

Peace Index - May 2011

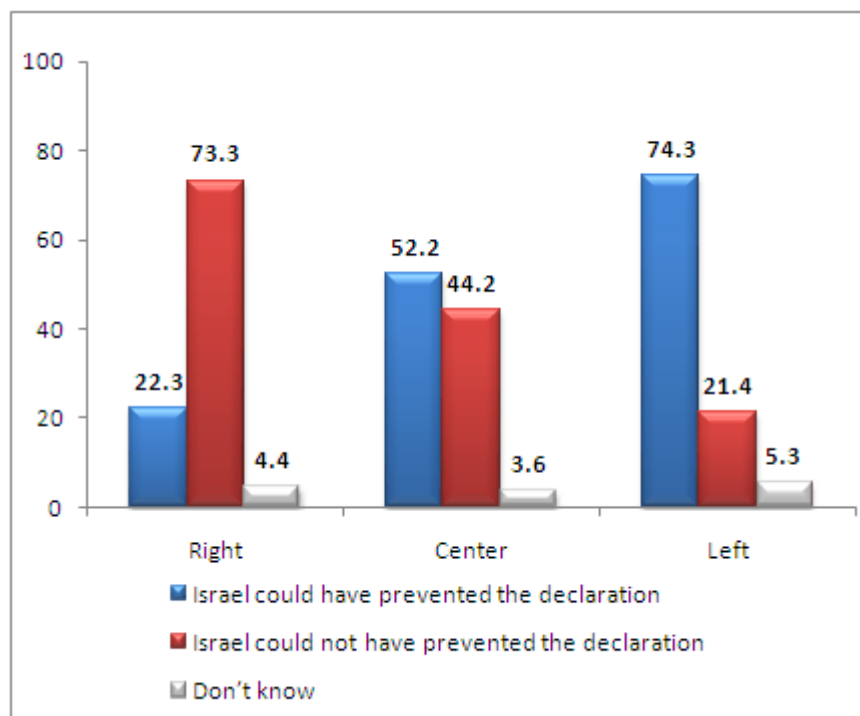
Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

Summary of the Findings

- **Will they or won't they declare a state?** About two-thirds of the Jewish public in Israel thinks that in September the Palestinians will declare the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and request that the UN General Assembly recognize it, even without an agreement with Israel. A majority (56%) of the Arab public, however, sees the chances of this as low.
- **Will it or won't it be recognized?** A higher rate (75%) of the Jewish public also believes that a General Assembly majority will recognize the Palestinian state even if Israel opposes this move. As for the Arab public, 68% foresee a large majority in the General Assembly.
- **Could it have been prevented?** Fifty-five percent of the Jews say Israel could not have prevented Palestinian declaration even if Israel had shown greater political flexibility in the past. Moreover, a majority (60%) of them do not think Israel should moderate its positions at this stage so as to prevent the Palestinian declaration – even if it is still possible to prevent the declaration. Sixty-four percent consider that even if Israel significantly moderates its positions, the chances that the Palestinians will not declare an independent state and request UN recognition for it are low. A majority of the Arabs (57%), however, think the Palestinian declaration could have been prevented if Israeli policy had been more flexible.
- **And what will happen after the declaration and the recognition?** The majority of the Jewish public (64%) believes that the declaration of Palestinian independence and the UN recognition will damage Israeli interests. An even larger majority (74%) believes that the chances are high that following the anticipated recognition, the international community will exert substantial pressures on Israel, such as economic sanctions, in order to force Israel to withdraw from the territories.
- **And who will not recognize the Palestinian state?** Seventy-one percent of the Jewish public thinks the current Israeli government will not recognize a Palestinian state that is declared unilaterally. A majority (Jews – 57%, Arabs – 60%) also thinks that, under these circumstances, the U.S. will not recognize the Palestinian state. At the same time, the Jewish public is divided as to whether Israel will or will not be able to allow itself not to recognize an independent Palestinian state: 48% believe it will be able to allow itself to withhold recognition while 47% think it will not. In the Arab public, a majority (53%) says Israel will be able to allow itself not to recognize the Palestinian state after the Palestinians declare the state and it is recognized by the UN.

- **And what will happen in the territories?** A large majority (Jews – 70%, Arabs – 62%) thinks that following the declaration of an independent Palestinian state and its recognition by the UN, the chances are high that an intifada will erupt in the territories. Fifty-eight percent of the Jews (50% of the Arabs) also believe the Palestinian leadership will encourage such an intifada.
- **And what about negotiations with the Palestinian unity government?** Surprisingly, the opinions in the Jewish public are divided: 38% support the claim that negotiations can be held even if Hamas is part of the government, since the alternative of an agreement with a Palestinian government that represents only half the people would be pointless. For 35%, the inclusion of Hamas in the Palestinian leadership means that Israel cannot negotiate with the Palestinian Authority, while 24% oppose negotiations with the Palestinians whether or not Hamas is part of their government. In the Arab public, 78% support the first position, and are in favor of negotiating with a unity government that includes Hamas.

