

## **Peace Index: February 2007**

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Despite the recent intense criticism of the government's functioning, the Jewish public appears to support its overall policy on foreign and security issues. Similar to Israel's official position, a majority of the Jewish public thinks the establishment of the Palestinian unity government reduces the chances of reaching a political settlement, and does not believe an agreement based on a two-state solution can be reached with this government. A large majority also supports the official policy of not negotiating with the Palestinian unity government until it recognizes Israel and fulfills the Quartet's other conditions, particularly fighting terror. At the same time, though, the prevailing opinion is that Israel cannot allow the present situation to continue and must make greater efforts than in the past to reach a political settlement with the Palestinians.

On the Syrian issue, as in the past the dominant position is against a peace agreement in return for a full withdrawal from the Golan, and a majority also supports not responding to the Syrian initiative to renew negotiations as long as it supports Hizballah and the other terror organizations. The Syrian approach is seen as resulting from weakness and not from a genuine desire for peace. At the same time, the widespread assessment is that Israel's policy stems mainly from the United States' opposition to negotiating with Damascus because of its position on the Iraqi issue, though Israelis believe it was right to accede to the American demand even if the Israeli leadership sees things differently.

As for Iran, the unanimous view is that its nuclear armament constitutes an existential danger to Israel, and a small majority also says Israel should attack the Iranian nuclear facilities even if it has to do so alone. Again similar to the official position, the majority favors adhering to Israel's traditional policy of ambiguity regarding its nuclear capacity.

In the domestic sphere, the Jewish public continues its overwhelming support for the efforts at rooting out corruption in the public sector, and only a small minority thinks these efforts are excessive and harm the government's ability to function.

Those are the main conclusions of the Peace Index survey that was carried out on 26-27 February 2007.

About 55% of the Jewish public now thinks the establishment of the Palestinian national unity government reduces the chances of reaching a settlement and only 25% believe its establishment will increase those chances (the rest have no opinion on the matter). Note that there is a majority for this view among all the parties. Fifty-six percent of the Jewish public also sees it as impossible to reach a settlement with this government based on the principle of two states for two peoples, compared to 40% who think it is possible. Interestingly on this question, in contrast to the previous one, there is an opposite majority among voters for Meretz and Labor who, unlike the rest of the parties, do not see an agreement based on the two-state principle as impossible. An unequivocal majority—83%—say the Israeli government should not recognize the Palestinian unity government or talk with it as long as it has not recognized Israel and fulfilled the Quartet's conditions, especially in regard to fighting terror. Here the pattern of views for Meretz and Labor voters is identical to the pattern for voters for the rest of the parties.

As expected, the views are different in the Arab sector. Here a majority, albeit not large (52%), thinks the establishment of the Palestinian unity government increases the chances for a settlement, and a majority of 64% say a settlement can currently be reached based on the principle of two states for two peoples. Only about one-fourth think Israel should avoid contacts with the unity government as long as it has not recognized Israel and fulfilled the Quartet's conditions.

Nevertheless, the dominant view—63% of the Jewish public and 86% of the Arab public—is that the present situation is dangerous for Israel, and it should make greater efforts than in the past to reach a political settlement.

Also on the Syrian issue the hawkish line—similar to the government’s position—holds sway among the Israeli Jewish public. Only about one-fifth are in favor of peace for a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and only 41% believe Israel should respond positively to Syria’s call to return to negotiations even if it has not stopped supporting Hizballah and the other terror organizations. Conversely, 52% think Syria’s call stems from weakness and Israel should not respond positively. At the same time, the public is aware of the link between the United States’ policy against negotiations with Syria since Syria supports organizations that are attacking the U.S. forces in Iraq, and the Israeli government’s position on this question. The leading view—49%—is that Israel is mainly acceding to the American demand on this matter, while only 37% see Israel as taking an independent position.

However, this is a case of “willing submission” since the majority—52%—think Israel is right to accede to the American demand not to start contacts with Syria on a settlement, with only 36% saying it should not accede if the Israeli government’s position is different from the American one. Only among Meretz voters does a majority—54.5%—assert that Israel should not follow the American demand on this issue.

In the Arab sector the picture is different. The majority—81%—support the formula of full peace for a full withdrawal from the Golan, and 73% think the Israeli government should respond positively to Syria’s call to return to the negotiating table without stipulating that it end its support for Hizballah and the other terror organizations. Here too only a minority—23%—see Israel as taking an independent policy and the majority—67%—see it as going along with an American dictate. However, unlike in the Jewish sector, in the Arab sector the majority—65%—say Israel should not accept the American position on the issue.

On the Iranian issue, too, the Israeli Jewish public sees eye to eye with the government's position. Eighty-two percent believe Iranian's nuclear armament constitutes an existential danger to Israel. And a majority—albeit smaller at 48.5% (vs. 39%)—say Israel should attack Iran's nuclear facilities and destroy them even if it has to do so by itself.

Interestingly, in the Arab sector as well a majority, albeit not large—53%—view that the Iranian armament as an existential danger to Israel, but only a tiny minority—8%—favor Israel attacking the Iranian facilities in Iran even if it does so by itself.

Having touched on the nuclear issue, this time we looked into the Israeli public's position on Israel's traditional policy of ambiguity. The Jewish public shows clear support for ambiguity among voters for all parties, with 62% in favor of maintaining this policy. In the Arab sector, however, the majority—54%—think Israel should openly declare that it has nuclear weapons.

As in recent months, we again found that a majority—both in the Jewish (64%) and the Arab (55%) public—support continuing the efforts to expose corruption in the public sector with only a minority seeing these efforts as excessive. At the same time, in both publics only a small majority (47% vs. 44% in the Jewish public, 50% vs. 42% in the Arab public) believes these efforts will bear fruit.

**The Peace Index project is conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research and the Evens Program in Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University, headed by Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann. The telephone interviews were conducted by the B. I. Cohen Institute of Tel Aviv University on 26-27 February 2007 and included 590 interviewees who represent the adult Jewish and Arab population in Israel (including the territories and the kibbutzim). The sampling error for a sample of this size is 4.5%**