

**Tel Aviv University Peace Index: January 2005 / Majority of Israelis Supports
Disengagement, Negotiations with Palestinians
77% of Israeli Jews Favor Negotiations with Palestinians
59% of Israelis Jews Believe Abu Mazen Making Sincere Efforts to Stop Terrorism**

By Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann

Feb. 7, 2005

w w w . h a a r e t z . c o m

In recent months we found cautious optimism among the Israeli Jewish public about the chance of a calm in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and this optimism has now increased.

Following are the main findings of the Peace Index survey that was conducted on Monday January 31 and Tuesday February 1.

There is overwhelming support for political negotiations with the Palestinian side along with increased belief that such negotiations could lead to peace. A majority of Jewish Israelis also think that new Palestinian leader Abu Mazen is making a sincere effort to end terrorism and has the ability to do so or at least to reduce it substantially.

Despite growing fear that resistance to the disengagement plan could lead to a civil war and a widespread view that the plan's opponents have been "marketing" their message more successfully than its supporters and are prepared to invest more effort in promoting their position, support for the plan among the Jewish public remains stable. A clear majority believes the government will be able to implement it.

A majority favors measures to make this process easier politically, including increasing compensation for evacuated settlers, preventing transfer of their homes and other property to Palestinians without suitable compensation, allowing soldiers who oppose the evacuation to avoid taking part in it and closing the area of the evacuation to the media.

The Jewish public supports, at a rate of two-to-one, both holding a referendum on the plan and stepped-up political activity by its supporters.

A large majority say that resistance by settlers and their supporters to the evacuation, whether in the form of curses and calling evacuators Nazis, or even employing weapons, should not lead to the evacuation's cancellation. At the same time, there is a clear preference for security forces to avoid the use of force and for the government to conduct a dialogue with the evacuees, unless weapons are used against soldiers conducting the evacuation. In such a case, there is broad support to continue the evacuation while immediately employing force against resisters.

Seventy-seven percent of the Jewish public currently support or strongly support diplomatic negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, and 51 percent believe strongly or moderately that this will lead to Israeli-Palestinian peace.

In the Arab sector, optimism is high indeed - 94.5 percent favor negotiations and 78 percent believe in their chances of bearing fruit.

This optimism is also reflected in the Oslo Index, which has been rising recently. The high support and belief in the chances for a settlement can, apparently, be attributed to the belief of a 59 percent majority (70 percent among Arabs) that Abu Mazen is making sincere efforts to stop terrorism. Fifty-five percent (66 percent among Arabs) also believe he has the capability to significantly reduce or even end Palestinian violence.

The broad support for the disengagement plan, at 59 percent, remains unchanged, and the correlation of support and opposition to the plan by party affiliation also shows great stability.

Support for disengagement is at 89 percent among Labor voters, 84 percent for Shinui, 78 percent for Yahad, and 60 percent for Likud, while the corresponding rate for the National Religious Party is 20 percent, for Shas 7 percent, and zero for the National Union.

The Jewish public is split on the danger that disengagement will ignite a civil war. Forty-nine percent see this danger as very high or high, up from 40 percent in September. Forty-six percent see the risk as low or very low. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority - 67 percent - of the Arab public sees little such danger.

Some 56.5 percent think that opponents of disengagement are marketing their message to the Israeli public more effectively than its supporters. About the same total say opponents are prepared to invest greater effort than supporters in advancing their position. It is not surprising, then, that about 60 percent of the public, similar to the proportion of supporters, would like supporters of disengagement to express their position more effectively via petitions, demonstrations and the like.

However, a very large majority - 74 percent - expects that the government will succeed in implementing the plan and evacuating the settlements. This is higher than the public's evaluation of the plan's chances of success in December, which was 63 percent. As would be expected, there is near unanimity - 91 percent - among the plan's supporters that the government will be able to carry it out. Interestingly, a majority of opponents - 52 percent - hold this view, while 41 percent disagree.

Whether because of a desire to see the plan succeed and/or empathy toward the people to be evacuated, there is a clear support for measures to ease the process. Seventy percent support increased compensations for settlers, 68 percent favor ensuring that their homes and infrastructure are not given to Palestinians without suitable compensation, 53 percent believe soldiers who oppose the evacuation should be allowed not to opt out, and the same proportion support closing the evacuation zones to the media.

Furthermore, most of the Jewish public, at a rate similar to support for the plan - 61 percent - favor a referendum. Even among the plan's supporters there is a majority - 52 percent - for a referendum, while 45 percent oppose one. Seventy-nine percent of opponents support a referendum.

How should the IDF react to resistance by settlers? We presented four scenarios of resistance: settlers curse evacuees and call them Nazis, settlers resist while holding Torah scrolls, settlers lie on roads with young children and settlers resist violently and use weapons against soldiers.

Only a small minority, between 12 percent and 17.5 percent, favor halting the evacuation altogether under any of these scenarios. On the first three scenarios, the prevalent view is to continue the evacuation as planned without employing force against settlers - 48 percent in the case of curses, 45 percent in the case of resistance with Torahs in hand and 33 percent in the case where young children are involved in the resistance. Under these scenarios only a small minority, between 13 percent and 17 percent, support continuing the evacuation while immediately using force

If violence and weapons are used against soldiers, a plurality of respondents - 38 percent - opt for continuing the evacuation as planned while immediately using force against resisters.

In all four scenarios, 20-25 percent favor putting the evacuation on hold and negotiating with settlers to calm the situation. The overall picture, then, is one of broad opposition by the Jewish public to stopping the evacuation under any of the scenarios we presented, but with a clear preference to avoid using force against settlers who resist.

Israeli Arabs also oppose using force against settlers, at least in the three scenarios in which the settlers do not resist violently or use weapons. However, if the evacuees do employ force, 62 percent of the Arab public support continuing the evacuation while immediately using force against them.

Indexes:

General Oslo: 42.2 (in December: 38.5); Oslo Jews: 38.5 (in December: 35.7).

General negotiation: 61.6 (in December: 56.8); Negotiation Jews: 59.7 (in December: 55.6).

The Peace Index project is conducted at the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research 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 January 31 and February 1, 2005, and included 581 interviewees who represent the adult Jewish and Arab population of Israel, including the territories and the kibbutzim. The sampling error for a sample of this size is about 4.5% in each direction.