**Graph of the month: Could Israel have prevented the Palestinian declaration of statehood if it had shown political flexibility?
(Based on self-definition as left, center or right)**



The Findings in Detail

In recent days, much has been said and written both in Israel and abroad about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possibilities for resolving it. This month's survey was conducted a few days before President Obama's speech on U.S. policy in the Middle East, which, of course, sparked many reactions, including fierce criticisms by the Israeli government and others. The survey focused mainly on the possibility that the Palestinians will unilaterally declare an independent state in September 2011 and turn to the UN institutions to recognize it, in contravention of Israel's position and without any agreement having been reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The first question dealt with the public's assessments of the likelihood that the Palestinians will indeed choose to take such a step. The data show that Palestinian statements about their plans have been taken seriously by the Israeli public:: about two-thirds of the Jewish public thinks the Palestinians will declare an independent Palestinian state in September and will ask the UN General Assembly to approve it, even in the absence of an agreement with Israel. In the Arab public, the Palestinian statements of intention have had less credibility; a majority of Arab respondents (56%) think the chances that an independent state will be declared unilaterally are low. A segmentation of the Jewish public's answers by the respondent's self-affiliation with the political right, center, or left revealed that in all three camps, a majority regards the chances of a unilateral declaration as high, although the majority is smaller in the right-wing camp (58%) than in the center and the left (both 70%).

Next, we sought to clarify the public's view of the chances that a Palestinian declaration will garner a large majority in the UN General Assembly. Seventy-five percent of the Jewish public and 68% of the Arab public expect a large majority there to recognize the Palestinian state even if Israel opposes this. Here, too, a segmentation of the answers to this question by political camps reveals that a majority of the Jewish public in all camps foresees a large UN majority, though with variance: among those defining themselves as right-wing, 72% foresee a large majority, among the center – 80%, and among the left – 84.5%.

How would Israel and the United States in a UN vote on a Palestinian declaration of independence? Based on their familiarity with the current Israeli government and its positions, 71% of the Jewish public and 64% of the Arab public think Israel will not recognize a Palestinian state that is declared unilaterally. Even before Obama's speech at the State Department and his speech to AIPAC, a majority (Jews – 57%, Arabs – 60%) similarly does not expect the U.S. government to recognize the Palestinian state under such circumstances. The Jewish public, however, is divided on the question of whether

Israel can or cannot allow itself not to recognize an independent Palestinian state if such a state is indeed declared and recognized by the UN: 48% think Israel can refrain from recognition while 47% say it cannot. As for the Arab public, a majority (53%) believes Israel can allow itself not to recognize the Palestinian state if such a state is declared and recognized by the UN. A segmentation of the answers to this question by political camps reveals major disparities: while in the right-wing camp, a majority of Jews (56%) thinks Israel can allow itself to refrain from recognizing the independent Palestinian state even if it is declared by the Palestinians and recognized by the UN, a majority of the center (57%) and of the left (54%) thinks that Israel cannot allow itself to refrain from recognizing such a state.

Since the declaration of the Palestinian state and its recognition are not, of course, the end of the story, we asked the question: what comes next? About two-thirds of the Jewish public (64%) thinks a declaration of Palestinian independence and recognition of the state by the UN will damage Israeli interests. A segmentation by political camps found that a majority in all camps expects such damage. Again, variance was found, but this time the distribution is different, and it is the center that anticipates more damage than other camps: 68% of the center expects damage, 64% of the right, and 52% of the left. Similar results were found in response to our question regarding the possibility that following the anticipated recognition, the international community will exert substantial pressures on Israel—for example, by means of economic sanctions—so as to force Israel to withdraw from the territories. In the Jewish public as a whole, 74% say this is what will happen (center – 81%, right – 71%, left – 68%). In the Arab public, only a minority – 24% – believes that declaration and recognition will harm Israel's interests. However, a majority (68%) anticipates that such a move will lead to heavy pressure on Israel if Israel does not withdraw from the territories as would be warranted by a declaration and recognition of this kind.

