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# Americans' Attitudes Toward the Middle East

*[Editor's note: During October 6-11, 1982, Decision/Making/Information, one of the leading opinion poll firms, surveyed the attitudes of 1020 Americans toward the Middle East. All respondents were 18 years or older and were interviewed by telephone. This sample can be projected to the entire US population with a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent. The poll was commissioned by the Institute of Arab Studies and supervised by Dr. Fouad Moughrabi and Dr. Elia Zureik. The following is a sample of the questions, responses and conclusions which indicates changing public opinion toward the Palestinians and US policy in the Middle East.]*

## **Fact Sheet**

Pollsters have been assessing American public attitudes to the Middle East since the middle of the 1930s, when the issue of European Jewish immigration was debated in the US in the context of World War II. As the struggle between Arabs and Jews intensified, the question of Palestine spilled over into American domestic politics, with the result that public opinion polls on the Middle East became a regular feature in surveys conducted by pollsters.

As it stands now, there is a plethora of public opinion polls on the Middle East conducted on behalf of various interest groups, governmental agencies, media organizations, specialists, and others.

An assessment of polls on the Middle East taken during the last 30 to 40 years reveals the following:

- Invariably, the major concern of pollsters and their sponsors has been to generate background information to inform and direct US policies in directions that are favorable to Israel.
- Until very recently, pollsters have defined the Middle East conflict as one involving the Arab states and Israel with the Palestinian dimension of it being ignored. Questions dealing directly with the Palestinians first appeared in 1978.
- Critics of public opinion polls, including some of the pollsters themselves as well as media analysts, have referred to the way dominant issues were singled out for study, the ambiguous and even distorted wordings of questions, and subjectivity in the interpretation of data, all of which contributed in due course to significant biases in the utilization of the results for policy purposes.
- Of the various comments and criticisms made of public opinion polls on foreign affairs, two stand out: first, the general public knows little about complex international issues to be able to formulate an informed opinion; second, attitudes about foreign policy issues tend to reflect stereotypical notions popularized by the press—this is particularly true in the case of the Palestinians whose image in the media has been overwhelmingly negative in the past.
- Finally, none of the numerous published polls conducted so far on the Middle East have been either sponsored by an Arab organization or informed by concerns that reflect areas of interest to the Arabs, particularly the Palestinian vantage point.

In order to rectify these shortcomings, and in recognition of the fact that public attitudes have a significant potential in shaping policy, the Institute of Arab Studies, an independent, non-profit research organization located in Belmont, Massachusetts, commissioned Decision/Making/Information, a US national research company, to conduct a wide-ranging attitudinal survey of the American public regarding the Palestine question in its various facets.

#### *Attitudes Toward a Palestinian State*

- Seventy-six percent agree that, based on the 1947 UN partition plan of Palestine, the Palestinians should have the right to establish a state of their own.

- Of the 11 percent who disagree with the idea of a Palestinian state based on the UN partition of Palestine, a majority changed their views from negative to positive, when they were told that of the 4.5 million Palestinians, slightly more than one-half live as refugees outside historical Palestine.
- Eighty-three percent favor a Palestinian representation at peace negotiations.
- Sixty-five percent agree to the statement that there will be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinians have a state.
- Of those who agree that the Palestinians should have a state, 55 percent feel that the US should help in establishing such a state.
- Only 29 percent feel that such a state would pose a security threat to Israel.
- Of those who oppose such a state on security grounds, almost two-thirds are prepared to favor the creation of such a state if it were to be demilitarized.

#### *Attitudes Toward Israel and the Palestinians*

- In response to the key points of President Reagan's Middle East plan 72 percent agree that there should be a freeze on further Israeli settlements on occupied Arab lands. Fifty-six percent believe that Israel should not annex the occupied territories.
- Respondents were asked, "thinking back a year ago, were your sympathies more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?" A year ago 59 percent sympathized with Israel, compared to 39 percent today; while 13 percent sympathized with the Palestinians a year ago, compared to 23 percent today.
- Fifty-two percent would want to see continued Israeli military presence there.
- Sixty-nine percent disapproved of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, while 72 percent opposed the Israeli forces entering Beirut.
- Most people are confused about who is responsible for the massacres in Beirut but of those who had an opinion the majority blamed Israel (22 percent).
- Forty-two percent said Israel's invasion of Lebanon was justified on the basis of PLO military presence there.

- However, when informed that from July, 1981 to June, 1982 the Palestine Liberation Organization observed the cease-fire and that the violations came from the Israeli side, the percentage justifying the invasion was reduced by almost one-half.
- Fifty-three percent agreed with the statement that had Israel not entered Beirut, the massacre of Palestinian refugees would have not taken place.

