this concession, but most settlers oppose it. Giving this opposition greater political weight is the fact that many Israelis mistakenly believe that most of the Israeli public sides with the settlers in opposing settlement evacuation as part of a peace agreement.**

Recent surveys indicate that the Israeli public divides into three roughly equal-size groups regarding support for a comprehensive peace agreement with the Palestinians. Upwards of one-third of Israelis (35%) are eager to negotiate a peace accord and support terms of the “Saudi plan” that no Israeli government could accept, including “retreating from all territories occupied in 1967” and allowing Palestinian refugees to return to Israel (Truman Institute, 6/10). At the opposite pole, nearly a third of the Israeli public (29%) are reluctant to negotiate a peace accord and oppose terms that no Palestinian party could offer, including no return of Palestinian refugees to Israel and a “demilitarized, without an army” Palestinian state (Dahaf Institute, 1/10). About a third of the Israeli public comprise a “swing group” whose support for a peace proposal depends on its reading of the relative benefits and costs of the proposed agreement. The size of this group can be estimated by calculating the difference between those who support the Dahaf Institute’s pro-Israeli terms (67%) and those who support the Truman Institute’s pro-Palestinian terms (35%) – that is, 32 percent of the Israeli public. (The Dahaf Institute and Truman Institute polls will be examined more fully in Section IE below.)

Recent surveys by the Truman Institute also permit us to compare the views of Israeli settlers with those of the Israeli public as a whole on the important issue of dismantling settlements as part of a peace accord. In the Truman Institute’s March 2010 survey, most settlers (69%) opposed “dismantling most settlements as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians,” while most of the Israeli public (60%) favored this concession. The Israeli public’s support for “dismantling most settlements” has declined to 51 percent (vs. 43% opposed) in the Truman Institute’s latest survey (June 2010). This is close to the average levels of support and opposition to dismantling most settlements as part of a peace accord that the Truman Institute has found on 14 polls during the past four years – 53 percent support vs. 43 percent opposition on average. Never since it began asking this question in 2001 has the Truman Institute found opposition exceeding support on this issue. Despite this consistent record of the Israeli public’s preference for “dismantling most settlements” as part of a peace agreement, a plurality of the Israeli public (44%) as well as a majority of Israeli settlers (57%), believe that most Israelis oppose dismantling most settlements as part of a peace agreement. Whether or not this broad misperception is produced by the relatively vocal settler movement or the relative passivity of its opposition, it can be argued that it is more effective politically in Israel than the public’s true preferences regarding dismantling most settlements.

Besides underestimating the Israeli public’s predominant support for dismantling settlements, Israelis overestimate settlers’ willingness to resist *by all means* a comprehensive evacuation of settlements in the West Bank. Asked how they would react “if the government decides on a comprehensive evacuation of settlements,” most settlers said they would either “obey” the decision (20%) or resist it “by legal means” (52%). One-fifth of the settlers (21%) said they

would “resist it by all means.” However, when the Israeli public was asked how they expected most settlers to react to such a government order, nearly three-fifths (57%) believed most settlers would “resist the decision by all means.” (These and other Israeli perceptions and misperceptions pertaining to the settler movement are examined more fully in an April 2010 article at [www.WorldPublicOpinion.org](http://www.WorldPublicOpinion.org).)

#### D. The United States’ Role

**One of the most telling measures of Israeli and Palestinian desire for a peace agreement are their attitudes toward a U.S. mediating role. Both Israelis and Palestinians predominantly favor a *stronger* U.S. role in the peace process, because the U.S. is seen as a key to reaching an agreement, even though each side perceives the U.S. as partial to the other.**

The role the U.S. plays in the Middle East peace negotiations depends on Israeli and Palestinian perceptions of U.S. influence in the region, as well as trust that the U.S. government will take their interests into account. According to the Pew Center’s May-June 2009 global survey, a sizeable majority of the Israeli public expressed a *favorable* opinion of the United States (71% vs. 26% unfavorable), while a lesser majority expressed *confidence* in U.S. President Barack Obama to handle world affairs (56% *a lot or some* confidence vs. 43% *little or no confidence*). Palestinians’ views were much more negative toward both the United States (15% *favorable* vs. 82% *unfavorable*) and President Obama (23% *confidence* vs. 75% *little or no confidence*).

Pew’s surveys in Israel (5/18-6/16/09) and the Palestine Territories (5/23-6/11/09) overlapped President Obama’s June Cairo address with its call for an Israeli settlement freeze. The immediate effect of the speech was to raise Israeli concerns about U.S. priorities: In July 2009, three-fifths of the Israeli public (60%) believed President Obama could not be trusted “to safeguard Israel’s interests” in his Middle East peace efforts (War and Peace Index, 7/09). A later survey by the New American Foundation (11/09) also found a majority of Israelis (55%) believed President Obama does not support Israel.

The early Palestinian reaction to the President’s Cairo address was a slight reduction in their widespread negative opinion of U.S. policy: Thirty-eight percent of Palestinians said the President’s June 4 speech made them feel “more optimistic about U.S. policies towards the Middle East,” compared to 10 percent who felt “more pessimistic,” while the plurality (48%) said their opinion had not changed. Nevertheless, only a third of Palestinians (32%) believed the U.S. “is serious in its attempts to compel Israel to halt settlement expansion in the West Bank” (vs. 60% said the U.S. “is not serious in these efforts” -- JMCC survey, 6/09). A more recent JMCC survey shows an increased number of Palestinians believe the U.S. is not serious “on opposing the Israeli settlement policy” (79% vs. only 18% “serious” – 4/10). The latest PSR survey (6/10) found barely a third of Palestinians believe President Obama “is truly committed to the two-state solution and is working toward the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel” (31% vs. 63% not committed).

In fact, recent surveys have found both Israelis and especially Palestinians believe President Obama tends to support the other side: In December, two-thirds of Palestinians believed President Obama’s policy is mainly supportive of Israel (69%), rather than mainly supporting the

Palestinians (only 3%) or both sides (22%). Nearly two-fifths of Israelis believed the President is mainly supportive of the Palestinians (37%), rather than Israel (13%), with 36 percent saying Obama supports both sides (Truman Institute/PSR, 12/09). More recent surveys suggest that Palestinian and Israeli perceptions of President Obama's partiality to the other side have increased since late 2009: Nearly four-fifths of Palestinians now believe President Obama mainly supports Israel (79%), rather than supporting the Palestinians (4%) or both sides impartially (13% -- PSR, 6/10). More than two-fifths of Israeli Jews perceive the Obama administration as pro-Palestinian (46%), compared to only 10 percent pro-Israel and 34 percent "neutral" (Smith, 7/10).

Despite the perception of each side that President Obama favors the other, many on each side have wanted the President to play a "*stronger role* in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process" (61% of Palestinians and 49% of Israelis), compared to roughly a third who wanted him "not to intervene" (29% of Palestinians, 34% of Israelis -- Truman Institute/PSR, 8/09). The latest PSR survey (6/10) shows an increase in the percentage of Palestinians who want President Obama to play a *stronger role* in the Palestinian-Israel negotiations (66% vs. 27% *not intervene*). This is despite the finding that most Palestinians believe strong U.S. intervention in the Palestinian-Israel peace process would benefit Israel more than the Palestinians (57% mainly Israel vs 15% mainly Palestinians with 21% saying both sides and 5% neither side – PSR, 6/10).

Both the Israeli and Palestinian publics view the U.S. as a key player in the Middle East. Majorities of both Israelis (56%) and Palestinians (64%) believe the U.S. has a *great deal* of "influence on the way things are going in our country" and smaller numbers of Israelis (35%) and Palestinians (20%) see the U.S. as having a *fair amount* of influence. Very few Israelis (9%) or Palestinians (15%) view the U.S. as having little or no influence on their country (Pew Center, 5-6/09).

Thus, while each side expects its adversary is likely to reap more benefits from U.S. mediation, both sides – especially Palestinians – have been inclined to believe that a "strong U.S. role will bring about a *successful* Palestinian-Israel peace process" (56% of Palestinians and 42% of Israelis). Less than one-third of each public thinks that a strong U.S. role would lead to a *failed process* (26% of Palestinians, 30% of Israelis), with less than one-fifth expecting a strong U.S. role to have no impact (15% of Palestinians, 18% of Israelis – Truman Institute/PSR, 8/09). The most recent PSR survey (6/10) shows an increase in the percentage of Palestinians who believe a *strong* U.S. role in the peace process will lead to *successful* negotiations (64% vs. 20% *failed process* and 14% *no impact*).

### American Public's Views on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

#### **A majority of the U.S. public, including American Jews, support the U.S. helping resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including exerting pressure on both sides to compromise.**

Americans' sympathies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have traditionally been with Israel, and this year is no exception. A Gallup poll last February asked the U.S. public whether, "In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?" and found Israel maintaining a large lead: Sixty-three percent of Americans *sympathized more* with the Israelis compared to 15 percent who *sympathized more* with the Palestinians, while the remainder volunteered *both* or *neither* (15%) or not sure (8%). The 63 percent pro-Israeli sympathy marks the second highest level obtained by Israel since Gallup introduced this measure in 1988.

Despite their mainly pro-Israel sympathies, most Americans prefer that the U.S. not take sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When World Public Opinion.org asked Americans which side the U.S. should take in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a majority said the U.S. should *not take either side* (71%), compared to 21 percent who wanted the U.S. to *take Israel's side* and 3 percent *take the Palestinians' side* (WPO, 1/18-27/08). Similarly, a recent Zogby International survey (3/17-19/10) found half of the U.S. public (50%) prefer that the Obama administration *steer a middle course* in the Middle East conflict, compared to 38 percent who prefer *leaning toward Israel* and 6 percent *leaning toward Palestine*.<sup>1</sup>

Most Americans have not been closely following news about the Middle East peace process,<sup>2</sup> and thus are not likely to have firm opinions about some of the specific issues dividing Israel and the Palestinians that will be examined in Part II. However, surveys by the Gallup Organization since 1994 have consistently shown that Americans predominantly favor "the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza strip." On its most recent survey on this issue (5/29-31/09), Gallup found a 51-29 percent margin in favor of establishing an independent Palestinian state.

American Jewish opinion – Recent polls of American Jews show they support an *active U.S. role* in the Middle East that involves exerting pressure on both sides, including efforts to persuade Israel to dismantle at least *some* West Bank settlements. A J Street/Gerstein-Agne survey of American Jews (3/17-19/10) found a large majority (82%) support the U.S. playing an *active role* "in helping the parties to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict." A sizeable majority (71%) support an active U.S. role that involves "exerting pressure on both the Israelis and Arabs" to make the compromises necessary for achieving peace. However, support for an active U.S. role drops sharply to 50 percent (vs. 50% opposed) if it involves exerting pressure on Israel alone to make compromises. An AJC survey (9/09) found most American Jews (60%) believe Israel should be willing to dismantle *some* (52%) or *all* (8%) Jewish settlements in the West Bank (versus 37% said *none*) "as part of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians."

<sup>1</sup> Zogby's question on preferred U.S. stance in the Middle East yielded a sharp split by party affiliation: Democrats overwhelmingly favor Obama steering a *middle course* (72%), with one-fifth about equally divided between *leaning toward Israel* (11%) and *leaning toward Palestine* (9%). In contrast, Republicans overwhelmingly want Obama to *lean toward Israel* (71%), with only one-fourth (24%) favoring a *middle course* and one percent inclined toward Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> World Public Opinion.org (3/25-4/6/09) found 29 percent of Americans reported they were following news about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process *very closely* (4%) or *fairly closely* (25%). The majority (69%) said they were following news about this issue *not too closely* (38%) or *not closely at all* (31%).

