

AMERICAN  
PUBLIC OPINION  
TOWARD ISRAEL  
& U.S. POLICY  
IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST:

POST SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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# AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD ISRAEL & U.S. POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: POST SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Most Americans (69%) believe that Iran supports terrorism, and they believe Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian authority (63%) also support terrorism. Most Americans also believe that the Palestinian people sympathize with the terrorists who attacked the United States.
- The vast majority of Americans (93%) believe that the United States and Israel should cooperate fully in combating terrorism.
- Some Americans link U.S. support for Israel as one of several factors responsible for the terrorist attacks on the United States. Such linkage, however, does not result in less support for Israel. Americans are just as likely to see the U.S. presence in the Gulf as a primary factor, among others. Most Americans do not want to change the U.S. policies that they see linked to the cause of terrorist attacks.
- Almost nine of every ten Americans believe that the U.S. should obtain the support of as many Arab and Islamic countries as possible. However, 70% believe that any country supporting terrorism, such as Iran or the Palestinian authority, should be excluded from the coalition.
- Over 60% of Americans believe that the Arab world seeks to destroy Israel, and only 15% believe that the Arab world sincerely accepts Israel's right to exist.
- It is not surprising, therefore, that 84% of Americans believe that Israel should do whatever is necessary to find and destroy terrorists who threaten to do serious harm to its citizens or nation.
- Only between 10% and 22% of those most recently polled after September 11 believe that the U.S. should distance itself from Israel. The vast majority say the U.S. should develop closer relations with Israel or keep them the same.
- Similarly, 63% of Americans want both military and economic aid to Israel to stay the same or be increased, with most wanting it to stay the same.
- A consistent majority of Americans, 51–55%, sympathize more with Israel than the Palestinians; between 8–14% sympathize more with the Palestinians — an imbalance which appears to have widened since the terrorist attacks on the U.S.
- Together, the polls show that only 33–38% of Americans favor the creation of a Palestinian state.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A number of polls were conducted from September 13 through October 31, 2001 concerning American attitudes towards Israel, Palestinians, and other countries in the Middle East. These polls also explore American attitudes on fighting terrorism. This report analyzes the results of these polls. The data reveal that the American public remains strong in their support for Israel, while Americans view Palestinians more negatively. The majority of Americans connect the Palestinians with terrorism. Still, a substantial minority of Americans support the creation of a Palestinian state.

While Americans advocate having Arab partners in a coalition to fight terrorism, they do not advocate having partners, such as Iran and the Palestinian Authority. They also believe that the United States and Israel should cooperate fully in fighting terrorism. Significant proportions of Americans consider support of Israel to be one of many causes of the terrorist attacks on the United States. However, Americans also remain steadfast in supporting America's ties to Israel. Although the terrorists identify Israel as a cause of their attacks, Americans reject their remedy of reducing U.S. support of Israel. Overall, there has been no public opinion backlash against Israel.

To summarize what Americans think, we utilize all publicly available national opinion polls taken and reported in the United States in the first six weeks following the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks that include questions relevant to the topic. We have identified thirteen such opinion surveys taken in the six weeks since the attacks (including two polls initiated by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research), as listed on the next page.

Except for the October 7 NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, each of these surveys is based on nationally representative samples of at least 1,000 Americans and used customary procedures of random-digital sampling and interviewing. The one-day October 7 poll is based on a smaller sample (N=513). "Benchmark results" from questions asked in earlier surveys are also presented, when available, to help assess changes over time.

This paper presents and analyzes the poll data and concludes with a brief discussion of implications for U.S. policy concerning Israel, the Palestinians, and nearby Middle East countries.

**Polls referenced in the report:**

- **September 13 - 14**  
Los Angeles Times poll
- **September 14 - 15**  
CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll
- **September 15 - 16**  
NBC News / Wall Street Journal poll,  
by Peter Hart and Robert Teeter
- **September 14 - 18**  
Institute for Jewish &  
Community Research poll,  
conducted by ICR  
(International Communications  
Research)
- **September 20 - 21**  
Newsweek poll, conducted  
by Princeton Survey Research  
Associates
- **September 19 - 24**  
Harris poll
- **September 20 - 23**  
New York Times/CBS News poll
- **September 28 – October 2**  
Institute for Jewish &  
Community Research poll,  
conducted by ICR
- **October 4 - 5**  
Newsweek poll, conducted  
by Princeton Survey Research  
Associates
- **October 7**  
NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll,  
conducted by Peter Hart and Robert  
Teeter
- **October 8 - 9**  
ABC News poll
- **October 12 - 14**  
New Atlantic Initiative/  
Chicago Sun Times poll  
conducted by McLaughlin and  
Associates
- **October 25 - 28**  
New York Times/CBS News poll

## AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

### 1) Who supports terrorism?

The recent major national media organization polls which are represented in this analysis, have not asked Americans whom — which countries — they think support terrorism. The Institute for Jewish & Community Research's second of two post – Sept. 11 opinion polls included such questions as well as another asking whether countries that support terrorism should be allowed to join the international anti-terrorism coalition.

Perhaps recognizing the hypocrisy that any other stance would involve, most Americans — seven out of every ten, on average — think that countries supporting terrorism should be prohibited from joining the international anti-terrorism coalition:

*Should a country that supports terrorism be prohibited from joining the international anti-terrorism coalition being formed by the United States? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2001)*

Yes – should be prohibited from joining	70%
No – should not be prohibited from joining	19%
It depends (volunteered)	4%
Don't know / Refused	7%

The question then becomes: Which countries are perceived to be involved with terrorism? The public has few doubts about Iran being a supporter of international terrorism: Americans believe that Iran supports terrorism by a margin of 63% to 10%:

*Do you believe the government of Iran supports terrorism in any way, or that it does not support terrorism? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2001)*

Yes – supports terrorism	63%
Yes, with comments	6%
No, with comments	1%
No – does not support terrorism	10%
Don't know / Refused	21%

The views about Syria's role are less one-sided, though among those with an opinion, twice as many Americans say Syria supports terrorism as the number who say it does not support terrorism. A rather large proportion, however, do not know, indicating that the public is less familiar with Syria:

*Do you believe the government of Syria supports terrorism in any way, or that they it does not support terrorism? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2001)*

Yes – supports terrorism	39%
Yes, with comments	3%
No, with comments	2%
No – does not support terrorism	18%
Don't know / Refused	37%

## **2) With whom should we cooperate in combating terrorism?**

In a choice between Syria and Israel as an ally in combating international terrorism, most Americans think Israel would make a more effective coalition partner:

*Which country do you believe would be a more effective ally of the United States in the fight against international terrorism – Israel or Syria? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2)*

Israel	68%
Syria	13%
Don't know / Refused	19%

The same poll also explored opinions about Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority: A majority of Americans, 63%, answered that the Palestinian leader and his government support terrorism:

*Do you believe that Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority support terrorism in any way, or that they do not support terrorism? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2)*

Yes – supports terrorism	54%
Yes, with comments	9%
No, with comments	3%
No – does not support terrorism	15%
Don't know / Refused	19%

Next, the public was asked a more potentially damning question — whether or not Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have ties with the terrorist organizations responsible for the attacks on the U.S.:

*Do you believe that Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have ties with the international terrorist organizations responsible for the attacks on the U.S., or that they do not have ties with those terrorist organizations? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2)*

Yes – do have ties	48%
No – do not have ties	27%
Don't know / Refused	25%

Nearly half of the American public believe that they do, while the rest are pretty evenly divided between those who think not and others who do not know. A majority, 54%, of the public thus sees Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority as engaged in some form of terrorism; somewhat fewer Americans, although nearly half, 48%, link them to those who attacked the U.S.

Just after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, television news broadcasts showed Palestinians dancing in the street in celebration. At a press conference the next day, Yasser Arafat, though perhaps sincere, was engaged in damage control, condemning the attacks and maintaining that the celebrating captured on television reflected the minority view of Palestinians. To what extent are the Palestinians seen by Americans as applauding the September 11 attacks?

*Following the terrorist attacks on the United States, a number of news reports showed pictures of Palestinians celebrating in the streets. Yasser Arafat issued a statement condemning the terrorist attacks and asserted that these celebrations do not reflect the feelings of most of the Palestinians. Which do you believe more accurately represents the feelings of most Palestinians about the terrorist attacks on the U.S., the pictures of Palestinians celebrating or Yasser Arafat's statement condemning the attacks? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2)*

The pictures	52%
Arafat's statement	34%
Don't know / Refused	14%

The survey results indicate that a majority of Americans disagreed with him: Only about one-third said they believe Arafat's statement, while over one-half of the public perceived that the celebratory dancing better symbolizes the views of most Palestinians.

Tying together the findings from the first two sections, the American public does not want to join forces with those in the Middle East seen as engaging in terrorism. By

inference, this would eliminate Iran, the Palestinians, and probably also Syria. Israel, a nation which is psychologically and militarily well-equipped to contribute as a result of years of unfortunate direct experience has expressed its willingness to assist the United States in its fight against terrorism. In fact, fully 93% (including 5% of those expressing qualified support) of Americans endorse the concept of full U.S-Israel cooperation in combating terrorism:<sup>1</sup>

*Do you agree or disagree that the U.S. and Israel should cooperate fully in combating terrorism? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research poll, Sept. 14-18, 2001)*

Agree	88%
Agree, with comments	5%
Disagree, with comments	1%
Disagree	2%
Don't know / Refused	4%

### **3) To what extent are America's pro-Israel policies seen as responsible for the September 11 attack?**

Six of the polls queried the public's perceptions on the key issue of precipitating factors. Each of them used different questions or methods of questioning, which complicates reaching a definitive conclusion about the balance of opinion on the perceived cause(s), especially, how much weight is placed on American support for Israel as a reason for the attack.

First, investigating possible facilitating conditions for the attack (as opposed to direct causes), U.S. support for Israel tops the list of reasons perceived as causing Arabs and Muslims to have more negative opinions about the U.S.:

*Do you think Arabs and Muslims around the world have a more positive or more negative opinion of the United States because of...? (ABC News poll, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>More Negative</u>
U.S. support for Israel	68%
The spread of Western culture in Arab/Muslim countries	64%
The presence of U.S. military forces in Arab/Muslim countries	63%
The U.S. role in leading the Persian Gulf War against Iraq	55%
Support for non-democratic governments in Arab/Muslim countries	55%

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<sup>1</sup> The question asked in the Institute for Jewish & Community Research's Sept. 14-18 poll — whether the U.S. and Israel should cooperate fully to fight terrorism — was not placed in the context of building an international coalition to pursue the attackers nor were the expected tradeoffs in Arab support made explicit.

As these numbers show, U.S. support for Israel is only one of a host of reasons viewed as causing Arab and Muslim countries to dislike the U.S. Although it is seen as a contributing cause by the highest proportion, other reasons are not far behind. For most Americans, an over-emphasis on changing U.S.-Israel relations misses the main point. Despite America's perception that it has a negative image among Arabs and Muslims, most think the U.S. need not do more to try to improve its image:

*Do you think the United States IS or IS NOT doing enough to try to improve its image among Arabs and Muslims around the world? (ABC News poll, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

Doing enough	70%
Not doing enough	25%
No opinion	5%

Turning now to perceptions of more proximate causes of the attack, the Sept. 13-14 Los Angeles Times poll finds that a majority of Americans point to U.S. policy in the Middle East:

*Do you think the terrorist attack last Tuesday was a direct result of United States' policy of intervention around the world or not?*

Yes	47%
No	36%
Partially (volunteered.)	6%
Don't know	11%

*Specifically, do you think the terrorist attack last Tuesday was a direct result of United States' policy in the Middle East or not?<sup>2</sup>*

Yes	58%
No	23%
Partially (volunteered.)	7%
Don't know	12%

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<sup>2</sup> Like the following question, excluded from the analysis, reference to "U.S. policy in the Middle East" is vague, making interpretation of the results ambiguous:

*Thinking about United States policies in general in the Middle East, should the United States consider changing its policies in the Middle East to try to reduce the violent backlash against the United States or should the United States not consider such changes? (Newsweek Poll, Oct. 4-5, 2001)*

Should consider changing policies	46%
Should NOT consider changes	43%
Don't know / Refused	11%

Who can say for sure to what policies and changes the question refers? This question also suffers from a lack of specificity that makes interpretation problematic.

If one accepts the inference that “United States’ policy in the Middle East” refers to the U.S.’s support for Israel, then one must conclude that a majority of Americans link the attack to this policy. But this assumption is fallacious: “U.S. policy in the Middle East” refers to more than the U.S. support for Israel and its position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The list of factors includes U.S. military presence in the region among a number of others. From this finding alone, some early news accounts leapt to the unfounded conclusion that U.S. backing of Israel is perceived as the main cause of the attack.<sup>3</sup>

Other questions asked in recent opinion surveys are less ambiguous. In asking about various motivators of the attack, one item specifies “opposition to U.S. ties to Israel and U.S. policies toward the Palestinian situation.” Although it is among the leading factors cited as a “major reason” for the attack, it is again one of several perceived motivators:

*Now I’m going to read you a list of different things that might have motivated terrorists to attack the United States. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason why terrorists have targeted the U.S.  
(Newsweek Polls, 2001)*

Factor seen as a “major reason” why the terrorists targeted the U.S.

	October 4-5 Poll	September 20-21 Poll
Opposition to U.S. ties to Israel and U.S. policies toward the Palestinian situation	58%	68%
Resentment of U.S. military and economic power in general	62%	64%
Opposition to the Gulf War and U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region	47%	53%
Economic hardships in Muslim countries created by Western capitalism	39%	37%
Resentment of the impact of U.S. culture, such as movies and other popular entertainment, in Muslim countries	28%	28%

In the first *Newsweek* poll, 68% regarded opposition to U.S. ties to Israel and policies toward the Palestinian situation as a major reason for the attack — a figure that drops ten points to 58% when the survey was repeated approximately two weeks later.

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<sup>3</sup> Newsweek, October 6, 2001.

Possibly, with additional time for reflection and additional information, one-tenth of the public changed their minds. (The decline was not mentioned in the presentations of the second poll's results — a finding at least as substantively significant as the value of the two-day poll snapshot percentage.)<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, 58% is not an inconsiderable percentage. One must read the item with care: The question was whether respondents think this was a major reason for the attack — not the major reason. These polls presented five different possible reasons, asking the public to respond to each one. In fact, one of the other items presented — “resentment of U.S. military and economic power” — was selected as often as “U.S. ties to Israel...” to explain the attack. In addition, sizable proportions attributed the attacks to other reasons, for example, to “opposition to the Gulf War and U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region.” As with similar questions, such opinions do not imply that Americans want to be more distant from Israel.

The Harris, New York Times/CBS News, and Institute for Jewish & Community Research polls provide even less evidence that Americans attribute the attacks exclusively or largely to this country's relationship with Israel. For example:

*When you think about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, do you place a lot of blame, some blame, or no blame at all on... (New York Times / CBS News Poll, Sept. 20-23)*

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>DK/NA</u>
The United States intelligence agencies, the CIA and the FBI?	10%	56%	30%	4%
United States policies in the Middle East over the years?	14%	54%	25%	7%
Security at U.S. airports?	40%	48%	11%	1%

As the data indicate, lax security at U.S. airports was seen as the primary culprit. “United States policies in the Middle East over the years” shares the blame, as does U.S. intelligence agencies, though most view these as deserving only “some” of the blame rather than “a lot.”

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<sup>4</sup> Newsweek Web Exclusive to MSNBC.com, October 8, 2001.

The Harris poll asked their respondents to choose one main reason among five presented to explain the attack:

*Which ONE of the following do you think is the main reason why those who attacked us and their supporters hate the United States? (Harris Poll, Sept. 19-24)*

Our democracy and freedom	26%
Our support for Israel	22%
Our values and way of life	20%
Our influence on the economy and lives of Middle Eastern countries	17%
Our economic and military policy	11%
Not sure	4%

While just over one in five respondents picked “our support for Israel” as the main reason, a slightly larger number picked “our democracy and freedom,” and almost as many selected “our values and way of life” and “our influence on the economy and lives of Middle Eastern countries” as the main reason for the attack. It is clear that the American public rejects any single reason for the attacks, recognizing instead a range of reasons and causes — just as they recognize a variety of reasons for Arab and Muslim dislike of America.

Respondents in the Institute for Jewish & Community Research poll were given two choices (but allowed to volunteer other answers) about the more likely cause of the terrorist attacks — U.S. support for Israel or the growing number of terrorist groups and protectors. In this survey, Americans widely reject U.S. backing of Israel as a prominent cause of the attacks, with fewer than one in five (19%) choosing this answer.<sup>4</sup>

*Which do you think is the more likely cause of the recent terrorist attacks on the United States – American support for Israel OR the growing number of Arab terrorist groups and the countries that harbor them? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research Poll, Sept. 14-18, 2001)*

American support for Israel	19%
Growing number of terrorist groups and countries harboring them	66%
Other response (volunteered)	6%
Don't know / Refused	9%

One more set of supporting data confirms that Israel is not the major factor in terrorist attacks on the U.S, this from the New Atlantic Initiative/Sun Times poll:

*Do you think that the United States' support of Israel was a major factor in the terrorist attacks against the United States, or do you think the attacks would have happened regardless of the United States' support of Israel? (NAI / Sun Times poll, Oct. 12-14, 2001)*

Major factor	30%
Would have happened regardless	63%
Don't know / Refused	7%

Finally, a New York Times / CBS News poll query asked whether Americans think that our having "paid too much attention to Israel" at the expense of her Arab neighbors is "a major cause of the U.S.'s problems in the Middle East today":

*Do you think a major cause of U.S. problems in the Middle East today is that the United States has paid too much attention to Israel and not enough attention to the Arab countries, or don't you think so? (New York Times / CBS News poll, Oct. 25-28, 2001)*

Yes	9%
No	46%
Don't know / Refused	16%

In summary, U.S. support for Israel is seen, at most, as one of several reasons/causes for the attacks and America's problems in the Middle East — and probably not the primary factor.

What do these perceived causes of the attacks imply for American policy? Although the poll data say little directly about this, there is no indication — here or elsewhere — that Americans support reducing U.S. presence in the Middle East, abandoning capitalism, or changing its Judeo-Christian culture. The poll data indicate practically no endorsement for reducing support for Israel. Cause and remedy are not the deductive sequence that some, including the terrorists, advocate.

#### **4) Do Americans need the support of Arab/Islamic nations in its anti-terrorism campaign?**

A key element of the Bush administration's war on terrorism is formation of a broad-based coalition of countries, including many Arab and Islamic countries. How does the American public regard this strategy? A large proportion of the public believes that Arab/Islamic backing is at least "somewhat important," and a majority believe it is very important:

*How important do you think it is that we get the support, of as many Arab and Islamic countries as possible? (Harris, Sept. 19-24, 2001)*

Very important	58%
Somewhat important	30%
Not very important	5%
Not at all important	6%
Not sure	1%

Support from “as many Arab and Islamic countries as possible” is viewed as at least as important as receiving support from the United Nations for our response to the attacks “even if it means exercising more restraint than we’d like”:

*How important do you think it is that we get the support of the United Nations — including a vote of the Security Council — supporting our response to the attacks, even if this means exercising more restraint than we’d like? (Harris, Sept. 19-24, 2001)*

Very important	54%
Somewhat important	30%
Not very important	8%
Not at all important	6%
Not sure	2%

Americans thus seem to accept one of the key premises of U.S. foreign policy — that a coalition of Middle Eastern nations is a necessary element of our anti-terrorism efforts. While acceptance of this position is far from overwhelming, most see merit in a getting Arab and Islamic nations on board.

