



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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No Desire for Greater U.S. Role in Resolving Conflict
MODEST BACKING FOR ISRAEL IN GAZA CRISIS

Also inside...

- General Support for Israel Remains Strong
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- Al Qaeda and Iran top international threats

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No Desire for Greater U.S. Role in Resolving Conflict

MODEST BACKING FOR ISRAEL IN GAZA CRISIS

Americans have a mixed view of the war in the Gaza Strip, and see it in much the same way as they viewed Israel's conflict with Hezbollah in 2006. While continuing to express strong general support for Israel, the public offers limited approval of Israel's decision to take military action in Gaza. However, Hamas is largely seen as primarily responsible for the outbreak of violence.

These are the principal findings of the latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Jan. 7-11 among 1,503 adults reached on landlines and cell phones. Overall public support for Israel has been undiminished by the war: 49% now say they sympathize with Israel in its dispute with the Palestinians while just 11% sympathize with the Palestinians. This division of opinion largely mirrors public attitudes in August 2006 during the Hezbollah war.

As to the situation in Gaza itself, more than three times as many people blame Hamas for the outbreak of violence there than blame Israel (by 41% to 12%). Nonetheless, just 40% approve of the military action Israel has taken in Gaza; 33% disapprove. Half of Americans say Israel's response to the current conflict with Hamas has been about right, while 24% believe Israel has gone too far. These views also are almost identical to those expressed about Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006.

There is little support for a greater U.S. role in resolving the Gaza crisis. Just 17% believe the United States should be more involved than it is currently, 27% say the United States should be less involved, and nearly half (48%) say it is about as involved as it should be. Again, these opinions closely replicate views of U.S. involvement in the war in Lebanon in 2006.

Strong General Support for Israel

<i>Who do you sympathize with more?</i>	Aug 2006	Jan 2009
Israel	52	49
Palestinians	11	11
Both (Vol)	5	5
Neither (Vol)	15	15
Don't know	<u>17</u>	<u>20</u>
	100	100

*Most responsible for outbreak of violence?**

Israel	12	12
Hezbollah/Hamas	42	41
Both (Vol)	6	5
Other	13	7
Don't know	29	37

Mixed Views of Israel's Actions

Israeli military action in Lebanon/Gaza...

Approve	45	40
Disapprove	33	33
Don't know	<u>22</u>	<u>27</u>
	100	100

Israel has...

Gone too far	23	24
Not gone far enough	15	7
Responded about right	44	50
Don't know	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100

U.S. Role in Resolving Conflict

US should be...

More involved	15	17
Less involved	28	27
As involved as it is	49	48
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100

What should US do?

Publicly support Israel	40	39
Say or do nothing	38	38
Publicly criticize Israel	8	9
Don't know	<u>14</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100

* Figures add to more than 100% because multiple responses were permitted.

August 2006 survey conducted during Israeli/Hezbollah conflict in Lebanon.

Partisan Gap Over Gaza

There are sizable partisan differences in opinions about the Gaza conflict and in overall support for Israel. By nearly three-to-one (55% to 20%), Republicans approve of the military action Israel has taken in the Gaza Strip. Independents, by a smaller margin (44% to 29%), also approve of Israel's actions. However, a plurality of Democrats (45%) disapproves of Israel's military campaign, while just 29% express a positive opinion.

Nearly two-thirds of Republicans (65%) say that Israel's response in Gaza has been about right, while very few (8%) believe Israel has gone too far. Fewer than half of Democrats (45%) say that Israel's response has been about right and more than a third (36%) say it has been excessive.