### Comprehensive versus Step by Step Negotiating Process

**Both the “comprehensive” and “step by step” approaches have their advocates for negotiating an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But even supporters of a comprehensive approach do not assume simultaneous agreement between the parties on all major issues.**

In theory, negotiating a comprehensive settlement may have the advantage that highly sensitive issues for one or both parties can be subsumed within a larger framework in which some compromises are accepted by both sides as the price for gaining a final settlement. A step by step process, on the other hand, can start with less contentious issues and build confidence in the negotiation process before attempting to tackle the toughest issues. Each approach has its advocates for negotiating an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer (Senate Testimony, 3/4/10) stated that “interim, incremental or step by step approaches will no longer work.” He argues that the U.S. must both (1) set forth its vision of how core issues should be resolved in a final peace agreement (for example, territorial division based on 1967 lines with territorial swaps of equal size and Palestinian territorial contiguity; evacuation of settlements from area agreed as constituting the State of Palestine; and division of Jerusalem along demographic lines) and (2) develop a multi-pronged strategy for achieving that vision (for example, starting negotiations on borders complemented by final status negotiations on Jerusalem; playing a pro-active interventionist role to bridge differences; and encouraging Palestinian state-building activities).

In contrast, Ehud Yaari (Foreign Affairs, March/April, 2010) argues that an attempt to reach a comprehensive settlement “is bound to falter,” since PA President Abbas has already rejected far reaching proposals from former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert that current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu would never match. He argues for establishing a Palestinian State within “armistice boundaries,” a less ambitious but in his view more attainable agreement that “transforms the situation on the ground and creates momentum for further negotiations” on the issues of Jerusalem, refugees and permanent boundaries. For Palestinians, such a provisional, interim agreement would “end the occupation” without yet formally conceding the loss of previous Arab lands. For Israel, it offers a workable two-state interim accord that preserves Israel’s Jewish and democratic identities “without conceding Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem.” Moreover, “it would be considerably easier to confront opposition [from the settler movement] over a limited armistice deal than over a final-status agreement requiring the evacuation of most of the settlements.”

Ehud Yaari argues explicitly for an incremental rather than a comprehensive negotiating approach. But even supporters of a comprehensive approach, such as Ambassador Kurtzer, do not assume simultaneous agreement between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators on all major issues. In fact, Kurtzer says the U.S. should consider “starting negotiations on borders, since an agreement on borders would frame and resolve many other issues.” This “borders-first negotiations,” he contends, “will need to be complemented by simultaneous final status negotiations on Jerusalem.” The case for a border-first incremental approach is argued by David Makovsky in a recent article, “First Tackle Borders, Then Address the Rest” (Forward.com, 4/28/10):

“It can be tempting to try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict all at once. But the prospect of Israelis and Palestinians reaching a grand agreement on all the core issues – refugees, Jerusalem, settlements and borders – is unlikely at this time. Refugees and Jerusalem are narrative issues and neither Israeli nor Palestinian leaders have conditioned their respective publics to deal with them. ... Instead, we should focus on reaching agreement where it is attainable. The issue where the gap between the parties is narrowest is the question of borders. A prior agreement on borders could give the parties the time and

political capital necessary to sell a compromise on these narrative issues [Jerusalem, refugees] to their people.”

The U.S. government’s effort last year to gain an Israeli settlement construction freeze in return for resuming certain Israeli-Arab commercial and diplomatic links can be seen as an attempt to initiate the first stage of an incremental, step by step process that could be followed by negotiations on borders, security arrangements, refugees and Jerusalem. That effort resulted in Israel’s consent only to a temporary freeze on new settlement construction that excluded East Jerusalem. Israel’s announcement of new housing units in East Jerusalem during Vice President Biden’s visit in early March opened a rift in U.S.-Israeli relations and pushed Jerusalem into the forefront of issues that have to be addressed. Thus, temporally at least, this development favors the argument for a negotiating approach that includes early consideration (though not necessarily final resolution) of the contentious issue of Jerusalem rather than placing this issue among the last to be negotiated.

#### E. Reactions to Several Comprehensive Peace Proposals

**The Israeli public divides into three roughly equal-size groups regarding support for a comprehensive peace accord with the Palestinians: A dovish group willing to negotiate an agreement demanding a minimum of Palestinian concessions, a hawkish group who oppose an accord even on pro-Israeli terms, and a “swing group” whose support for an agreement hinges directly on its assessment of the relative benefits and costs associated with the specific terms of the agreement.**

Support for a comprehensive peace proposal depends considerably on the specific terms it contains for resolving important issues. The Truman Institute has asked Israelis and Palestinians about a comprehensive “Saudi plan” several times during the past year, and in each case Palestinian support was much greater than Israeli support for the proposed plan. The “Saudi plan,” according to the survey, called for Israel to yield all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, and for the refugee problem to be resolved in accordance with a U.N. resolutions on this issue. In return, all Arab states would recognize Israel and its right to secure borders, and would sign peace treaties and establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel. A clear majority of Palestinians supported this plan in June 2010 (67% -- up from 57% in June 2009), while a majority of Israelis (59%) opposed it. (Table 2A)

**Table 2A. Israeli and Palestinian Views of the “Saudi Plan”**  
(Truman Research Institute, 6/10)

Question: “According to the Saudi plan, Israel will retreat from all territories occupied in 1967 including Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, and a Palestinian state will be established. The refugees problem will be resolved through negotiation in a just and agreed-upon manner and in accordance with U.N. resolution 194 (*which allows return of refugees to Israel and compensation*). In return, all Arab states will recognize Israel and its right to secure borders, will sign peace treaties with her and establish normal diplomatic relations. Do you agree or disagree with this plan?”

