

Peace Index October 2014

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This month's index deals with the urgent issue of the Temple Mount, Israeli policy in the territories, U.S.-Israeli relations, and Sweden's recognition of a Palestinian state.

• **Attitudes toward Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount:** In recent years the issue of the Temple Mount and Jewish prayer on it has become central to the thoughts and activities of growing circles of the Israeli Jewish public. Recently there has also been an increase in the phenomenon of Jews, including cabinet ministers and Knesset members, who try—despite the legal and Halachic prohibitions—to pray on the mount. This is encouraged by a number of rabbis who have issued rulings that permit prayer on the mount and urge those who accept their authority to go there and pray. The ultimate goal of these adjudicators and their followers is to bring about a change in the government's policy, which prohibits Jewish prayer at the site mainly so as to prevent conflict with the Muslim world. The findings of the survey show that, indeed, a certain majority of the Jewish public (56%) currently favors continuing the policy of prohibiting Jews from praying on the mount, but over one-third (38.5%) think the prohibition should be canceled even if this change leads to bloodshed. Similarly, while almost half (47%) support the ruling of most of the haredi and national-religious rabbis that Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount is forbidden until the coming of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple, about one-fourth (26%) back the ruling of those rabbis who permit Jews to pray on the mount even now. A segmentation by the interviewees' religiosity revealed that the traditional-religious, the religious, and the nonreligious traditional sectors showed the highest rates of support for changing the government policy that prohibits Jewish prayer on the mount (49%, 46.5%, and 44% respectively), while the secular and haredi sectors had the lowest rates in favor of a change (34% and 17% respectively).

In this context we also asked about the rabbinical ruling that forbids Jewish prayer on the mount. A huge majority of the haredim (96%) oppose changing this ruling, compared to 60% of the religious. It should be noted that among the secular a very high rate (more than one-third) did not answer this question.

• **Assessing the chances for a Jewish-Muslim agreement on prayer on the Temple**

Mount: Less than one-third of Jewish Israelis (31%) believe there is currently a chance of reaching an agreement that would enable the members of both religions to pray at the site, while the majority thinks there is no chance of this whether because of the Muslim side (30%), the Jewish side (4%), or because of both sides together (29%). The assessment of the chances of reaching such an agreement is more optimistic when the matter is put in the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement. In such a situation, the rate of those who believe it would be possible to reach an agreement (45%) is only slightly lower than the rate who do not believe in such a possibility (49%), whether because of the Muslim side (26%), the Jewish side (2%), or because of both sides (21%). As these data show, the rate of those who ascribe the lack of a chance to reach an agreement to the Muslim side, both in the current situation and in one of a comprehensive agreement, is much higher among the Jewish interviewees than the rate who ascribe the low probability of an agreement to the Jewish side.

Among the Arab respondents there is also a majority (64%) that thinks there is currently no chance of reaching an agreement on prayer for the two sides on the mount. In the situation of a comprehensive peace agreement, a smaller majority (53%) thinks there is currently no chance of reaching an agreement. Interestingly, whereas under the current situation the rate of the Arab interviewees who pin the blame on the Jews for the inability to reach a settlement is higher than the rate of those who put the responsibility on the Muslims (because of the Jews—21%, because of the Muslims—9%), when it comes to the situation of a peace agreement, conversely, 24% place the responsibility on the Muslim side and only 10% on the Jewish side.

• **The motive for renewing the building in the territories:** To the question of what was the main reason Netanyahu decided to renew the building in the territories, about two-thirds of the Jewish respondents (64%) said he did it to shore up his status on the right and among the settlers. Only a small minority (22%) think the decision stemmed from a real belief that renewing the construction will serve Israel's national interests. A segmentation of the responses to this question by voting in the 2013 Knesset elections shows that Likud voters are almost evenly split between those who think he made the decision out of a real belief (42%) and those who see it as aimed at augmenting his status on the right (38%). Among voters for all the other parties, from right to left, there is clearly more support for the view that Netanyahu decided to renew construction in the territories so as to boost his standing in the right-wing camp and not out of a real belief that this doing so serves Israel's national interests. The same is true for the distribution of views among the Arab interviewees.

• **Yaalon's decision to prevent Palestinians from riding buses that settlers use:** Among the Jewish respondents a clear majority (56%) supports the decision by Defense Minister Yaalon to prohibit Palestinians from riding these buses. On this issue a large gap was found between respondents according to their self-placement on the political-security spectrum. Whereas on the right a large majority (70%) favors Yaalon's decision, in the center about one-half back it (51%) while on the left only a small minority (11%) agrees with it. Among the Arab respondents a clear majority opposes the decision.

• **The terror attacks:** In the debate being waged on how to define the recent spate of terror attacks, a large majority of the Jewish public (58%) sees them as individual acts carried out by local initiative. About one-third (32%), however, hold the contrary opinion that these acts mark the start of an organized intifada. As for the right way to prevent such terror attacks, over half (52.5%) think the peace talks should be renewed

while about one-third favor suspending all political contacts on peace. Five percent support a continuation of the current situation. Almost half of the Arab interviewees did not answer this question. Among those who did, the rate of those who think these are local initiatives was a bit higher than the percentage of those who saw them as the inception of a third intifada. A huge majority (81%) of the Arab interviewees think the way to deal with the recent terror incidents is to renew the political negotiations on peace.

- **U.S.-Israeli relations:** Over the past month there were several indications of a deterioration in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. We asked two questions on this issue, one on the governmental level and the second on the level of the general public. The findings show that a decisive majority (69%) of the Jewish public assesses the relations between the Israeli government and the U.S. administration under President Obama as very poor or moderately poor, while only 28% define these relations as very good or moderately good. However, when it comes to the relations between the Israeli people and the American people, the perception is the opposite: 82% define the relations between the two peoples as very good or moderately good and only a small minority (11%) sees these relations as very poor or moderately poor. This evaluation apparently explains why the Jewish public is not overly worried about the ongoing crisis between the Israeli government and the U.S. administration, since the prevailing view (72%) is that this crisis will not deteriorate to the point that the United States is no longer a close ally of Israel. As for responsibility for the crisis in relations between the two states, the Jewish public thinks the blame falls more on the American side (47%) than on the Israeli side (30%). Eighteen percent assign the blame equally to the two sides.

A cross-checking between political-security placement and attribution of blame for the crisis in relations reveals that *on the right*, only 21% blame the Israeli side, the majority (68%) blames the American side, and 8% blame both sides, while *on the*

center 35% blame Israel, 27% blame the U.S., and 31% blame both sides, and *on the left* a very high majority (67%) blame Israel, only 11% blame the U.S., and 16% blame both sides.

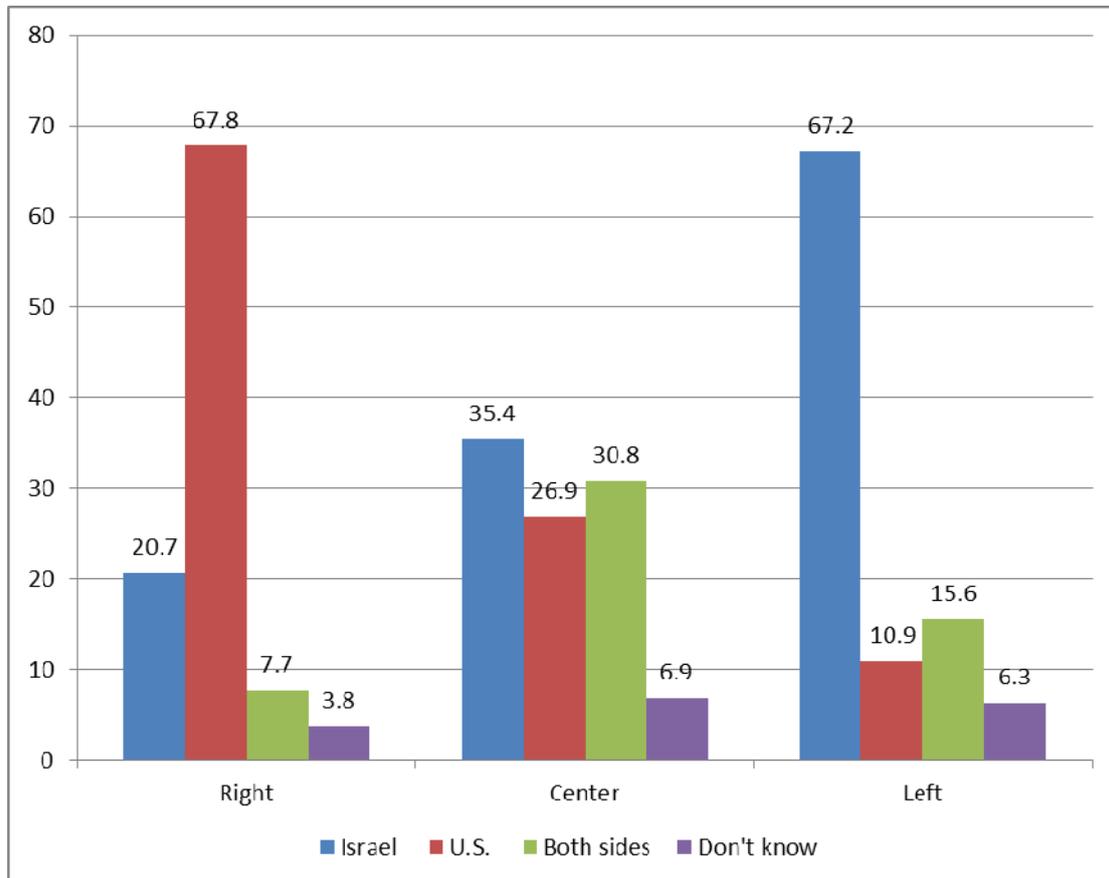
We asked about what a rift in the relations would mean if it were to occur. In the Jewish public, the highest rate according to our findings (47%) thinks a reduction in U.S. support would severely damage Israel's national security. Some 40%, however, believe that a reduction in U.S. support would in fact cause Israel to rely itself and strengthen its independence.

Among the Arab interviewees, the majority (50%) defines the relations between the Israeli government and the Obama administration as very good or moderately good, and a higher rate (69%) likewise characterizes the relations between the American people and the Israeli people. A large majority (72%) sees low chances of a deterioration in the crisis of relations to the point that the United States ceases to be a close ally of Israel. As for responsibility for the crisis in relations, the most common answer (34%) is that Israel is more responsible, 10% think the Americans are more responsible, while 33% assign equal responsibility for the situation to the two sides.

- **The Swedish government's recognition of the Palestinian state:** It appears that the large majority of the Jewish public is disturbed by the implications of the Swedish government having recognized the Palestinian state even in the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Sixty-one percent think that if other countries follow in Sweden's tracks, Israel's national interests will be harmed. An analysis of the findings according to the interviewees' political-security placement shows that in all three camps—right, center, and left—a majority thinks Israel's interests would be harmed, though on the left the majority is a bit smaller (53%) than on the right (62%) and in the center (64%).

Peace Index—46.7 (Jewish sample—41.1)

Graph of the month: Who in your opinion is more responsible for the ongoing crisis in relations between the Israeli government under Netanyahu and the U.S. administration under President Obama? (% , Jews, by political camp)



The Peace Index is a project of the Evens Program for Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University and the Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute. This month's survey was conducted by telephone on November 3-5, 2014, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 603 respondents, who constitute a representative national sample of the adult population aged 18 and over. The survey was conducted in Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.1\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. Statistical processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay.