

War and Peace Index - September 2009

Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

The international and regional debate on the report of the Goldstone Commission has apparently drawn the attention of the Israeli Jewish public while attracting that of the Israeli Arab public much less. Sixty-one percent of the Jewish interviewees—compared to only 22% of the Arabs—answered that they know what the report's main conclusion is. Among the Jewish interviewees who responded that they are aware of the report's main conclusion, there is almost total unanimity (93.5%), that the report was biased against the IDF. Along with this is widespread opposition of 79%, cutting across the political parties, to the Goldstone Report's claim that during Operation Cast Lead the IDF committed war crimes. Not surprisingly, in the Arab public only 5% opposed this claim of the commission.

Unlike the consensus about the content of the report, the Jewish public is divided on whether the Israeli government's decision not to cooperate with the Goldstone Commission was justified or unjustified: 46% think the decision was justified, 20% that it was unjustified, apparently believing that cooperation with the commission could have softened its harsh conclusions against the IDF, and 34% do not know. An analysis of the answers to this question by Knesset voting in the last elections shows that only Meretz voters are evenly split between those who think the decision not to cooperate with the commission was justified and those who think it was unjustified. Among the Jewish voters for all the other parties, the majority justifies the noncooperation. In the Arab public, which, as noted, shows only scant interest in the commission and its findings, only 6% think the decision was justified, 22% say it was unjustified, and the overwhelming majority—about 70%—have no opinion on the matter.

Another issue on the public agenda this month was the videotape of Gilad Shalit that Hamas transferred to Israel. We wanted to know how the public views the significance of this transfer in terms of the chances of advancing the negotiations for

Shalit's release. The findings reveal that the majority of the Jewish public (50%) thinks the transfer neither increases nor decreases the chances of his release, though 37% think it increases them and 4% that it decreases them. In the Arab public the prevailing opinion, 49%, is more optimistic—that the transfer of the video raises the chances of his release. Twelve percent of the Arab interviewees think it decreases them, and about one-fourth do not think the transfer affects the chances of a release one way or the other.

As to the question of whether Hamas can or cannot be a side to negotiations on a peace agreement with the Palestinians, a clear majority of the Jewish public (71%) says no, while a 53% majority of the Arab public says yes. Is there a connection between overall view of Hamas and positions on the significance of the transfer of the Shalit video? It appears that in the Jewish public, among those who would accept Hamas participation in the peace negotiations, there is—and not surprisingly—a larger degree of optimism about the significance of the video's transfer, with the majority (49%) assessing that the chances of Gilad's release have grown and 41% saying they have not changed, while among those opposing Hamas participation in the negotiations, only 32% think the chances for his release have grown whereas the majority—55%—do not believe they have changed.

As for the political issue standing at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely, support or opposition to a peace agreement based on the principle of “two states for two peoples,” here too it appears that the distribution of views among the Jewish public is quite clear : the majority, about two-thirds (64%), favor the principle compared to a third who oppose it. At the same time, it appears that a majority of the Jewish public (60%), think continued building in the settlements does not reduce the chances of reaching the two-state solution and is not concerned that continued building will lead in practice to the situation of a binational state, with only one-third concerned about such an outcome. A cross-checking of the answers to the two questions—on agreement with the two-state idea and on continued construction in the settlements—shows that among both the supporters and the opponents of the two-

state formula, a majority thinks continued construction in the settlements will not ultimately detract from the realization of the two-state solution; nonetheless, the position on the first question influences the assessment on the second question. That is, while among the two-state supporters only 54% are not concerned about continued building, among the two-state opponents a large majority of 72% are not concerned about the effects of continued building in the settlements.

Negotiation index:

General sample: 51.4; Jewish sample: 47.8

The War and Peace Index is funded by the Evans Program for Conflict Resolution Research of Tel Aviv University. The telephone interviews were conducted by the B. I. Cohen Institute of Tel Aviv University on 12-13 October 2009, and included 514 interviewees who represent the adult population of Israel (including the territories and the kibbutzim). The sampling error for a sample of this size is 4.5%.