	<i>Israelis</i>		<i>Palestinians</i>	
	<i>5-6/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>	<i>5-6/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>
Agree (Definitely agree)	36% (14%)	35% (13%)	57% (8%)	67% (13%)
Disagree (Definitely disagree)	56 (33)	59 (32)	40 (11)	30 (9)
Don’t know, no answer	8	6	3	3

Illustrating the effects that differently-worded proposals can have on support for a comprehensive peace plan, two additional, differently-worded Israeli surveys have been conducted in recent months. The first comparison comes from a New America Foundation (NAF)/Gerstein-Agne survey of Israelis last November. Their proposed comprehensive plan calls for internationally recognized borders with most settlers to be inside Israel with equal land swaps, a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with international force monitors, division of Jerusalem according to demographic patterns, and financial compensation for Palestinian refugees while allowing some refugees to live in Israel who meet Israeli government criteria. A 53 percent majority of Israelis supported this comprehensive plan – an 18 percentage point increase in support compared to the “Saudi plan” above. (Table 2B)

**Table 2B. Israeli Views of the NAF Proposal**  
(NAF/Gerstein-Agne, 11/09)

Question: “I would like you to imagine that the United States convenes a negotiations summit with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinian leadership. During the summit, the U.S. presents a final status agreement that it wants the two sides to sign. This agreement includes an official end to the conflict with no further claims to be made by the Palestinians; a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza; internationally recognized borders that include some land swaps allowing for most Jewish settlers in the West Bank to be inside Israel while the Palestinians get equal land areas in return; international forces to monitor the new Palestinian state and border crossings; Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem become part of the new Palestinian state while Israel retains control of Jewish neighborhoods and the Western Wall in Jerusalem; and financial compensation for Palestinian refugees while allowing some refugees to live in Israel if they meet specific family reunification criteria and the Israeli government approves. If Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Palestinians agree to this deal, and Prime Minister Netanyahu puts it to a national referendum, would you vote yes to confirm it or no to reject it?”

Yes, favor this agreement – 53%    No, reject this agreement – 45%    Undecided – 2%

Lastly, a Dahaf Institute poll in early January 2010 found a large majority of Israelis (67%) support a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that stipulates: Palestinian refugees can only return to the state of Palestine, the Palestinian state would be demilitarized “without an army,” borders would be based on the 1967 lines and include equal land swaps that meet Israel’s security needs and maintain the large settlement blocks under Israeli sovereignty, division of Jerusalem according to demographic patterns, and joint administration of the Old City by Israel, the Palestinians and the U.S. (Table 2C)

**Table 2C. Israeli Views of the Dahaf Institute Proposal**  
(Dahaf Institute, 1/10)

Question: “This questionnaire is designed to gain your view on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement whose principles are listed below and whose implementation would take place only after the Palestinians would fulfill all their commitments with an emphasis on fighting terror, and the implementation would be monitored and verified by the United States. The principles of the agreement are:

- (1) Two states: Israel the state of the Jewish people and Palestine the state of the Palestinian people.
- (2) Palestinian refugees will have a right to return only to the state of Palestine.
- (3) The Palestinian state will be demilitarized, without an army.
- (4) Borders will be based on the 1967 lines and will include land swaps equal in size that will take into consideration Israel’s security needs and will maintain the large settlement blocks under Israeli sovereignty.
- (5) Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem will come under Israeli sovereignty and Arab neighborhoods under Palestinian sovereignty.
- (6) The Old City within the walls will be without sovereignty and will be jointly administered by the United States, Israel and the Palestinians. The Holy Places will be under the same religious supervision as current arrangements (for example, the Kotel will be under Israeli supervision and responsibility).

If the government of Israel brought this peace agreement to a referendum, would you support or oppose the agreement? [The question posed to the general public included a repeat of all the principles and if there was a need, they were read for a third time.]”

Support this agreement – 67%      Oppose this agreement – 29%      Undecided – 4%

The Israeli public’s support for peace proposals shows a considerable 32-point progression on these three surveys --from 35 percent for the Saudi Plan (Table 2A) to 67 percent for the Dahaf proposal (Table 2C). As noted earlier (Section IC), these findings suggest that the Israeli public divides into three roughly equal-sized groups regarding support for a comprehensive peace accord, including a “swing group” of about one-third whose support for a peace proposal hinges on their assessment of its benefits/costs ratio. The differences in Israeli support for these three peace proposals also shows that reactions to a comprehensive peace plan cannot be predicted without knowing the specific terms in which various issues are resolved within the plan. Reactions to a number of specific proposals are examined in Part II.

## II. Most Important Issues and Most Acceptable Proposals to Resolve Them

In either a comprehensive or step by step negotiating process reactions of Israelis and Palestinians will be affected by the importance they attribute to different issues and by their satisfaction with the proposed resolutions of these issues.

### A. Importance of Different Issues to be Negotiated

**The Israeli public's top goal in negotiations with the Palestinians is to assure their country's long-term security. The Palestinians public's top priority is to establish a viable and independent state. Agreement on the future of Jerusalem stands near top priority for both publics. Each side will presumably find it most difficult to compromise on issues its public regards as high priority (Table 3).**

In the Peace Poll surveys conducted in February 2009 both Israelis and Palestinians were asked to rate the importance of different issues, as well as the acceptability of various proposals to resolve each issue. The three issues rated most important by Palestinians were “establishing an independent sovereign state of Palestine” (97% *very significant*), “the rights of refugees” (95%), and “agreement on the future of Jerusalem” (94%). The two issues considered most important by Israelis were “security for Israel” (77% *very significant*) and “agreement on the future of Jerusalem” (68%). These and other issues rated by both publics can be sorted into four groups according to how they ranked in importance, based on the *very significant* response levels.\* A total of eight issues comprise the paradigm presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Four Groups of Issues Dividing Israelis and Palestinians,  
Based on Their Ranked Importance by the Two Publics**  
(Peace Polls, 2/09)

