Peace Index column—August 2015

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This month the Peace Index survey focused on two issues: Prime Minister Netanyahu’s struggle to thwart the nuclear deal with Iran in the U.S. Congress (a struggle that, at the time of writing, clearly did not bear fruit, though this was not yet known while conducting the survey), and some aspects of Israel-Hamas relations in Gaza, including the results of Operation Protective Edge.

**Preventing the nuclear deal with Iran:** Even before it emerged that Netanyahu’s efforts to thwart the deal had failed, a large majority of the Jewish public (64%) did not think the struggle he was waging in Congress had any chance to succeed. Moreover, the prevailing opinion in the Jewish public is that Netanyahu’s struggle exacted a heavy price for U.S.-Israeli relations, and also, to some extent, for the relations between Israel and American Jewry. Regarding relations with the United States, 48% thought Netanyahu’s campaign would damage them while 37% did not think it would affect them one way or the other. Only 8% believed the struggle would contribute to the relations between the states. We found that an especially large majority of Meretz (85%), Zionist Union (72%), and Yesh Atid (68%) voters saw Netanyahu’s campaign as causing damage to U.S.-Israeli relations. As for the campaign’s likely effect on the relations between Israel and American Jewry, the highest rate (43%) did not anticipate that it would affect them one way or the other while 29% thought it would affect them negatively. Seventeen percent viewed the prime minister’s struggle as contributing to Israel’s relations with this community. On this latter question, only among Meretz voters did we find a substantial majority (71%) who said Netanyahu’s fight to foil the deal would damage Israel’s ties with American Jewry.
The Iranian threat: Despite the estimate of the fruitlessness of Netanyahu’s struggle and the costs it would probably entail, it appears that the Jewish public sees the logic of the prime minister’s efforts. An overwhelming majority (73%) are sure or moderately sure that Netanyahu is right when he describes the deal with Iran as an existential threat to Israel. Here too Meretz voters are the exception, with a huge majority (90%) considering that Netanyahu is not right when he describes the deal as an existential threat to Israel. Among the voters for all of the other parties, including Zionist Union, the majority go in the opposite direction, that is, they agree with the prime minister’s view. An even larger majority (78%) do not think Iran will actually uphold its obligations under the deal. Among the Arabs, the largest group (45.5%) thinks Netanyahu is not right to characterize the deal with Iran as an existential threat to Israel. On the question of whether Iran will meet its commitments, this public is almost evenly divided into three parts: those who do not know, those who believe the answer is positive, and those who believe it is negative.

U.S.-Israeli relations: We found a less clear distribution of opinions on the question of whether Israel is right or not right to refuse to hold talks with the United States on the weapons and equipment that Washington is prepared to give it so that the deal does not harm Israel’s security. Some 46.5% think Israel’s position is right, while 37% say the opposite. However, whether or not Israel is right in this behavior vis-à-vis the United States, the Israeli public does not buy the view, conveyed by the leadership in Jerusalem, that the Americans have turned their backs on Israel: two-thirds of the Jewish public (66%) still think the U.S. administration is committed to maintaining Israel’s security. Only among Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu voters did we find a majority that believes the opposite—namely that the U.S. administration is not committed to Israel’s security (71% and 54% respectively).

A deal with Hamas: Amid the media reports that Israel is holding talks with Hamas behind the scenes, we asked: “Do you support or oppose Israel signing a long-term truce with Hamas, which would include Israel granting Hamas access to a seaport
and opening the commercial crossings to Gaza?” The Jewish public’s position on this question is firmly negative: 70% oppose such a deal. An analysis of the responses according to voting for the Knesset in the most recent elections revealed substantial gaps. Whereas, among voters for Meretz and Zionist Union, we found a majority in favor of signing such a deal (76% and 60% respectively), among voters for all of the other Zionist parties the clear majority opposed a deal with Hamas under such terms. As for the Arab public, a clear majority favors concluding such a deal—85%.

Similarly, though with a smaller majority, 57% of the Jews think Hamas is not interested at this time in maintaining quiet along the border with Israel. Here too the assessment of Meretz and Zionist Union voters differs from that of voters for all of the other parties: a majority of them see Hamas as indeed interested in quiet (Meretz—65%, Zionist Union—51%). On this question the highest rate among the Arabs answered “Don’t know” (45%); among those with an opinion, the highest rate view Hamas as interested in keeping things quiet (36%).

On whether Hamas is capable or incapable of controlling the other organizations now active in Gaza, opinions in the Jewish public are split: 47% think or are sure that it is capable whereas 46% think or are sure that it is not. Exceptions on this issue are Shas and Likud voters, a majority of whom see Hamas as unable to control the other organizations (Shas—62%, Likud—52%). Here too, among the Arabs, the largest group was the “Don’t knows” (40%). However, among those having an opinion the highest rate see Hamas as indeed capable of controlling the other organizations in Gaza (37.5%).

**Operation Protective Edge in retrospect:** How does the Jewish public view the decision to launch Operation Protective Edge, and its results, after one year? The survey shows that today the Jewish public still widely agrees (80%) that Israel’s decision to launch the operation was right. The only Zionist party where a majority of voters take a negative view of embarking on the operation is Meretz (62% think the
decision was not right). Among the Arabs as well, a clear majority (69%) say the decision to launch Operation Protective Edge was not right.

On the results of the operation, the Jewish public is divided: 50% define them as moderately good or very good, 47% as not good at all or not so good. On this question a majority of Meretz and Zionist Union voters consider that results were not good (Meretz—70%, Zionist Union—62.5%). Apparently influenced by the strong position of party leader Avigdor Lieberman, a major of Yisrael Beiteinu voters (56%) also negatively assess the outcomes of Protective Edge, though the reasons here are probably different if not the opposite of the left-wing voters’ reasons. About three-fourths (73.5%) of the Arabs view the operation’s results as not good.

**Negotiations index—47.5 (Jews—44.7)**

**Graph of the month:** To what extent are you sure or not sure that Prime Minister Netanyahu is right when he describes the nuclear deal with Iran as an existential threat to Israel? (%, Jews, sure or think Netanyahu is right, by voting in the 2015 elections)
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 August 30-31, 2015, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents, who constitute a representative national sample of the adult population of Israel aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is ±4.1% at a confidence level of 95%. Statistical processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay. [http://www.peaceindex.org](http://www.peaceindex.org)