For Immediate Release:

U.S. Public Opinion Supports Palestinian State and Right to Return

Washington—American voters support the implementation of Palestinian rights in any future Middle East peace agreement.

A survey of 890 likely voters nation-wide showed 66 percent supporting the Palestinian right to independent statehood—with only 13 percent opposed to that right.

The poll, commissioned by the Arab American Institute (AAI), was conducted by Zogby International (ZI) of New York. The AAI/ZI poll was conducted from July 14-17, 2000 and had a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.4 percent.

The poll focused on principles and not on the modalities of implementation. These issues and the forms of U.S. participation in final arrangements reached at Camp David may be addressed in a future poll.

The results of the July 14-17, AAI/ZI poll are as follow:

“President Clinton is currently meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat at Camp David to seek a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. I am going to read you a few of the issues that must be decided by the Israelis and the Palestinians.”

1. Do you agree or disagree with the Palestinian right to establish an independent state?

32.8% Strongly Agree < 66% Agree

33.3% Somewhat Agree

5.4% Somewhat Disagree < 13% Disagree

7.5% Strongly Disagree
2. Israel has claimed all of Jerusalem as its capital. Palestinians say that East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 war, should be the site of the Palestinian capital. In your view, should Jerusalem be... 

22% Entirely Israeli  
43.5% A divided or shared capital between Israelis and Palestinians  
14% Neither  

3. Israeli law holds that Jews from anywhere in the world have the right to come to Israel and become citizens of that state. However, since Israel was created in 1948, millions of Palestinians have become refugees. The UN passed a resolution saying that Palestinians have the right to return to their homes. Do you agree or disagree that Palestinians have this right to return? 

51.4% Strongly Agree  
< 74% Agree  
22.6% Somewhat Agree  
4.7% Somewhat Disagree  
< 9% Agree  
4.5% Strongly Disagree 

4. In general, do you agree or disagree with President Clinton’s handling of the Middle East peace effort? 

28.7% Strongly Agree  
< 63% Agree  
34% Somewhat Agree  
6.7% Somewhat Disagree  
< 23% Disagree  
14.9% Strongly Disagree 

“These poll results show that American voters will support a peace agreement that recognizes, in principle, Palestinian rights in a number of areas. These results show continued steady improvement in some American voters’ appreciation of Palestinian concerns. The peace process, the present involvement of President Clinton and a sense of urgency that time is running out in an effort to reach a comprehensive agreement may all account for this improvement,” said AAI President Dr. James J. Zogby.
WASHINGTON WATCH

AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIANS GROWS

By

Dr. James J. Zogby ©
President
Arab American Institute
www.aaiusa.org

American voters are more strongly inclined to support a wide range of Palestinian rights than at any time in history.

This is the finding of a national poll of 890 U.S. likely voters commissioned by the Arab American Institute (AAI) and conducted by Zogby International (ZI). The AAI/ZI poll was conducted from July 14 to 17, 2000, and had a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percent.

Voters were questioned on three critical final status issues being negotiated at Camp David: the right of Palestinians to establish an independent state, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and the rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem. The results were strongly supportive in all three areas.

Sixty-six percent agreed that Palestinians have the right to establish an independent state. Only 13 percent disagreed with that right. A substantial 74 percent agreed with the UN resolution that Palestinian refugees have the right to return to their homes, only nine percent disagreed.

When asked whether they supported the exclusive Israeli claim to all of Jerusalem, only 22 percent of American voters agreed. Twice that number, 43.5 percent, on the other hand, agreed that Jerusalem also belonged to the Palestinians and should be shared or divided between the two peoples.

To understand the significance of these results it is important to compare them with earlier polls—both those from the 1970s and 1980s and those from the past six years.

During the late 1970s, the Carter Administration, as it was preparing for the first Camp David summit, collected polling data from a variety of available sources. The polls showed the U.S. public to be somewhat ambivalent on the issue of a Palestinian state. Depending on how the question was framed, the results varied, but were never overly positive.

For example, when in 1975, Gallup asked Americans whether Palestinians should be

recognized as a separate nation or should Palestinians continue to live as they are (in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and under Israeli rule) 36 percent said a separate nation, while 29 percent said they should continue as they are.

When asked again in 1979, the same question drew a similar result with 37 percent saying they supported a separate Palestinian nation and 25 percent not so inclined. After Israel's brutal invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the pro-Palestinian percentage increased to 40 percent with 17 percent saying that Palestinians should stay as they are.

A different wording of the question yielded different results. When, Newsweek magazine asked Americans if they supported a Palestinian state the numbers changed. In 1980, 33 percent said "yes" as opposed to 32 percent "no." By 1982 the supporters of a Palestinian state had increased to 37 percent, but the opponents also increased to 45 percent.

AAI/ZI polls have been asking the direct question of "support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state" since 1997. The results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much the same is true regarding the question of Jerusalem. When in 1978, Harris polls asked Americans if they believed that Israel should keep control over all of Jerusalem or surrender parts of it to the Arabs, 75% supported the Israeli position. Only 14 percent supported restoring Arab rights in East Jerusalem. In 1980, Harris again asked voters this question, but added an option of supporting international control of the Holy City. Still, 63 percent of Americans supported Israeli control, 26 percent chose internationalizing the city, while only 22 percent supported restoring the East to Arab control.

Once the current peace process began, attitudes began to shift toward a more balanced approach to this sensitive issue. Printed below are results since 1995 in answer to the question: "Israel has claimed all of Jerusalem as its capital. Palestinians say that East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 war, should be the site of the Palestinian capital. In your view, should Jerusalem be..."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Entirely Israeli</th>
<th>Shared or Divided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is somewhat ironic that the third major issue covered in the 2000 AAI/ZI poll, the right of Palestinian refugees to return, was never a topic of discussion in polls of the 1970s or 1980s. It is a fact, that this topic is only receiving serious public discussion now that it is being negotiated as part of the final status talks at Camp David.

In the early years when this issue, the cornerstone of the entire Arab-Israeli conflict, was raised in polls it was framed in a rather vague manner. As described above, Americans would be asked whether Palestinians should have a homeland or “continue as they are.” Polls, in other words, followed the biases inherent in the political discourse and were framed as the pro-Israeli sentiment of the era would dictate.

It is, therefore, quite striking that today 74 percent of American voters support the right of Palestinians to return to their homes—a majority so substantial that it represents a consensus position shared by every sub-group in the poll.

There are a number of factors that account for this strengthening of the Palestinian position in U.S. opinion today. First, there are the historical reasons that have changed attitudes during the past 25 years; the first Camp David Summit, the Israeli invasion into Lebanon, the Intifada, the role of Arab allies in the Gulf War and the developments surrounding the Madrid process and the Oslo Accords. All have contributed to a changing landscape, which brought about incremental improvements in the Arab and Palestinian position and a balancing of attitudes regarding Israel.

More recently, President Clinton’s treatment of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, and Palestinians in general, the tensions that developed between the United States and Israel during the Netanyahu era, and Israel’s repeated “unilateral acts” that received U.S. criticism have further contributed to changing U.S. opinions.

Now, with Palestinians and Israelis sequestered at Camp David and the peace process entering its “end game,” Americans are focusing more sharply on all of the issues at stake in this process. In this context, a Palestinian state is an assumed fact and a “shared Jerusalem” and the “right to one’s home” appears as logical, “old-fashioned” values like justice and fair play.