	Importance Ranking (% “Very Significant”)*	
	Israelis	Palestinians
(a) Issues ranked high priority by both publics:		
(1) Agreements on the future of Jerusalem	2 <sup>nd</sup> (68%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> (94%)
(2) Managing the Holy sites	4 <sup>th</sup> (57%)	4 <sup>th</sup> (91%)
(b) Issues ranked high priority by Israelis, but not by Palestinians:		
(1) Security for Israel	1 <sup>st</sup> (77%)	8 <sup>th</sup> (21%)
(2) Rights to natural resources	3 <sup>rd</sup> (62%)	6 <sup>th</sup> (88%)
(c) Issues ranked high priority by Palestinians, but not by Israelis:		
(1) Establishing an independent sovereign state of Palestine	6 <sup>th</sup> (33%)	1 <sup>st</sup> (97%)
(2) The rights of refugees	8 <sup>th</sup> (25%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (95%)
(d) Issues ranked in second tier by both publics:		
(1) Agreement on borders for Israel and Palestine	5 <sup>th</sup> (49%)	7 <sup>th</sup> (77%)
(2) Settlements in the occupied territories	7 <sup>th</sup> (33%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (89%)

\***Note:** The importance ranking is based on the percentage of each public who responded *very significant* when asked to rate each issue in one of five categories – as *very significant*, *significant*, *of*

*some significance, of little significance or not at all significant.* The Palestinian public gave a much higher *very significant* rating than the Israeli public to each of these issues, except for the issue “security for Israel.”

#### B. Satisfaction with Proposed Solutions for Eight Issues

**The levels of support of the Israeli and Palestinian publics for 28 specific proposals presented by Peace Polls.org (2/09), covering eight different issues, are summarized below (Table 4), together with comparable results obtained on more recent joint surveys conducted by the Truman Institute/PSR.**

**There is a sharp contrast in the level of support for the different issues: for example, each of the three Peace Poll proposals to resolve water and natural resource issues received majority support from both the Israeli and Palestinian publics; but each of the three proposals on Jerusalem was predominantly opposed by both publics.**

(1) Final status: Two-state option – Establishing a viable, sovereign state is the top priority for Palestinians, and the proposal “two states for two peoples – Israel and Palestine” is widely accepted by both publics. This option was found *satisfactory* by about three-fifths of both Palestinians (63%) and Israelis (61%) and *unacceptable* by about one-fifth of each public (Peace Polls, 2/09 – see Table 4.1).<sup>3</sup> Recently, a Truman Institute survey (3/1-14/10) found a larger majority of Israelis (71%) than Palestinians (57%) support the “two-state solution” based on “the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.” Surveys by the Institute for National Security Studies have found that Israeli support for the “two states for two peoples” concept (64% in 5/09) has run about 10 points higher than support for “the establishment of a Palestinian state” (53% in 5/09). Two-thirds of Palestinians (68%) support going to the U.N. to gain recognition for an “independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders” (AWRAD, 12/09).

Peace Polls (2/09) found much less support among Israelis and Palestinians for a single “bi-national federal state in which Israelis and Palestinians share power.” This option was found *unacceptable* by 59 percent of Palestinians and 66 percent of Israelis (Table 4.1). Truman Institute surveys (3/10) found two-thirds or more of both Palestinians (69%) and Israelis (70%) *oppose* a “one-state solution for two peoples” in which Palestinians and Israelis would have equal rights.

---

<sup>3</sup> The three-fifths of Palestinians who expressed satisfaction with this proposal includes 38% who said this option was *essential*, 15% who said it was *desirable*, and 10% who found it *acceptable*. Among Israelis the comparable figures were 32%, 13%, and 16%. Twenty-four percent of Palestinians and 21% of Israelis found it *unacceptable*. Excluded from the tally of those satisfied with this proposal are 11% of Palestinians and 17% of Israelis who said the proposal was *tolerable*. The rationale for excluding them is that some of those responding *tolerable* might have given a neutral or even a mildly negative response if those options had been offered. For example, a Truman Institute poll (5-6/09) showed a 59-36 percent majority of Israelis supported the “two states for two peoples solution to the conflict with the Palestinians.” This result equates to that obtained by Peace Polls if the Israelis who responded *tolerable* on the latter poll (17%) are added to the percentage who replied *unacceptable* (21%), yielding a total of 38% not satisfied compared to 61% satisfied.

When Israelis and Palestinians have been presented with a choice between the two-state and one-state options, both publics have expressed a clear preference for the former. Seventy-three percent of Israelis prefer the two-state option; only nine percent prefer the one-state option. Palestinians also clearly prefer the two-state option, but by a somewhat lesser margin than do the Israelis (64% for two-state option vs. 20% for one-state option – Truman Institute, 12/09).

(2) Palestinian refugees – This issue is second in importance to Palestinians, but eighth and last for Israelis (Table 3). None of the options tested by Peace Polls (2/09) to resolve the issue of Palestine refugees was deemed satisfactory by both the Israeli and Palestinian publics. The proposal for “right of return and compensation” was overwhelmingly favored by Palestinians (95%), but overwhelmingly rejected by Israelis (77% *unacceptable*). A less polarizing option is to offer “compensation and choice of resettlement in Palestine or another Arab country” for those refugees who did not wish to return to Israel. This option was supported by 63 percent of Palestinians, but by only 38 percent of Israelis (vs. 51% *unacceptable*). The only option presented by Peace Polls to both publics that most Israelis supported (72%) was “the U.N. close the refugee camps and resettle them with compensation outside of Israel.” However, 51 percent of Palestinians found this option *unacceptable* (vs. 41% satisfactory – Table 4.2).

The latest Truman Institute survey (6/10) stipulated that the refugees would be given five choices for permanent residency, including return to Israel, but that this latter option would be restricted and at the discretion of Israel. All refugees would be entitled to compensation for loss of property. Palestinians split on this proposal (48% in favor vs. 49% opposed), while Israelis leaned against it (37% in favor vs. 50% opposed).