#### *Attitudes Toward US Administration Policies*

- When asked about the Reagan peace plan, only one-third of the respondents agreed with the President's view that there should not be an independent Palestinian state.
- Fifty-six percent agree with the Jordan option, namely that the West Bank and Gaza should have self-rule in association with Jordan.
- In contrast, 50 percent opt for an independent state, while 17 percent have no opinion. This is the highest percentage reported so far. Gallup asked a similar question in September, 1982 and reported then that 23 percent endorsed the idea of an independent Palestinian state.
- Thirty-two percent think that the US government should recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization, with 55 percent saying the government should not. This is a drop in favor of recognition, when compared to the Gallup poll of August, 1982 in which 48 percent say that the US should talk directly with the Palestine Liberation Organization as the representative of the Palestinian people.
- However, when informed that the Palestine Liberation Organization is recognized by 108 governments around the world, one-third of those who had originally opted for nonrecognition changed their views in support of recognition.
- Thirty-one percent believe that the Palestine Liberation Organization is the Palestinian people's political representative, whereas in 1978 according to a Gallup poll only 14 percent saw the Organization as the official representative of the Palestinian people. Among the Palestinians living in the occupied territories sampled by Time magazine in May 1982, 86 percent favored an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza run by the Palestine Libera-

tion Organization. No doubt the figure will be higher after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the massacre.

- Respondents are almost evenly divided on the Reagan peace plan proposition that the US should make an iron-clad guarantee to the security of Israel: 49 percent agree and 46 percent disagree.
- Sixty-four percent feel that it is important for the US government to maintain friendly relations with the Arab countries.
- Forty-nine percent feel that US policies in the Middle East are balanced while 41 percent feel that they favor one side.
- Of those who think that US policies are not balanced, 86 percent say the US favors Israel and only 8 percent say that it favors the Palestinians.

#### *Attitudes Toward Israel*

- Support for Israel is still strong among the American public and most Americans do not favor disciplinary measures against Israel.
- Sixty-nine percent agree with the statement that the tax-exempt status of Israeli bonds sold in the US should be revoked when they are told that Israel is the only country allowed this status.
- Thirty-five percent believe that disciplinary measures ought to be taken against Israel because of its Lebanese invasion.
- Americans are evenly split as to whether Israel should be receiving aid from the US.
- Of the 44 percent agreeing that the US should continue to give aid to Israel, 37 percent favor legislation reducing the amount of aid once they realized that on a *per capita* basis Israel receives more aid than any other country, and a further one-third is prepared to endorse legislation cutting off aid to Israel once they realized the extent of the aid to Israel on a *per capita* basis: \$1,000 per man, woman and child in Israel.

#### *Attitudes Toward the Media*

- When asked to name the sources of information about the Middle East other than television news, 41 percent mention newspapers, 26 percent magazines, 16 percent television talk shows, and 13 percent friends, relatives and others.

- **Contrary to claims made by pro-Israeli organizations in this country, the majority, 57 percent, feel that the media is fair in its reporting about the Middle East, 20 percent feel that it favors Israel, and 9 percent feel that it favors the Palestinians.**

Today, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?

Israelis . . . . .	1 (39%)
Palestinians . . . . .	2 (23%)
Neither . . . . .	3 (21%)
No opinion . . . . .	4 (16%)
Both . . . . .	5 ( 1%)

Thinking back a year ago, were your sympathies more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?

Israelis . . . . .	1 (59%)
Palestinians . . . . .	2 (13%)
Neither . . . . .	3 (13%)
No opinion . . . . .	4 (-0-)
Both . . . . .	5 (-0-)

Do you feel the US policies in the Middle East favor one side more than another, or are these policies pretty well balanced?

Favor one side . . . . .	1 (41%)
Balanced . . . . .	2 (49%)
No opinion . . . . .	3 (10%)

If "Favor One Side":

Which side do you think US policies favor, the Palestinians or Israelis?

Palestinians . . . . .	1 ( 8%)
Israelis . . . . .	2 (86%)
No opinion . . . . .	3 ( 6%)

Do you favor or oppose the recent Israeli advances on West Beirut?

Favor . . . . .	1 (16%)
Oppose . . . . .	2 (72%)
Don't know . . . . .	3 (12%)

Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the massacre would not have taken place if the Israelis would have kept their commitment to the United States not to move troops into West Beirut?

Strongly agree . . . . .	1 (25%)
Somewhat agree . . . . .	2 (28%)
Somewhat disagree . . . . .	3 (17%)
Strongly disagree . . . . .	4 (12%)
No opinion . . . . .	5 (18%)

Do you think Israel violated the terms of the US Arms Export Control Act which states that American-made weapons can be used only for legitimate self-defense?