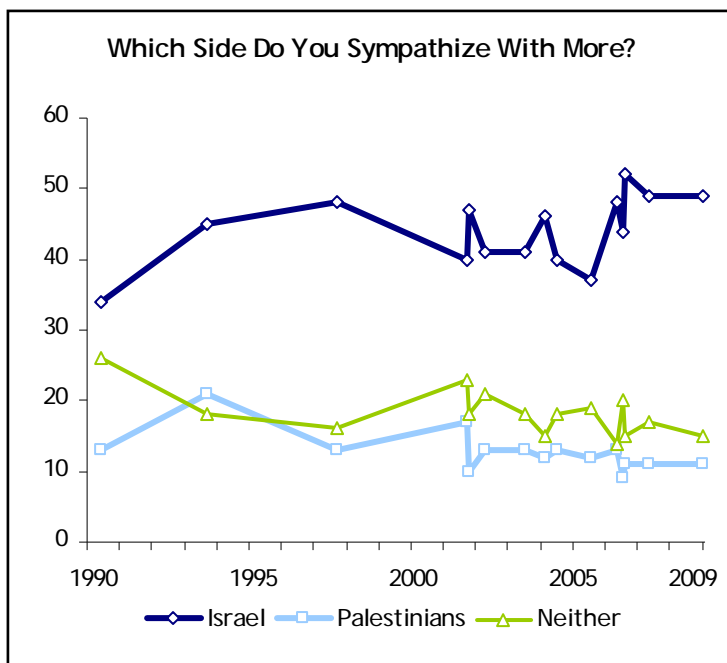
These divisions extend to attitudes about the proper U.S. response to the crisis. A majority of Republicans (56%) say that the United States should publicly support Israel, compared with 37% of independents and 34% of Democrats. The plurality view among independents and Democrats, shared by roughly four-in-ten in each group (42% of independents, 40% of Democrats) is that the United States should say or do nothing in this conflict.

Democrats More Critical of Gaza Campaign				
<i>Israeli military action in Gaza...</i>	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
Approve	40	55	29	44
Disapprove	33	20	45	29
Don't know	<u>27</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Israel has...</i>				
Gone too far	24	8	36	24
Not gone far enough	7	9	6	6
Responded about right	50	65	45	50
Don't know	<u>19</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>20</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>What should US do?</i>				
Publicly support Israel	39	56	34	37
Say or do nothing	38	32	40	42
Publicly criticize Israel	9	3	12	8
Don't know	<u>14</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>13</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>US should be...</i>				
More involved	17	15	18	17
Less involved	27	20	31	26
As involved as it is	48	58	43	50
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100	100	100

There are smaller partisan differences in views about the U.S. role in resolving the conflict. Fewer than one-in-five Democrats (18%), independents (17%) and Republicans (15%) say that the United States should be more involved than it is now in resolving the conflict. However, more Democrats (31%) and independents (26%) than Republicans (20%) say the United States should be less involved than it is now.

And in Mideast Sympathies

The public has long sympathized more with Israel than the Palestinians in the Middle East conflict and that continues to be the case. More than four times as many people say they sympathize with Israel rather than the Palestinians (49% to 11%); 15% say they sympathize with neither side, while a sizable proportion offers no opinion (20%).



There has been a wide partisan gap in Mideast sympathies in recent years. Currently, 69% of Republicans say they sympathize more with Israel in the Middle East conflict, compared with 47% of independents and 42% of Democrats. Partisan differences in basic Mideast sympathies have been about that large since 2006.

Nearly one-in-five Democrats (18%) and 10% of independents currently say they sympathize more with the Palestinians than Israel in their dispute; just 5% of Republicans say they sympathize more with the Palestinians.

There also are substantial ideological, religious and age differences in views of the Middle East conflict. Three-quarters of conservative Republicans (75%) say they sympathize more with Israel while just 3% say they sympathize more with the Palestinians. The balance of opinion is closer among other ideological groups. Liberal Democrats express the most sympathy for the Palestinians: 34% of liberal Democrats say they sympathize more with Israel while 26% say they sympathize more with the Palestinians.

	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %	R-D diff
Jan 2009	69	42	47	+27
May 2007	68	44	46	+24
Aug 2006	68	45	49	+23
July 2005	50	32	36	+18
July 2004	57	34	33	+23
July 2003	53	37	36	+16
Apr 2002	56	37	33	+19
Aug 2001	50	38	38	+12
Sept 1997	55	48	45	+7
Sept 1993	52	43	44	+9

White evangelical Protestants are far more likely to express greater sympathy for Israel than are members of other religious groups. Fully 70% of white evangelicals say they sympathize more with Israel while just 5% say they sympathize more with the Palestinians. About half of white mainline Protestants (48%) and white non-Hispanic Catholics (50%) side more with Israel, while about one-in-ten sympathize more with the Palestinians (13% of white mainline Protestants, 10% of white non-Hispanic Catholics).

Fewer than a third of the religiously unaffiliated (32%) expresses greater sympathy for Israel in the Mideast dispute, while 15% sympathize more with the Palestinians. A relatively large minority of the religiously unaffiliated (23%) sympathizes with neither side.

Those who are younger than 30 are less likely to sympathize with Israel than are older Americans. By 42% to 17%, more young people say they sympathize more with Israel than the Palestinians. Roughly half or more of those in older age groups sympathize more with Israel, while only about one-in-ten or fewer sympathize more with the Palestinians.