(3) Israel’s security – This is Israel’s top priority, but only eighth for Palestinians. Peace Polls (2/09) found both publics agree on the need for Palestine to have a strong police force (72% of Israelis and 99% of Palestinians support this), but they disagree sharply on whether Palestine should also have an army: 98 percent of Palestinians think it should, but 63 percent of Israelis find this *unacceptable*. Israelis are much more inclined to rely on an international force, including Arab participation, rather than a Palestinian force for their security: Fifty-three percent supported having an international force replace the IDF to help implement a peace agreement in the occupied territories (vs. 32% *unacceptable*). Palestinians to a lesser extent also were inclined to back this proposal (47% vs. 39% *unacceptable*). However, Palestinians draw the line on permitting Israel to maintain “observation posts in the Palestinian state” for security reasons: Sixty-two percent of Palestinians say this is *unacceptable*, in contrast to 80 percent of Israelis who support this option. (Table 4.3)

The Truman Institute (6/10) tested the following multiple-option proposal for a “demilitarized independent Palestinian state” with a strong Palestinian security force (but no Palestinian army) and a multinational force to ensure security, and found this proposal continues to be supported by most Israelis, but opposed by most Palestinians:

Question: “A demilitarized independent Palestinian state will be established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian state will have no army, but it will have a strong security force, and a multinational force will be established to ensure the security and safety of both sides. Both sides will be committed to end all forms of terrorism and violence directed against each other. Do you agree or disagree with this option?”

	<i>Israelis</i>		<i>Palestinians</i>	
	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>
Agree	56%	58%	23%	28%
Disagree)	40	35	75	70
Don't know, no answer	4	7	2	2

(4-5) Status of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites – Resolution of these two issues ranks very high in priority for both Israelis and Palestinians but, unfortunately, there is no agreement between the two publics on any of Peace Poll's proposals to resolve these issues. Peace Polls (2/09) found a number of seeming compromises are rejected by both publics. For example, majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians oppose proposals “to divide the city according to Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods” or place the Old City under “joint control.” (Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

The Truman Institute (6/10) found a majority of both Israelis (56%) and Palestinians (62%) continue to oppose the following multi-option proposal covering both Jerusalem and its Holy sites: “Jerusalem will be the capital of both states. East Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian state and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel. The Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem including those in the old city as well as the Temple Mount will come under Palestinian sovereignty. The Jewish neighborhoods including the Jewish quarter and the Wailing Wall will come under Israeli sovereignty. Do you agree or disagree with this option?”

	<i>Israelis</i>		<i>Palestinians</i>	
	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>
Agree	34%	38%	31%	37%
Disagree)	62	56	68	62
Don't know, no answer	4	6	1	1

(6) Water and natural resources – Israelis and Palestinians concur that a “regional solution for water” is preferable to a bilateral agreement between them on the division of water. Peace Polls found four-fifths or more of both publics support a regional solution, compared to about three-fifths support for a bilateral agreement. On the third option tested on this issue, nearly all Palestinians believe that they should have “control of their energy, minerals and air space” (99% support, including 96% *essential*), and a slim majority of Israelis supports Palestine having these rights (52% vs. 35% *unacceptable*). (Table 4.6)

(7) Final borders – Among the three options Peace Polls tested on this issue only one gained considerable support from both publics -- “Israel withdrawal to the 1967 border with adjustments through agreed equivalent exchange of land.” This option is supported by most Palestinians (58% vs. 30% *unacceptable*), while Israelis are closely divided over it (41% support

vs. 39% *unacceptable*). The other two options are thoroughly rejected by one of the parties: The proposal that “Israel should withdraw to the 1967 borders” is supported by 89 percent of Palestinians, but 60 percent of Israelis find it *unacceptable*. Conversely, most Palestinians reject having the security wall define the border (73% *unacceptable*), while Israelis are inclined to accept this option (45% vs. 35% *unacceptable*). (Table 4.7)

(8) Settlements – Every proposal tested by Peace Polls for resolving the settlements issue was viewed as *unacceptable* by a majority of one or both publics. For example, permitting the settlers to remain within negotiated Palestine borders and acquire Palestinian citizenship was found *unacceptable* by sizeable majorities of Palestinians (61%) and Israelis (69%). The proposal for giving Palestinians “abandoned settlements and infrastructure” was supported by nearly all Palestinians (93%), but by barely a third of Israelis (30% vs. 58% *unacceptable*). A compromise proposal on settlements (“dismantling most of the settlements, move settlers to large blocks and exchange land”) received about one-third support from both Israelis (33% support vs. 51% *unacceptable*) and Palestinians (35% support vs. 54% *unacceptable*). (Table 4.8)

The Truman Institute (6/10), however, finds Israelis closely divided and Palestinians now mainly in favor of a proposal that specifies the total area of settlements to be annexed to Israel, with equal Israeli land exchanged: “The Palestinian state will be established in the entirety of Judea Samaria and the Gaza strip territories, except for several large blocks of settlements which will be annexed to Israel and will not exceed 3 percent of the size of the West Bank. Israel will evacuate all other settlements. The Palestinians will receive in return territory of similar size along the Gaza Strip. Do you agree or disagree with this option?”

	<i>Israelis</i>		<i>Palestinians</i>	
	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>	<i>8/09</i>	<i>6/10</i>
Agree	47%	45%	48%	60%
Disagree)	48	44	50	38
Don't know, no answer	5	11	2	2

As noted earlier (Section IC), the Truman Institute’s latest survey (6/10) shows a slim majority of the Israeli public supports “dismantling most of the settlements in the territories as part of a peace agreement” (51% supports vs. 43% opposed). In its previous survey (3/10) the Truman Institute found two-thirds of Israeli settlers opposed dismantling most of the settlements as part of a peace agreement (69% opposed vs. 23% supported).

### C. Analyses of Proposals for Resolving Issues Dividing Israelis and Palestinians

**The eight issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians are separated into three groups according to the estimated difficulty of resolving them – from *relatively easy* to resolve (e.g, two-state accord) to *very difficult* to resolve (Jerusalem). Not only is the issue of Jerusalem ranked high in importance by both publics, but each proposal presented to resolve this issue was predominantly opposed by both Israelis and Palestinians.**

The reactions of Israelis and Palestinians to the various Peace Polls proposals for resolving each of eight issues are summarized by issue in Table 4. Reactions to proposals contained in other surveys have been cited in the text above. Each of the issues can be examined in terms of whether (1) proposals critical to resolving the issue are supported by most Israelis and Palestinians, making the issue *relatively easy* to resolve; (2) the two sides are not very far from agreement on important proposals, making the issue *difficult* to resolve;<sup>4</sup> or (3) important proposals tested to resolve the issue are mainly opposed by one or both sides, making it *very difficult* to reach agreement on this issue.

Issues that are *relatively easy* to resolve using these proposals and criteria include a **final status/two-state** accord which is favored by most Israelis and Palestinians (Table 4.1a). **Water and natural resource** issues also seem relatively easy to resolve, since each of the three proposals tested on this issue received majority support from both publics (Table 4.6).

Most issues fall under the category, *difficult* to resolve. Regarding **Israel's security**, both sides clearly agree on Palestine having a strong police force and barely agree on an international force to replace Israel's defense forces in the West Bank. But they disagree strongly over whether Palestine should have an army (Table 4.3). Offering **refugees** compensation and a wide choice of resettlement is supported by about three-fifths of Palestinians and two-fifths of Israelis (Table 4.2b). The proposal that "Israel withdraw to the 1967 **border** with adjustment through agreed equivalent exchange of land" similarly is supported by about three-fifths of Palestinians and two-fifths of Israelis (Table 4.7a).

The **settlements** issue appears to have moved during the past year from a *very difficult* to a *difficult* problem to resolve in terms of Israeli and Palestinian public preferences, which leaves aside the complicating matter of widespread Israeli misperceptions of Israeli preferences on settlement issues. A proposal in Peace Polls (2/09) to "dismantle most settlements" received about one-third support from Israelis and Palestinians (Table 4.8c). However, recent surveys by the Truman Institute (6/10) indicate that the two sides are more closely divided regarding a proposal that specifies the total area of settlements to be annexed to Israel (no more than 3% of the West Bank) with equal Israeli land exchanged.

The issue that remains *most difficult* to resolve is the future of **Jerusalem** and – to a lesser extent – the **Holy Sites**. Each of the three Peace Polls proposals on Jerusalem was predominantly opposed by both Israelis and Palestinians. For example, the proposal to "divide the city

---

<sup>4</sup> This raises the question whether predominant support of a proposal among both Israelis and Palestinians is an indicator – but not a guarantee – of the resolvability of that issue. A minority with intense views that is ready to pay a high price can obstruct and even defeat a peace process, especially if the majority is relatively passive in expressing its views.

according to Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods” was supported by about one-fourth of Israelis and Palestinians and opposed by about three-fifths (Table 4.4a). Regarding the Holy Sites, the Peace Polls’ surveys indicate that both Israelis and Palestinians find the idea of sharing guardianship of their respective sites (nearly two-fifths support from each side) more acceptable than delegating this function to a neutral body, like the U.N. (nearly one-fifth support from each side – Table 4.5).

**Table 4. Israeli and Palestinian Opinions on Proposals to Resolve Eight Issues**  
(Peace Polls, 2/09)

	<i>Israeli Opinion*</i>		<i>Palestinian Opinion*</i>	
	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<b>(1) <u>Final status options</u></b>				
a. Two-state solution: Two states for two peoples	61%	21%	63%	24%
b. Political status quo with econ. devel. of Palestinian Territories	57	24	50	40
c. One shared state – Binational federal state in which Israelis and Palestinians share power	24	66	22	59
<b>(2) <u>Palestinian refugees</u></b>				
a. Right of return AND compensation	16%	77%	95%	3%
b. Refugees who do not wish to return to Israel given compensation and resettlement in Palestine or another Arab country	38	51	63	24
c. Israel recognizes refugees’ suffering; most return to Palestine and some to Israel	28	60	64	23
d. U.N. closes the refugees’ camps and resettles them with compensation outside of Israel	72	14	41	51
<b>(3) <u>Israel’s security</u></b>				
a. Palestine should have a strong police force	72%	19%	99%	1%
b. Palestine should have an army	26	63	98	1
c. On signing a peace agreement a force of intl., regional and Arab states will replace the IDF in the West Bank for an agreed period	53	32	47	39
d. For an agreed period, Israel will have observation posts in Palestine for security reasons	80	14	26	62

**Table 4. Israeli and Palestinian Opinions on Proposals to Resolve Eight Issues (Continued)**  
(Peace Polls, 2/09)

	<i>Israeli Opinion*</i>		<i>Palestinian Opinion*</i>	
	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<b>(4) <u>Jerusalem</u></b>				
a. Divide the city according to Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods	28%	55%	24%	61%
b. Jerusalem divided into East and West along the pre-1967 border	13	77	33	50
c. The Old City should be under joint control	17	69	22	59
d. All of Jerusalem should remain in Palestine	Not Asked		97	3
e. All of Jerusalem should remain in Israel	69	25	Not Asked	
<b>(5) <u>Holy Sites</u></b>				
a. A neutral body, like U.N., will be guardian of the Holy sites	17%	73%	17%	69%
b. Free access for all to Holy sites and neither side to be sovereign. Israel to be guardian of Wailing Wall and Palestine guardian of Islamic Holy sites. No change in status of Christian Holy sites	36	46	39	46
<b>(6) <u>Water and natural resources</u></b>				
a. Find a regional solution for water	82%	5%	96%	2%
b. Divide water between Israel and Palestine via an agreement	57	28	66	24
c. Palestinians control their energy, minerals and air space	52	35	99	1
<b>(7) <u>Borders</u></b>				
a. Israel withdraws to 1967 border with adjustment through agreed equivalent exchange of land	41%	39%	58%	30%
b. Israel withdraws to the 1967 border	24	60	89	6
c. Border established by the security wall	45	35	18	73
<b>(8) <u>Settlements</u></b>				
a. Settlers can stay in Palestine, if they become Palestinian citizens	22%	69%	27%	61%
b. Abandoned settlements and infrastructure given to Palestinians	30	58	93	5
c. Dismantle most settlements, move settlers to large blocks and exchange land	33	51	35	54

\*Note: "Support" percentage is the sum of those responding that the proposal is either *essential*, *desirable* or *acceptable*. "Oppose" percentage is based on those saying the proposal is *unacceptable*. Those who said the proposal was *tolerable* are not included (see footnote 3).