Yes . . . . .	1 (69%)
No . . . . .	2 (15%)
No opinion . . . . .	3 (16%)

Do you feel that the American media favor either the Israelis or the Palestinians or they give a fair account of the current conflict?	Favor Israelis . . . . .	1 (20%)
	Favor Palestinians . . . . .	2 (9%)
	Fair . . . . .	3 (57%)
	No opinion . . . . .	4 (14%)

### Israeli Invasion of Lebanon

Recently the Israeli military forces invaded Lebanon. Do you approve or disapprove of this action?

	Approve (%)	Disapprove (%)	Don't Know (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	21	69	10
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	32	59	9
Female	12	78	10
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	26	64	10
Protestant	21	72	7
Catholic	12	79	9
Jewish/Other/None	23	64	13
<b>Age/C</b>			
18-34	18	75	7
35-54	24	64	12
55 and older	23	67	10
<b>Ideology</b>			
Conservative	23	67	10
Moderate	23	64	13
Liberal	19	74	7
<b>Interest/Foreign Affairs/C</b>			
High	26	66	8
Low	18	72	10

Now, I would like to read you some statements that others have made concerning the Middle East crisis. Whether you agree or disagree with any statement, you can be sure that many people feel as you do. Would you please tell me for each statement whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

Currently, Israel is the only country allowed tax exempt status on their bonds for American investors. This status should be revoked to create tax revenue for the US government.	Agree strongly . . . . .	1 (43%)
	Agree somewhat . . . . .	2 (26%)
	Disagree somewhat . . . . .	3 (12%)
	Disagree strongly . . . . .	4 (9%)
	No opinion . . . . .	5 (10%)

**US Take Disciplinary Measures Against Israel**

Do you think it has gotten to the point that the United States should take disciplinary measures against Israel because of its recent invasion against Lebanon?

	<b>Yes (%)</b>	<b>No (%)</b>	<b>No Opinion (%)</b>
<b>Aggregate</b>	35	57	8
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	39	57	4
Female	32	58	10
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	33	59	8
Protestant	38	57	6
Catholic	40	55	5
Jewish/Other/None	28	59	14
<b>Sympathies Lie With... 1982</b>			
Israelis	25	71	4
Palestinians	55	42	4
Neither	35	55	10
No opinion	31	51	18

Do you think the aid the US presently gives Israel is about the right amount, too much, or not enough?

Right amount . . . . .	1	(46%)
Too much . . . . .	2	(27%)
Not enough . . . . .	3	( 8%)
No opinion . . . . .	4	(19%)

If "right amount," "not enough," or "no opinion":

If you knew that Israel receives more aid *per capita* from the United States than any other country, would you favor or oppose legislation that would reduce aid to Israel?

Favor . . . . .	1	(37%)
Oppose . . . . .	2	(52%)
No opinion . . . . .	3	(11%)

If "oppose":

If you knew that every man, woman and child in Israel receives a thousand dollars a year in aid from the United States, would you favor or oppose legislation that would reduced aid to Israel?

Favor . . . . .	1	(37%)
Oppose . . . . .	2	(52%)
No opinion . . . . .	3	(11%)

<b>US Give Aid to Israel</b>			
Do you feel the United States should give aid to Israel?			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>
	(%)	(%)	(%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	44	50	6
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	54	44	2
Female	36	56	8
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	43	46	11
Protestant	46	50	4
Catholic	34	63	3
Jewish/Other/None	55	42	3
<b>Age/C</b>			
18-34	40	57	2
35-54	50	47	4
55 and older	44	45	11
<b>Education</b>			
Some high school	38	54	8
High school graduate	43	53	4
Some college/Vocational	46	50	4
College/Postgraduate	58	37	5
<b>Interest/Foreign Affairs/C</b>			
High	53	40	7
Low	38	58	4
<p>I'm going to read you a list of some of the provisions of the Camp David Accord. Of course, different groups favor or oppose each of these points, and I would like for you to tell me whether you favor or oppose each point. First, do you favor or oppose:</p>			
	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Full autonomy, or self-control [ <i>sic</i> ], for the Arab residents of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip?	(58%)	(26%)	(16%)
Palestinian representation at peace negotiations?	(83%)	(13%)	( 4%)
The locating of Israeli forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip?	(31%)	(52%)	(17%)
The withdrawal of the Israeli government from the West Bank and Gaza Strip?	(60%)	(26%)	(14%)

Now I'm going to read you a list of some of the key points of President Reagan's new Middle East Peace Plan. Of course, different groups favor or oppose each of these points. As I read each one, I would like for you to tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each point.

	Agree Strng (1)	Agree Smwht (2)	Disag Smwht (3)	Disag Strng (4)	No Opinion (5)
There should be no independent Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan River or in the Gaza Strip.	(13%)	(20%)	(30%)	(20%)	(17%)
Israel should not annex the territories they currently occupy.	(27%)	(12%)	(19%)	(13%)	(29%)
Palestinians should have eventual self-rule of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan.	(19%)	(11%)	(18%)	(15%)	(37%)
There should be an immediate freeze on new Israeli settlements on occupied Arab land.	(42%)	( 6%)	(13%)	( 9%)	(30%)
The US should make an ironclad commitment to Israel's security.	(25%)	(23%)	(23%)	( 5%)	(24%)

Now let's try something different. I will read you the positions of two people, call them Smith and Jones. After I read you both opinions, please tell me if you are strongly like Smith, somewhat like Smith, somewhat like Jones, or strongly like Jones. Mr. Smith feels there will be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian people have self-determination and their own state on the West Bank and Gaza. Mr. Jones feels that a Palestinian state would be a threat to the security of Israel. Is your opinion . . .

Strongly like Smith . . . . .	1	(23%)
Somewhat like Smith . . . . .	2	(42%)
Somewhat like Jones . . . . .	3	(19%)
Strongly like Jones . . . . .	4	(10%)
No opinion . . . . .	5	( 6%)

### Palestinian State

In 1947, the United States supported a United Nations proposal for both a Palestinian and an Israeli state. Do you feel the Palestinians should have the right to establish this state?

	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Opinion (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	76	11	13
<b>Interest in Foreign Affairs/C</b>			
High	84	7	9
Low	69	15	16

Those who answered "no" (114) were asked: "If you knew that half of the 4.5 million Palestinians in the world are stateless refugees and the majority of the remaining half live under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, would you feel the Palestinians should have the right to establish a state of their own?"

	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Opinion (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	69	13	18
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	57	23	20
Female	77	7	17
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	64	10	25
Protestant	67	17	16
Catholic	84	3	14
Jewish/Other/None	70	19	11
<b>Occupation</b>			
White collar	83	11	6
Blue collar	60	12	28
Retired/Unemployed/Other	64	18	18

Those who still said "no" (33) were asked: "And why do you feel that way?"

	Respondents (N)		Respondents (N)
Israel should not give land away	6	No need/No right	5
General positive/Israel	1	General negative	9
PLO are terrorists	4	No opinion	5
Poor world economy	3		—
		Total Respondents	33

Those who answered that the "Palestinian people should have a state" (941) were asked: "Do you feel that the US should help the Palestinians establish this state?"

	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Opinion (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	55	37	8
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	63	32	6
Female	48	42	10
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	56	36	8
Protestant	51	41	8
Catholic	57	37	6
Jewish/Other/None	54	37	9
<b>Geographic Region/4-Part</b>			
Northeast	60	35	6
Midwest	56	39	5
West	54	39	6
South	49	37	13

**PLO: Representative of Palestinian People**

Do you believe the PLO is the Palestinian people's political representative?

	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Opinion (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	31	46	23
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	26	41	33
Protestant	32	50	18
Catholic	37	49	14
Jewish/Other/None	31	44	25
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	30	48	21
Non-White	35	35	30
<b>Age</b>			
18-34	38	45	17
35-54	30	47	23
55 and older	24	46	30
<b>Income</b>			
Under \$14,999	28	43	29
\$15,000-\$29,999	32	49	20
Above \$30,000	29	53	17

**Middle East: Right Direction/Wrong Track**

Since the Israeli invasion in June, do you think things in the Middle East are going in the right direction, or have they pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?

	<b>Right Direction</b> (%)	<b>Wrong Track</b> (%)	<b>No Opinion</b> (%)
<b>Aggregate</b>	17	68	15
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	23	62	14
Female	11	74	15
<b>Religion</b>			
Born-Again Christian	18	68	15
Protestant	15	66	18
Catholic	12	78	10
Jewish/Other/None	24	61	15
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	18	66	16
Non-white	12	80	8
<b>Party ID/C</b>			
Republican	22	63	15
Independent	15	65	20
Democrat	15	76	9
<b>Interest in Foreign Affairs</b>			
High	21	66	13
Low	13	71	16
<b>Sympathies Lie With...</b>			
<b>1981</b>			
Israelis	21	66	13
Palestinians	6	90	4
Neither	9	68	23
No opinion	15	64	24