Major Threats: al Qaeda, Iran

Large majorities of Americans believe that al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups (77%) and Iran's nuclear program (65%) represent major threats to the well-being of the United States. Other international concerns are viewed as less threatening. Fewer than half (45%) see the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians as a major threat to the United States, which is comparable to the percentages that view political instability in Pakistan (47%) and China's emerging power (46%) as major threats.

The public perceptions of major international concerns have changed little over the past year. Somewhat fewer Americans view Russia's

	Israel	Pales- tinians	(Vol) Neither	(Vol) Both	DK
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	49	11	15	5	20=100
Republican	69	5	9	3	14=100
Conservative	75	3	8	3	11=100
Mod/Lib	58	7	13	3	19=100
Democrat	42	18	15	6	19=100
Cons/Mod	47	16	16	5	16=100
Liberal	34	26	15	7	18=100
Independent	47	10	16	6	21=100
18-29	42	17	18	2	21=100
30-49	49	11	14	7	19=100
50-64	55	9	14	4	18=100
65+	50	7	13	6	24=100
Protestant	57	10	10	4	19=100
White evang	70	5	5	2	18=100
White mainline	48	13	12	6	21=100
Catholic	47	11	18	5	19=100
White non-Hisp	50	10	16	5	19=100
Unaffiliated	32	15	23	5	25=100

	Major threat	Minor threat	Not a threat	DK
	%	%	%	%
Islamic extremist groups	77	15	4	4=100
Iran's nuclear program	65	23	6	6=100
N. Korea's nuclear program	53	32	8	7=100
Pakistan's political instability	47	37	8	8=100
China's emerging power	46	36	13	5=100
Israeli-Palestinian conflict	45	40	9	6=100
Russia's tensions w/neighbors	37	48	8	7=100

tensions with its neighbors as a major threat to the United States than did so last September 37% now, 44% then), shortly after Russia’s conflict with neighboring Georgia.

Nearly eight-in-ten Republicans (77%) view Iran’s nuclear program as a major threat to the United States, compared with 65% of Democrats and 63% of independents. There are comparable partisan differences in concerns over China’s emerging power (12 points) and Islamic extremist groups like al Qaeda.

Partisan Differences in Concerns about Iran, China, Islamic Extremism				
	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<i>R-D</i> <i>diff</i>
	%	%	%	
Iran’s nuclear program	77	65	63	+12
China’s emerging power	55	43	47	+12
Islamic extremist groups	86	75	75	+11
N. Korea’s nuclear program	60	51	53	+9
Israeli-Palestinian conflict	53	46	40	+7
Russia’s tensions w/ neighbors	46	41	31	+5
Pakistan’s political instability	48	53	42	-5

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,503 adults, 18 years of age or older, from January 7-11, 2009 (1,128 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 375 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 112 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2007 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2007 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the sample.

The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,503	3.0 percentage points
Form 1 sample	769	4.0 percentage points
Form 2 sample	734	4.0 percentage points

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
JANUARY 2009 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
 January 7-11, 2009
 N=1,503

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 31 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

NO QUESTION 32

ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=734]:

Q.33F2 I'd like your opinion about some possible international concerns for the U.S. Do you think that **(INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE)** is a major threat, a minor threat or not a threat to the well being of the United States? What about **(INSERT ITEM)**

		<u>Major Threat</u>	<u>Minor Threat</u>	<u>Not a Threat</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a.F2	China's emergence as a world power				
	January, 2009	46	36	13	5=100
	September, 2008	48	35	11	6=100
	Late May, 2008	50	31	10	9=100
	February, 2006	47	34	12	7=100
	Late October, 2005	52	31	10	7=100
	May, 2001	51	30	10	9=100
	July, 1999	53	33	10	4=100
b.F2	Growing tension between Russia and its neighbors				
	January, 2009	37	48	8	7=100
	September, 2008	44	41	10	5=100
TREND FOR COMPARISON					
	Growing authoritarianism in Russia				
	Late May, 2008	24	46	12	18=100
	February, 2006	22	45	16	17=100
	Late October, 2005	23	44	13	20=100
	May, 2001 ¹	27	46	12	15=100
	July, 1999	40	42	14	4=100
c.F2	North Korea's nuclear program				
	January, 2009	53	32	8	7=100
	September, 2008	55	33	7	5=100
	Late May, 2008	55	32	7	6=100
	February, 2006	60	27	6	7=100
	Late October, 2005	66	24	4	6=100
d.F2	Iran's nuclear program				
	January, 2009	65	23	6	6=100
	September, 2008	60	29	6	5=100
	Late May, 2008	62	25	8	5=100
	February, 2006	65	24	5	6=100
	Late October, 2005	61	27	5	7=100

¹

In May 2001 and July 1999, the item was listed as: "Political and economic instability in Russia."

Q.33F2 CONTINUED ...

		Major <u>Threat</u>	Minor <u>Threat</u>	Not a <u>Threat</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
e.F2	Political instability in Pakistan				
	January, 2009	47	37	8	8=100
	September, 2008	43	40	8	9=100
	Late May, 2008	41	40	9	10=100
f.F2	Islamic extremist groups like al Qaeda				
	January, 2009	77	15	4	4=100
	September, 2008	72	21	3	4=100
	Late May, 2008	72	18	4	6=100
g.F2	The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians				
	January, 2009	45	40	9	6=100

ASK ALL:

Q.A3 In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, which side do you sympathize with more, Israel or the Palestinians?

	<u>Israel</u>	<u>Palestinians</u>	(VOL.) <u>Both</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
January, 2009	49	11	5	15	20=100
May, 2007	49	11	5	17	18=100
August, 2006	52	11	5	15	17=100
July, 2006	44	9	5	20	22=100
May, 2006	48	13	4	14	20=100
July, 2005	37	12	5	19	27=100
July, 2004	40	13	7	18	22=100
Late February, 2004	46	12	8	15	19=100
Mid-July, 2003	41	13	8	18	20=100
April, 2002	41	13	6	21	19=100
Mid-October, 2001	47	10	8	18	17=100
Early September, 2001	40	17	6	23	14=100
September, 1997	48	13	5	16	18=100
September, 1993	45	21	3	18	12=100
<i>Chicago CFR 1990</i>	34	13	7	26	20=100
<i>Chicago CFR 1978</i>	38	12	8	15	13=100

QUESTIONS 34 THROUGH 53 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

NO QUESTIONS 54-55

ASK ALL:

On a different topic...

Q.56 Over the past few weeks, there has been a significant military conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. All things considered, who do you think is most responsible for the outbreak of the recent violence? [OPEN END; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR MORE THAN ONE. PROBE ONCE FOR CLARITY IF GENERAL RESPONSE]

TREND FOR COMPARISON

(escalation of violence between Israel/Hezbollah)

Aug 2006²

12	Israel	12	Israel
41	Hamas	42	Hezbollah
5	Both sides	6	Both sides
3	Palestine/Palestinians	5	Lebanon
1	United States/Bush	*	Syria
3	Other	2	Iran
37	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2	United States/Bush
		1	Palestinians
		1	Arabs/Muslims/Islam
		*	Terrorists/Extremists
		2	Other
		29	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION 57

ASK ALL:

Q.58 What should the United States do in this conflict? Should the United States government publicly support Israel, should it say or do nothing, or should it publicly criticize Israel?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

-- (Israel/Hezbollah conflict) --

Aug 2006 *CBS/NYT*
July 2006

39	Support	40	39
38	Say or do nothing	38	40
9	Criticize	8	7
<u>14</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>14</u>	<u>14</u>
100		100	100

ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=769]:

Q.59F1 Do you approve or disapprove of the military action Israel has taken in the Gaza Strip?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

-- (military action in Lebanon) --

Gallup/USA Today

Aug 2006 July 2006

40	Approve	45	50
33	Disapprove	33	38
<u>27</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>22</u>	<u>12</u>
100		100	100

²

Questions 56-62 show trends for comparable questions asked in 2006 about the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=734]:

Q.60F2 What do you think about the way Israel is responding in the current conflict with Hamas in the Gaza Strip?
Has Israel gone too far, not gone far enough, or has Israel's response been about right?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

-- (Israel/Hezbollah) --

		<u>Aug 2006</u>	<u>CBS/NYT</u> <u>July 2006</u>
24	Gone too far	23	26
7	Not gone far enough	15	9
50	About right	44	48
<u>19</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>18</u>	<u>17</u>
100		100	100

NO QUESTION 61

ASK ALL:

Q.62 In terms of resolving this conflict, do you think the United States should be more involved than it is now, less involved than it is now, or is it as involved as it should be?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

(Israel/Hezbollah conflict)

		<u>Aug</u> <u>2006</u>
17	More involved	15
27	Less involved	28
48	As involved as it should be	49
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>8</u>
100		100