## Conclusions

### A. Keys to Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations

Both the Israeli and Palestinian publics want to reach a peace agreement. The Israeli public's foremost goal is to assure their long-term security; Palestinians mainly want to establish a viable and independent state for their people. One of the most telling measures of this mutual desire for an accord – besides both sides' stated support of the Middle East peace process – are their attitudes toward the U.S. role: Half or more of Israelis (49%) and Palestinians (61%) favor a *strong* U.S. role in the peace process, because the U.S. is seen as a key to reaching an agreement, even though each side perceives the U.S. as partial to the other. Regarding American opinion, a majority of both the U.S. public and American Jews support the U.S. helping resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including exerting pressure on both sides to compromise.

A major unknown in negotiating a final accord is the importance of forming a single Palestinian negotiating entity, including supporters of both Fatah and Hamas, that is focused on building a viable Palestinian state based on 1967 lines rather than on armed resistance to Israel. Most Israelis believe that their security interests would be best served by negotiating with a Palestine unity government comprised of both Hamas and Fatah. Most Palestinians want to end the serious economic and security toll that the Fatah-Hamas split is inflicting on their lives. Moreover, Fatah's rivalry with Hamas over which best represents Palestinian aspirations has made it difficult for Fatah to compromise even with a centrist Israeli government. However, some have argued that an agreement with Fatah alone regarding the West Bank is better than no agreement at all. Moreover, the emergence of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank could attract Hamas supporters and impel Hamas to moderate its position.

There is a growing consensus among Middle East observers that the United States at some point will have to present Israeli and Palestinian negotiators with a two-state peace plan including at least the basic parameters for resolving the most critical issues – borders/settlements, Jerusalem/Holy Sites, security arrangements and refugees/compensation. Establishing a viable Palestinian state and assuring Israel's security are the top priorities of the two respective publics. Both of these objectives are relatively attainable with proposals tested on the Israeli and Palestinian publics and presented in Part II. The two publics are close to agreement on using the 1967 lines with agreed, equal land swaps to define the borders of the Israeli and Palestinian states. Also, both publics agree that Palestine should have a strong security force (but not an army) and that an international force should replace the Israeli army on the West Bank for an agreed period.

Several assumptions underlie this approach: (1) Fatah remains committed to continued progress on issues of security, governance and economic development in order to build the foundations of a Palestinian state; (2) there is a near-term need to defuse Palestinian frustration and potential violence over the “occupation” while simultaneously assuring Israel that its security needs are going to be met in the process of creating a Palestinian state; (3) an effective international force will facilitate the transition from Israeli occupation to Palestinian sovereignty while successfully countering extremists on both sides who aim to scuttle an Israeli-Palestinian accord; (4) the issue of Jerusalem will have to be discussed sooner rather than later; and (5) the current broad support

of both the Israeli and Palestinian publics for the goal of a two-state solution can be maintained and help facilitate a negotiating process demanding difficult compromises on both sides.

## B. Resolving Specific Issues in Dispute

Eight issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians were grouped in Table 3 (p. 15) according to the rankings they received from both publics regarding their importance. Presumably, the two publics will find it more difficult to compromise on issues that both regard as high priority than on issues both sides rank lower in importance. From this perspective, the future of **Jerusalem** appears to be the most difficult issue to resolve, since both publics ranked it high in importance (Israelis – 2<sup>nd</sup> in importance, Palestinians – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and thus neither public may be willing to compromise very far from its preferred outcome. Moreover, each of the proposals presented to resolve the issue of Jerusalem was predominantly opposed by both Israelis and Palestinians. Proposals to divide Jerusalem along demographic lines or along the pre-1967 borders, for example, were rejected by both Israelis and Palestinians by large margins.

Perhaps other proposals will be forthcoming to help resolve this important and contentious issue. Perhaps setting a future date for implementing an agreement to make East Jerusalem the Palestinian capital and West Jerusalem the Israeli capital – while allowing local security measures to take hold – would ease pressure and reduce opposition. Similarly, dealing with Jerusalem in a package with the issues of borders/settlements and West Bank security arrangements might ease its resolution.

Past surveys also placed the issue of **settlements** in the *very difficult* to resolve category. The Peace Polls (2/09) proposal to “dismantle most settlements, move settlers to large blocks and exchange land” was supported by only a third of the Israeli and Palestinian publics. But recent Truman Institute surveys show that Israelis and Palestinians are more closely divided regarding a proposal that specifies the total area of settlements to be annexed to Israel with equal Israeli land exchanged. Thus, in terms of overall public preferences the settlement issue may have become somewhat more manageable, particularly if it is subsumed in negotiations over borders -- regarding which there is considerable agreement on adhering to the 1967 line with agreed, mutual adjustments. However, as noted earlier (Section IC), the political effect of Israeli public support for evacuating settlements is diminished by the fact that this support is considerably underestimated by the Israeli public itself, as well as by the settler movement.

Agreement on the borders for a two-state solution, Israel’s security needs and a preliminary accord on Jerusalem could create momentum for resolving other issues on which the two sides differ, including Jerusalem’s Old City and Palestinian refugees. Both Israelis and Palestinians are more receptive to sharing guardianship of their respective Holy Sites than delegating control to an international authority. Many Palestinians appear to accept the principle of compensation for refugees with resettlement primarily in Palestine or another Arab country. Nearly all Palestinians (93%) say they would accept abandoned Israeli settlements, which could serve as compensation to many returning refugees.