An additional question asked whether it would have been possible to prevent declaration and the recognition if Israel had demonstrated more political flexibility in its contact with the Palestinians in the past. Fifty-five percent of the Jews think Israel could not have prevented this Palestinian move even if it had shown greater political flexibility. A segmentation by political camps reveals profound gaps: only a minority (22%) of the right, compared to a majority of the other camps (52% of the center and 74% of the left), think moderating Israel's policy could have prevented the Palestinian move. Moreover, the majority of the Jewish sample as a whole (60%) does not believe Israel should moderate its positions now so as to prevent the Palestinian move, assuming that it is still possible to prevent it, while 64% say that even if Israel significantly moderates its positions, the chances are slim that the Palestinians will not declare an independent state and seek UN recognition for it. Again, a segmentation by camps reveals substantial disparities in views:

whereas only a minority (21.5%) of the right believes Israel should moderate its positions now in an attempt to prevent a declaration and recognition, a majority in the center and the left was found to favor such moderation (51% and 69%, respectively). These differing preferences stem from different, though not contradictory, assessments of whether moderating Israel's stance would yield the desired result: 19% of the right thinks moderation could still prevent a declaration and recognition, compared to 32% of the center and 47% of the left. In other words, even among those who think Israel should moderate its positions, there is at least skepticism about the chances that this would prevent the Palestinian declaration. A majority of the Arab public (57%), however, believes the Palestinian move could have been prevented had Israeli policy been more moderate in the past, 60% think Israel should moderate its positions at present, and 58% think that an Israeli moderation of this nature could still prevent the Palestinian move. Beyond the external pressures, especially against the backdrop of the popular revolts that are raging in many countries of the region, we asked what will happen within the territories themselves if the declaration and recognition go through and Israel does not withdraw from the territories. A large majority (Jews – 70%; Arabs – 62%) believes that following the declaration of an independent Palestinian state and its recognition by the UN, the chances of an intifada erupting in the territories are high. Fifty-eight percent of the Jews (50% of the Arabs) also think the Palestinian leadership will encourage such an intifada. No significant differences were found between the different political camps regarding these questions.

The current survey also touched upon some additional issues:

Negotiations with the Palestinian unity government: Surprisingly, opinions in the Jewish public as to whether Israel can continue negotiating with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas are divided: 38% support the position that it is possible to conduct negotiations even if Hamas is in the government, since the alternative of reaching an agreement with a Palestinian government that represents only half of the people would be pointless. Thirty-five percent say Hamas's inclusion in the Palestinian leadership means Israel cannot negotiate with the Palestinian Authority, while 24.5% oppose negotiating with the Palestinians whether or not Hamas is part of their government. Here a segmentation by political camps reveals dramatic, though not unexpected, disparities: a minority of 23% of the right, compared to 54% of the center and 74% of the left, is in favor of negotiations with a national unity government that includes Hamas. In the Arab public, 78% agree with the first position presented – i.e., that Israel should negotiate with a unity government that includes Hamas.

The Nakba Day events: We asked whether the Arab demonstrations and the crossing of Israel's borders from different directions signal the beginning of a popular uprising similar to those that are surging through the countries of the region at present. Fifty percent of the

Jewish public say yes, but an almost equivalent minority (44.5%) believes the opposite. A segmentation by political camps showed no systematic differences in this case. The Arab public is also divided on this question: 44% see the events of Nakba Day as the start of a popular uprising similar to the others in the region, while 42% do not.

Israel's regional situation vis-à-vis the wave of popular uprisings in the region: In the Jewish public, the highest rate (45%) thinks Israel's situation has not changed, 39% believe it has worsened, and 11% think it has improved. In the Arab public, a large majority (72%) says Israel's situation has worsened, 20% sees the situation as unchanged, and a small minority (6%) thinks there has been an improvement.

The Negotiations Index for May, 2011

The Peace Index project includes ongoing monitoring of the Israeli public's attitudes towards peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The monthly Negotiation Index is comprised of two questions, one focusing on public support for peace negotiations and the other on the degree to which the public believes that such talks will actually lead to peace. The aggregated replies to these two questions are calculated, combined, and standardized on a scale of 0-100, in which 0 represents total lack of support for negotiations and lack of belief in their potential to bear fruit, and 100 represents total support for the process and belief in its potential. Each month, the Negotiations Index presents two distinct findings, one for the general Israeli population and the other for Jewish Israelis.

Negotiations Index: General sample 47.4; Jewish sample 44.4.

The Peace Index is a project of the [Evans Program for Conflict Resolution](#) at Tel Aviv University and [the Israel Democracy Institute](#). This month's survey was conducted by telephone on May 17-18, 2011 by the Dahaf Institute. The survey included 600 respondents, who constitute a representative sample of the adult Jewish population of Israel. The measurement error for a sample of this size is 4.5%; statistical processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay.