

Arab and Jewish Americans see Eye-to-Eye, says Poll

*For the first time in decades,
both sides agree peace in the
Middle East is possible.*

By James Zogby and Debra DeLee

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Washington, DC - We were a little anxious when we decided to jointly poll Jewish and Arab Americans on Middle East peace this year.

Not that we haven't done it before. Similar surveys that we commissioned three times in the past six years have shown that American Jews and Arabs largely see eye-to-eye on the importance of efforts to achieve peace between Israel and its neighbours and on the vital role that the US must play to promote such efforts.

But this year is different. Israeli and Palestinian morale is at an all-time low. People in the region, despaired by ongoing violence, revenge, fanaticism, corruption and lack of leadership, have almost given up on hope for real peace. With no political horizon in sight, a sense of hopelessness dominates public opinion in the region. And Americans with ties to the region - whether Arabs or Jews - pick up on this sentiment. We were concerned that the grim situation on the ground would reduce support for peace efforts among our respective communities.

As expected, our poll shows that most American Jews (73%) and Arab Americans (63%) are mostly pessimistic about Middle East peace.

Yet despite the scepticism, most American Jews and Arabs, according to the poll, still want to see our government lead a diplomatic process that would bring peace and security to their brethren in the region.

Moreover, the poll shows that most will take that policy-priority to the voting booth in November 2008. Only 3% said that they are less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who promises to take an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, while a large majority of American Jews (68%) and Arabs (64%) said that they are more likely to vote for such a candidate. Significant majorities in both communities also said that they are more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who promises to support peace negotiations between Israel and Syria.

Our poll sends an unmistakable message to presidential candidates: withdrawing from America's traditional role as a peace-broker between Israel and its Arab neighbours is not the way to win the Jewish or Arab vote. Neither is downplaying the use of diplomacy in

other parts of the Middle East. In other words, a repeat of President Bush's Mideast policy approach will not attract Jewish or Arab voters. When asked how they rate President Bush's handling of the Arab-Israeli conflict, 76% of Arab Americans and a whopping 80% of American Jews said it was ineffective. In comparison, 65% of Arab Americans and 76% of American Jews rated President Clinton's handling of the conflict as effective. Clinton, it should be reminded, invested significant amounts of his time in trying to personally mediate between Israeli and Arab leaders.

Overwhelming majorities in both communities, Jewish and Arab, said they believe that such efforts are vital to American interests. 91% of Arab Americans and 96% of American Jews agreed that trying to achieve peace, security and dignity for Israelis and Palestinians is important to U.S. strategic interests. A large majority, 80% in each community, agreed that American efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will help the U.S. achieve its broader goals in the Middle East.

Further illustrating the strong support in both communities for diplomatic engagement in the Middle East is the high percentage of respondents in both communities who said that America should engage in serious diplomacy with Iran rather than focus on preparations for military action. 79% of Arab Americans and 73% of American Jews preferred focusing on diplomatic action.

While we hope that politicians take note of the poll's results, we will continue to follow the message this survey sends. **An overwhelming majority, some 90% in both communities, said that it is important for Jewish and Arab Americans to work together to promote a Middle East peace in which Israelis and Palestinians live in independent states of their own.** This survey reinvigorates us, the head of a Jewish American organisation and the head of an Arab American organisation, to keep on struggling, jointly, to achieve that goal.

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