

War and Peace Index: April 2008

The War and Peace Index is an ongoing public-opinion survey project aimed at systematically tracking the prevailing trends in Israeli public opinion on the regional conflict and its effects on Israeli society. The project was launched as the Peace Index in September 1993. The change in name (along with the change in venue from *Haaretz* to *ynet*) reflects the worsening of relations between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world in recent years, it being impossible to ignore that the possibility of war has returned to the picture. The data for the index are collected in a monthly telephone survey that is based on a probabilistic representative sample of the entire adult population of Israel (age 18+) including Arabs, kibbutzim and moshavim, and the settlements in the territories. The size of the sample is about 600 men and women and the sampling error is about 4.5%.

The survey is funded by two academic bodies belonging to Tel Aviv University: the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research and the Evens Program in Mediation and Conflict Resolution. The surveys are conducted by the B. I. Cohen Institute of Tel Aviv University. The joint academic responsibility for the project, including formulation of the questionnaires and analysis of the findings, is held by Prof. Ephraim Yaar of Tel Aviv University and Prof. Tamar Hermann of the Open University.

For the survey data, see <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace>

On the eve of Israel's 60th Independence Day the security threat is at the center of public awareness, and the opinions on different aspects of it are in most cases unequivocal. Some 75% of the Israeli Jewish public thinks that in the next five years Israel will find itself at war with one or more Arab states. Note that more women than men, more people with higher education than without it, and more second-generation native Israelis than those of other extractions, Ashkenazi or Mizrahi, expect a war to break out in the next few years.

In the Israeli Jewish public as a whole, opinions are more or less evenly divided between those who see a possibility in the next five years that Israel will sign a peace agreement with at least one additional Arab state and those who see no such possibility (interestingly, the younger age groups are more pessimistic on this issue than the older ones, and also show less support for negotiating with the Palestinian Authority). But as for achieving a settlement with Syria and the Palestinians, the two most relevant regional actors, assessments of the chances are much lower: 66% of the

entire Jewish public does not believe in the chances of an agreement with Syria and 70% think the same regarding the Palestinians.

At present the Jewish public's willingness to "pay" for a peace agreement is particularly low. Only 19% support an Israeli withdrawal from all of the Golan Heights for a full peace treaty with Syria while the overwhelming majority—75%—oppose it (6% did not know). As for the Palestinians, a majority—57%—favor holding negotiations with the PA but 34% are against (among these there is, as noted above, a higher representation of the younger age groups, and also of those with less education and of those defining themselves as religious or haredi). An even larger majority of 70% support the formula of "two states for two peoples" (25% oppose this solution; again, among the opponents there is a larger representation of the younger age group and of second-generation Israeli natives, and also of those defining themselves as religious or haredi).

But when it comes to substantial concessions—in Jerusalem, for example—the positions of a majority of the Jewish public are quite hard-line. Fifty-five percent (vs. 40%) are not willing to see the Arab neighborhoods handed over to Palestinian sovereignty, 60% are not in favor of joint Israeli-Palestinian administration of the Temple Mount and the Jerusalem holy places, and 83% oppose handing over the Old City to the Palestinians.

What, in the view of the Jewish public, is the gravest security danger facing Israel today? Thirty-eight percent put the Iranian nuclear threat in first place (fear of the Iranian threat is higher in the older age group, among the less religious groups—the traditional and the secular, and among men). For twenty percent the gravest danger is that the Israel Defense Forces will not be sufficiently prepared for war if one breaks out in the future (here the apprehension is in fact higher among the younger age groups, who are perhaps more affected by the events of the Second Lebanon War and do not carry memories of the victories in past wars). Seventeen percent are most

worried that the Israeli Arabs will launch a violent rebellion against the state and only 12% see the gravest threat as an intensification of the Palestinians' struggle against Israel (the rest—13%—did not know).

Notwithstanding all of the above, when asked to assess the balance of achievements of the state of Israel in the 60 years of its independence, an overwhelming majority of 78% say Israel has succeeded in the military sphere (17% think it has failed and 5% do not know). In the economic sphere as well, the prevailing assessment is positive (65% succeeded, 30% failed, 5% do not know). However, the scale tips to the negative on the closing of economic and social gaps (66% failed, 25% succeeded, 9% do not know), on imparting a sense of equality and belonging to the Arab citizens (50% failed, 38% succeeded, 12% do not know), and on promoting peace (57% failed, 37% succeeded, 6% do not know).

The assessments of today's situation compared to the past and the expectations for the future show a contrasting pattern. Whereas the rate of those who currently see the national security situation as worse than ten years ago, when Israel celebrated 50 years of independence—38%—is higher than the rate of those who think the current situation is better—23% (31% think the situation has remained as it was and the rest do not know), the Jewish public's attitude toward the future is optimistic. That is, the rate of those who believe that in another ten years, when Israel celebrates 70 years of independence, the national security situation will be better—38.5%—is much higher than the proportion who say it will be worse—15%; 24% expect the situation to stay the same and the rest do not know. Interestingly, the younger age groups are in fact less optimistic about the future than the older ones.

And what is the most important goal for which Israel should strive in the coming decade? For the Jewish public achieving peace indeed comes first but, apparently because of the pessimism about the chances of realizing this goal, only 19% of the respondents chose it as the ultimate objective. Very close behind are two domestic objectives: reducing the socioeconomic gaps and the war on corruption (17% each). In

fourth place in the public's priorities is enhancing unity among the people (12%), followed by improving the economic situation (11%). The rest of the respondents did not choose any one of these objectives, or any objective, as the most important.

And how do the Israeli Arabs view the situation? It turns out that on many questions their position does not differ from that of the Israeli Jews. For example, in the Arab public, too, a majority—61%—expect Israel to find itself in a war in the next five years; but unlike the Jewish public, here a majority—62%—also think Israel will sign a peace agreement with at least one additional Arab state. As in the Jewish public, the rate of those who do not believe the contacts with the Palestinians will lead to a peace agreement—52%—is higher than the rate of those who see a chance they will bear the hoped-for fruit (45%). As for the ranking of the threats, the order is identical to what we found among the Jewish interviewees: for the Arab public the greatest fear is of the Iranian efforts to attain nuclear weapons, with an intensification of the Palestinian struggle against Israel coming last. The Arab public also sees the balance of Israel's achievements similarly to the Jewish public, citing successes mainly in the military domain. The assessment of success in the economic sphere is lower, seemingly because the Arab public enjoys less of the fruits of the recent years' economic growth. However, the harshest judgment is on promoting peace, with 62% of the Arab interviewees saying Israel has failed in this regard; 60% also give it a failing grade on imparting equality and a sense of belonging to its Arab citizens. Like the Jewish public, the Arab public's view of the present national security situation tends to be pessimistic with the majority seeing it as worse than ten years ago. However, unlike the Jewish public's optimism on the future national security situation, the Arab public expects it to be worse in the coming decade than it is today.

As for the goals for the next decade, the Arab public is much more unanimous and unequivocal than the Jewish public: 46% put achieving peace in first place, with improving the economic situation—13%—a distant second.