

January 18, 2005

Poll: Most Palestinians ready for two-state deal

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www.haaretz.com

Some 54 percent of the Palestinians support a two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, with border corrections and no massive return of refugees, confirming that there has been a change in Palestinian public opinion since the death of Yasser Arafat.

Those findings in a comprehensive public opinion poll among 1,319 respondents conducted at the end of December contrasts with a similar poll done in December 2003, which showed only 39 percent of the Palestinians supported an agreement with Israel. And a parallel poll, conducted in Israel among a representative sample of Jewish and Arab voters, showed that 64 percent are now in favor of a permanent peace agreement compared to only 47 percent who supported such a deal in a similar poll last year.

The pollsters presented the people with a series of articles that were reminiscent of the Clinton Framework of 2000 and the Geneva Accord deal of 2003, without naming the source of the particulars. Most of the findings of the joint poll point to a significant rise in the support for reconciliation between the peoples and a peace agreement, since Arafat's replacement by Mahmoud Abbas.

Dr. Khalil Shkaki, head of the Center for Palestinian Policy and Research in Ramallah, conducted his poll in the last days of 2004, while the IDF was conducting operations throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Dr. Yaacov Shamir of the Hebrew University's Truman Institute, conducted his poll with the help of Dahaf's Mina Tzemach on January 9-10, at the height of Qassam rocket attacks on Sderot.

Support for mutual recognition

Some 63 percent of the Palestinians support the proposal that after the establishment of the state of Palestine and a solution to all the outstanding issues - including the refugees and Jerusalem - a declaration will be issued recognizing the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and the Palestinian state as the state of the Palestinian people. Some 35 percent of the Palestinians oppose such a declaration. In June 2003, 52 percent supported such a proposal, and 46 percent were opposed.

On the Israeli side, 70 percent supported the proposal for mutual recognition, and 16 percent were opposed. In 2003, 65 percent supported the proposal and 33 percent were opposed.

Some 63 percent of the Palestinians said they definitely agreed or agreed to the statement: "The Palestinian state will be established on all of the West Bank and Gaza, except for the large settlement blocs that will be annexed to Israel though not more than 3 percent. Israel will evacuate the rest of the settlements, and the Palestinians will get in exchange a piece of territory of the same size contiguous to Gaza." Some 35 percent said they oppose or definitely oppose such a formula.

A similar question posed in December 2003 won 57 percent support compared to 41 percent who were against.

In Israel, that proposal won 55 percent support and 43 percent opposed it, compared to 47 percent who favored it in 2003 and 50 percent who opposed it.

Tougher stances on Jerusalem

On the issue of Jerusalem, there has been a toughening of the stand on both sides. On the Palestinian side, 44 percent were in favor and 54 percent were opposed to an agreement in which "Jerusalem will be the capital of two states. East Jerusalem will be the capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel. The Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, including the neighborhoods in the Old City and the Temple Mount / Haram el Sharif, will be under Palestinian sovereignty. The Jewish neighborhoods, including the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall, will be under Israeli sovereignty."

A similar question posed in 2003 won 46 percent support and was opposed by 52 percent. On the Israeli side, 39 percent were in favor and 60 percent opposed. In 2003, 41 percent were in favor and 57 percent opposed.

A solution for the refugees

The poll reveals a major change in the Palestinian position regarding the refugees. According to the principles of the Clinton Framework and the Geneva Accord, the solution to the problem will be based on UN decisions 194 and 242, and include five possibilities from which the refugees can choose: to remain in their current countries; a return to the Palestinian state; a return to the Palestinian state as part of the territorial exchange; emigration to Europe or other countries like Australia and Canada; or a return to Israel, which would be limited and decided on by Israel, with Israel basing its decision on the average number of refugees who emigrate to countries like Australia, Canada and Europe. In addition, all refugees will be eligible for financial compensation from an international fund.

The poll in 2003 showed that only 25 percent of the Palestinians supported such an arrangement for the refugees, while in the latest poll the proposal now wins support from 46 percent of the Palestinians, with 50 percent opposed. On the Israeli side, 44 percent support such an arrangement, compared to 35 percent last year.

Ending the conflict

Some 69 percent of the Palestinians support an agreement that includes a declaration of the end of the conflict with Israel, with no further demands to be

made by either side of either side. Last year, only 42 percent of the Palestinians supported such a declaration, and 55 percent were opposed. On the Israeli side, 76 percent support such a declaration and 23 percent are opposed, compared to 66 percent and 33 percent respectively in 2003.

Most Palestinians - 61 percent - opposed the following statement: "The state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza will not have an army, but will have a strong security force and there will be an multinational force to guarantee the security of both sides. There will be commitments by Israel and Palestine to end terror and violence on both sides."

Only 27 percent of the Palestinians accepted that proposal. In December 2003, when it was last asked - without the element of the multinational force - 36 percent were in favor and 63 percent opposed.

Some 53 percent of the Palestinians supported the following statement: "Israel will be allowed to use the Palestinian air space for practice, but the state of Palestine will be sovereign over its airspace, its land and its sources of water. In addition, two Israeli early warning stations will be established in the West Bank for 15 years, and a multinational force will remain in the Palestinian state and at the borders for an indeterminate period of time. The purpose of the multinational is to monitor the implementation of the agreement and defend the territorial integrity of the Palestinian state and the border passages, because it will be demilitarized."

Some 45 percent of the Palestinians opposed that. Last year only 23 percent supported this, compared with 67 percent who were opposed. On the Israeli side, 61 percent supported this approach while 37 percent opposed the article's inclusion in any final peace agreement.

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