

War and Peace Index – March 2009

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For a clear majority of the Israeli public, the economic crisis is the most important issue facing the new government (62% put it in first or second place). Trailing far behind are the security and political issues—the Iranian threat at 39% and the negotiations with the Palestinians at 27%. Domestic problems are also accorded secondary importance—the economic gaps (31%), corruption (19%), and improving the system of governance (16%).

A majority of the Jewish citizens of Israel (53%), but not of the Arabs (33%), believe Netanyahu's declaration that his government will strive for peace with the Palestinians. However, a majority of both sectors supports Netanyahu's view that the key to achieving stability and quiet is "economic peace" based on advancing the economic condition of the Palestinians. In contrast, however, to Netanyahu's refusal to commit himself to the formula of two states for two peoples, a majority of both sectors (56% of the Jews and 78% of the Arabs) currently favors working toward this solution. That is, the Israeli public thinks "economic peace" is a good idea but not enough to achieve ongoing quiet and stability. The support for the two-state idea is especially evident when comparing it to two other possibilities: continuing the existing situation or establishing a binational state. Among the Jews, 51% now back the two-state formula, 28% favor continuing the existing situation, and only 7% are for setting up a binational state. For the Arabs the parallel figures are 66% for the two-state formula, 8% for continuing the existing situation, and 17% for binationalism. In other words, the Arabs, not surprisingly, overwhelmingly oppose continuing the existing situation; at the same time a large majority also opposes the idea of a binational state and supports, like the Jewish public, the two-state solution. A further interesting finding is that a majority—about three-quarters—of both groups disagrees with the ominous claim that unless the two-state idea is realized soon, the result will be the rise of a binational state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

A majority of Israelis, both Arab (59%) and Jewish (54%), believe that despite the new government's right-wing composition it will maintain a good relationship with the

Obama-led U.S. administration when it comes to advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace. However, while a majority of the Jewish public (55%) expects Obama to pressure Israel harshly if it does not cooperate in advancing the negotiations, a majority of the Arab public (51%) sees the chances of U.S. pressure on Israel as low. These different assessments presumably stem from the fact that the Arabs, more than the Jews, believe in the basic American sympathy for Israel and in the power of the American Jewish lobby's influence on U.S. policy in the region.

With the publication of the testimonies of soldiers who took part in Operation Cast Lead that IDF forces harmed, on orders, civilians and structures beyond what was required by the fighting, we checked the public's degree of trust in these testimonies and its positions on the question of what to do if the IDF's investigation verifies them. On these issues we found, as expected, large gaps between Jews and Arabs. A majority of the Jewish public (64%) discounts these testimonies and thinks that even if the IDF investigation verifies them, neither the soldiers nor the commanders should be put on trial, with greater leniency toward the soldiers who carried out the orders—74% saying they should not be put on trial while 58% say so regarding the commanders. A clear majority of the Arab public (61%), however, believes the testimonies of deliberate abuses and thinks the soldiers and commanders should be charged. Similar to the Jewish public, however, the Arabs distinguish between commanders and soldiers with a clear tendency to be stricter toward those who give the orders (78% say the commanders should stand trial compared to 58% who favor charging the soldiers).

Negotiations Index: General: 50.3; Jews: 47.3

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