



The Middle East Peace Process: Opportunity in Face of Despair

Results of a Comprehensive Survey

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Highlights:

- 65 percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support direct negotiations based on a settlements freeze and international guarantees; only 8 percent support unconditional direct negotiations.
- Palestinians blame American (inaction), Israeli (lack of recognition of Palestinian rights) and Palestinian (internal division) for lack of progress in the peace process.
- 62 percent support, accept or tolerate a two-state solution.
- 88 percent strongly believe that Palestinian refugees have the right for (return and compensation), but 64 percent could live with a solution where refugees return to the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.
- 66 percent are willing to accept or tolerate an equivalent swap of land as part of a broader agreement.
- Palestinians are equally split over the division of Jerusalem to East and West based on the 1967 borders.
- 50 percent support and 50 percent oppose that the (Islamic and Christian sites be under Palestinian sovereignty, while the Wailing Wall be under Israeli sovereignty).
- 95 percent consider a comprehensive peace agreement, if implemented, as the end of the conflict.
- 56 percent believe that only peaceful means are the best means to end the occupation.
- 58 percent believe that Palestinians and Israelis have a chance to coexist and live side by side.

Introduction

The Arab World for Research and Development completed a comprehensive survey among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The survey gauged the opinions of 3000 adult Palestinians on issues related to the peace process. The survey comes at a critical juncture, as the Palestinian and Israeli governments prepare to resume direct talks for the first time in 20 months. Negotiations will occur as the Israeli government settlement moratorium comes to a close, and will face significant challenges on longstanding and sensitive issues such as the status of Jerusalem and refugees.

The latest survey by AWRAD shows a Palestinian commitment to peace and coexistence, and provides a glimpse of hope and realism within desperation and entanglement. The survey reveals three levels of interrelated opinions that reside within the psyche of the majority of Palestinians:

- Intellectual and emotional commitment to the principles of justice exemplified in holding into what they believe to be the true narrative of modern Palestinian history.
- Recognition of the desperate political context and the widespread perception of deterioration with no signs of real change for the better,
- Rising from the ashes to a middle ground between (dream and desperation), within a forward – looking interpretation of reality (exemplified by commitment to a peace process, negotiations, a two-state solution and long term coexistence based on parity).

A. Commitment to ideals will live on

The survey shows that Palestinians will not surrender their narrative of the conflict, and will not give up on their ideals emotionally and intellectually. They will, as long as the current conditions prevail, hold into their principles in respect to Palestine. For example¹:

- 91 percent of the respondents will say that historic Palestine—from the Jordan River to the sea—as the national homeland of the Palestinians is essential or desirable.
- 94 percent find that the right of return and compensation is essential or desirable.
- 93 percent believe that it is essential or desirable that Palestine has an army.
- 97 percent believe that all the settlers should leave the Occupied Territories and settlements should be closed.
- 94 percent regard that all of Jerusalem—East and West—should remain a part of Palestine.
- 93 percent believe that East Jerusalem, with all of its holy sites, should stay under Palestinian sovereignty.

¹ Similar questions were asked in an opinion poll carried out by ONEVOICE with AWRAD, and supervised by Dr. Irwin Collin and Dr. Nader Said, refer to http://www.onevoicemovement.org/programs/polling_contents.php.

B. Dreams in the midst of desperation

The survey shows that Palestinians have no illusions about the peace process. They do not have high expectations for peace process negotiations that have been taking place intermittently since 1991—almost 20 years. They have no trust in the parties that have been involved in this process. For example:

- As to the responsibility for the lack of progress in the peace process, an equal percentage of respondents (about 82 percent) blame the American lack of commitment, an Israeli lack of desire for peace, and Palestinian internal division.
- Other parties such the United Nations, the EU, and the Arab League are also blamed.
- In comparing the high percentage of those who believe that historic Palestine is the right of the Palestinians, only 10 percent believe that historic Palestine is likely to be achieved within the coming ten years. About the same percentage (9 percent) believes that a two-state solution will likely to take place. Minimal expectations exist for a one-state solution. The largest group of respondents (38 percent) believes that the status quo will continue. At the same time, 27 percent believe that the situation will deteriorate.
- While 94 percent believe that the right of return and compensation is the best solution, only 12 percent believe that it is likely to be implemented within the coming ten years. About 46 percent believe that the status quo will continue and 22 percent believe that the situation regarding reaching a just solution for refugees will deteriorate.
- The same pattern applies to the issue of settlements, as the desires clash with expectations, where only 13 percent believe that all settlers are likely to leave within the coming ten years. About 39 percent believe that the status quo will continue and 32 percent believe that the situation regarding the settlements will deteriorate.
- Only 9 percent believe that East and West Jerusalem is likely to be under the sovereignty of the Palestinians within the coming ten years. About 38 percent believe that the status quo for Jerusalem will continue and 33 percent believe that the situation regarding Jerusalem will deteriorate.
- Only 15 percent believe that Israel will withdraw from the 1967 areas within the coming ten years.

C. Commitment to peace and coexistence

In spite of longstanding principals and a desperate reality, Palestinians show commitment to peace and coexistence:

- 95 percent of respondents believe that a peace agreement, when reached and enforced, will be the end of the conflict between the two peoples.
- 77 percent support a decision by President Abbas to engage in negotiations with conditions or without conditions. About 45 percent support negotiations on the conditions of a settlement freeze and international assurances. About 11 percent want to start negotiations only if there is a freeze on settlements. Another 9 percent want negotiations only under international assurances and a timetable. About 8 percent support negotiations without any conditions. About 22 percent do not support any direct negotiations.
- As much as 56 percent believe that only peaceful means are the best means to end the occupation; 35 percent believe that negotiations are the best means to establish a Palestinian state and 19 percent believe that non-violent uprising is the best means. About 26 percent believe that attacks on soldiers and settlers within the Occupied Territories are the best means to end the occupation. Less than 7 percent believe that suicide attacks against civilians are the best means. Another 6 percent believe that attacks against soldiers only are the best means.
- In spite of the desperation and disillusionment, Palestinians are hopeful that negotiators will lead to a Palestinian state. When asked if negotiations will ever lead to a sovereign Palestinian state in the WBG, 18 percent said yes and 47 percent said maybe. In contrast, 32 percent do not believe that negotiations will ever lead to a sovereign Palestinian state.
- Even with the dismal prevailing conditions, as much as 58 percent believe that Palestinians and Israelis have a chance to coexist and live side by side. In contrast, 42 percent disagree.

D. Realistic solutions and scenarios

When provided with specific proposals, Palestinians provided realistic assessments of the situation and the future scenarios. This section will provide scenarios that are deemed to be within the reach of Palestinians within the current international resolutions and realities. In this analysis, we add the percentages of those who support, accept or tolerate such scenarios and compare them to the percentages of those who find these scenarios unacceptable.

D-1 Palestinian State

- **One- joint state:** As much as 53 percent are willing to support, accept or consider the idea of one-joint state in which Israelis and Palestinians are equal citizens between the Jordanian River and the sea. In contrast, 47 percent find this unacceptable.

- **Two-State solution:** As much as 62 percent are willing to support, accept or consider a two-state solution as a resolution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. In contrast, 38 percent find that unacceptable.
- **Confederation:** A confederation with Jordan or Egypt is unacceptable to 64 percent of respondents.

D-2 Refugees

- **Compensation without right of return:** About 68 percent of the general public in the WBG find compensation without the right of return to be unacceptable.
- **Limited numbers into Israel:** About 60 percent find that restricting the number of returnees to only family members to be unacceptable.
- **Closing the camps:** 51 percent do not support a scenario whereby the UN will close the refugee camps and resettle refugees with compensation outside of Israel. About 49 percent are willing—to varying degrees—to consider this option.
- **Right of return without compensation:** As much as 66 percent are willing to consider a scenario where refugees are given the right of return but not compensation. In contrast, 34 percent find this unacceptable.
- **Provide refugees with options:** 71 percent will consider a scenario where refugees are given a choice of either compensation if they do not wish to return, but with a choice of being resettled in the WBG or any other Arab country. About 29 percent find that unacceptable.

D-3 Security

Palestinians are willing to consider a number of scenarios in the field of security, especially which involve international and regional involvement:

- **Israeli presence in the Palestinian state:** 58 percent find it unacceptable to have Israeli observation posts within the Palestinian state even for agreed period. About 42 are willing to consider this option.
- **Israeli access to Jordanian borders:** 50 percent would be willing consider security access by Israel to the Jordan borders for agreed period.
- **International and regional presence:** 77 percent of respondents are willing to consider the presence of an international, regional, or Arab force as a replacement of the Israeli military in the Occupied Territories for agreed period within a signed peace agreement. About 23 percent find that unacceptable.
- **Transition to full Palestinian responsibility:** 84 percent are willing to consider a transition to full Palestinian control of internal security under the supervision of an international-Arab force. Only 16 percent find that unacceptable.

- **Boarders with Jordan:** 78 percent find it acceptable or tolerable that an international force is placed on the Jordanian boarders to ensure security. About 22 percent find that unacceptable.

D-4 Settlements

The majority of Palestinians are not compromising on the issue of settlements.

- **Taking up Palestinian citizenship:** 55 percent find it unacceptable that settlers who take up Palestinian citizenship be permitted to stay in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza). About 17 percent find that scenario tolerable. The remaining 28 percent find it acceptable, or desirable, or essential.
- **Moving settlers to large blocks:** 54 percent find it unacceptable that most settlements are dismantled, and settlers are moved to large blocks with exchange of land. About 18 percent find it tolerable and the remaining 28 percent find it acceptable, desirable, or essential.
- **Adjust boarders without settlers:** If settlements are not mentioned, as much as 66 percent are willing to consider the adjustment of the 1967 boarders through equivalent exchange of land. About 34 find that unacceptable.

D-5 Jerusalem

Jerusalem is very important to the Palestinians. That importance is somewhat elevated during the Ramadan fasting month, where spirituality and connection to holy sites are parts of the rituals of holy month. The poll was carried out two days before Ramadan and three days during the holy month.

- **Internationalization under multi-faith covenant:** As much as 61 percent are willing to support, accept or tolerate that Jerusalem is (internationalized as a city of peace under the authority of a multi-faith municipal covenant). About 39 percent find that unacceptable.
- **Internationalization under the UN:** About 51 percent would agree to a proposal to the internationalization of Jerusalem under the authority of the UN. Almost an equal percentage of the respondents find that unacceptable.
- **Division according to pre-1967:** Palestinians are divided over this scenario; 50 percent are willing to support and 50 percent find it unacceptable.
- **Current neighborhoods:** Dividing the city according to current Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods is unacceptable to 54 percent of respondents, while 46 percent are willing to support or consider such a scenario.

D-6 Holy sites

- **Freedom of access:** 55 percent will support or consider a scenario that guarantees freedom of access to holy sites and—without granting either side sovereignty over any site—renders Palestine the guardian of Islamic holy sites, Israel the guardian of the Wailing Wall, and continues the status quo of the Christian holy sites. About 45 percent find that unacceptable.
- **Sovereignty by each side:** Almost 51 percent will support or consider Palestinian sovereignty over Christian and Muslim holy sites (including the Temple Mount) and Israeli sovereignty over the Wailing Wall. Almost an equal percentage (49 percent) finds that unacceptable.
- **Neutral body:** 52 percent find it unacceptable that a neutral body, such as the UN, be made the guardian of the holy sites. In contrast, 48 percent will support or consider such a scenario.

E. Implementation

For these scenarios to be implemented, a number of elements must come together.

- **Referendum:** 90 percent indicate (as essential or desirable) that any peace agreement be subject to a referendum by the people of Palestine.
- **Prisoners:** 97 percent find it essential or desirable that all Palestinian political prisoners be released from Israeli jails.
- **End of conflict:** 97 percent agree with the statement that a peace agreement will be the end of conflict between both parties and enforced by both.
- **International monitoring:** 94 percent will support or consider the idea that an international body acceptable to both parties will be established to monitor and enforce the full implementation of an agreement.

F. Confidence building

There are number of confidence building measures that are necessary, as perceived by Palestinian respondents.

- **Priority to checkpoints, settlements and the Wall:** Over 87 percent perceive that the removal of checkpoints, demolishing the Wall, and freezing settlement activities are all essential elements in rebuilding confidence. Most of the rest see all of that as desirable, acceptable or tolerable.
- **Lifting the closure of Gaza:** 80 percent perceive that the lifting of the closure imposed on Gaza by Israel and Egypt is essential to rebuild confidence in the peace process. In addition, 18 percent perceive that as desirable, acceptable or tolerable.
- **Prisoners:** 72 percent find that releasing Palestinian political prisoners as essential for the peace process, with 24 percent finding that as desirable, acceptable or tolerable.

- **The Obama administration:** About two thirds of respondents believe that it is essential for the Obama administration to place a high priority on Middle East peace. In addition, 30 percent find that to be desirable, acceptable or tolerable.
- **Unilateral ceasefire:** 37 percent believe that it is unacceptable for Palestinians to continue a unilateral ceasefire. In contrast, 63 percent will support or consider such a proposal.
- **Firing rockets:** 28 percent find it unacceptable to stop firing rockets from Gaza into Israel. In contrast, 63 percent will support or consider such a proposal.

G. The Mitchell Mission

- A majority of respondents (57 percent) say that proximity talks, led by Mr. George Mitchell, did not achieve any progress in the peace process. 20 percent believe that the situation has gotten worse.
- About 14 percent believe that some progress was achieved.
- About 21 percent of respondents believe that proximity talks should continue until a freeze on settlements is declared and enforced.
- In contrast, 31 percent believe that direct negotiations are a better option.
- About 38 percent are ambivalent, indicating that they do not care for negotiations at this stage as they make no difference.
- Only 8 percent will accept negotiations without conditions, but 64 percent support direct negotiations with the conditions of a settlement freeze and international guarantees.
- Around 22 percent will not support direct negotiations.
- About 32 percent support the Arab Initiative to be the frame of reference for negotiations, and 25 percent support that the UN resolutions are the reference. Only 13 percent believe that the Road Map should be the reference.

For the full results of our comprehensive poll on the peace process, please refer to AWRAD's website: www.awrad.org, write to nader@awrad.org, or call us at 00970-2-2950957, or 00970599204527.