A more strongly-worded question — one that recognizes a likely tradeoff between Arabic support and relations with Israel — was asked in a different poll a few weeks later:

*What do you feel is more important at this time — U.S. relations with Israel or U.S. relations with the Arab nations? (ABC News, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

Israel	36%
Arab nations	39%
Both (volunteered)	14%
Neither (volunteered)	3%
No opinion	9%

One should recognize that “at this time” is an important qualifier. No doubt, some answering that relations with Arab nations are now more important are responding to

the efforts to assemble an anti-terrorism coalition of Arab countries. It would seem logical that many Americans take U.S. relations with Israel as a given over the long term, and recognize the need for Arab cooperation at this time. Other polling data in this report support this interpretation.

### **5) Do Americans perceive that the Arab world wants to destroy Israel?**

A recurring issue is Israel's legitimacy in the Arab world. Some feel that most of Israel's Middle East neighbors have come to accept their existence — even if they are not pleased about it or willing to admit it publicly. Others believe that most Arab governments and people are bent on Israel's eventual destruction. According to the most recent survey tapping Americans' perceptions on this issue, the more malevolent view prevails by far:

*Overall, do you believe that the Arab world sincerely accepts Israel's right to exist, or do you believe that the Arab world seeks the eventual destruction of Israel? (NAI / Chicago Sun Times poll, Oct. 12-14, 2001)*

Accepts Israel	15%
Seeks Israel's destruction	62%
Don't know / Refused	23%

### **6) Should Israel do whatever is necessary to protect itself from terrorism?**

Most Americans think that Israel must be vigilant, taking very strong measures to protect itself from terrorism:

*Do you feel that Israel should do whatever is necessary to find and destroy terrorists who threaten serious harm to its citizens or nation, or do you think such actions would be wrong? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research poll, Sept. 14-18, 2001)*

Yes, should do whatever is necessary	76%
Yes, with comments	8%
No, with comments	2%
No, it would be wrong	6%
Don't know / Refused	7%

This is nearly as strong an endorsement to do "whatever is necessary" as the number who answered affirmatively to the same question in the same survey about whether the United States should do "whatever is necessary" in combating terrorism (82%).

## 7) Should the U.S. move closer to Israel or reduce its ties?

A Newsweek poll asks: Should the U.S. reduce its ties to Israel to lessen the acts of terrorism? This question is biased for two reasons. First, it confounds two issues: whether the respondent wants to reduce ties with Israel and whether reducing ties will lessen terrorism. Second, it omits the obvious third choice: to maintain current ties to Israel. Despite the biased question wording, a majority of Americans disagree that we should reduce our ties to Israel, and this number has grown in the three weeks following the attack:

*Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statement, or if you have no opinion either way — “The U.S. should reduce its ties to Israel in order to lessen the acts of terrorism against us.” (Newsweek Polls, 2001)*

	Oct. 4-5	Sept. 13-14
Agree	22%	32%
Disagree	61%	50%
No opinion	17%	18%

Similar to the question about reducing our ties to Israel, two other polls asked whether, in the wake of the attacks, the U.S. should distance itself from Israel or become closer. One poll was repeated three weeks later, so altogether there are three measures of this sentiment. The results are in strikingly similar: All indicate that a plurality of Americans favor the status quo — no change in our relationship. But, among the rest — those who favor a change — by margins of greater than 2 to 1, most of them feel we should develop closer relations with Israel rather than distance ourselves.

*(Have Tuesday’s events / Has the war on terrorism) made you think that the United States’ relations toward Israel should be closer, more distant, or stay the same? (NBC News / Wall Street Journal Polls, 2001)*

	Oct. 7	Sept. 15-16
Closer	30%	33%
More distant	13%	16%
Stay the same	48%	42%
Not sure	9%	9%

*Do the events of the last week say to you that the U.S. should develop closer relations with Israel, that we should begin to distance ourselves from Israel, or there should be no change in our current relationship? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research Poll, Sept. 14-18, 2001)*

Develop closer relations	33%
Distance ourselves	10%
No change	43%
Don't know / Refused	13%

The slight apparent shift of opinion in the two NBC News/Wall Street Journal polls is too small to be statistically significant. Conclusions based on any inference to change are unfounded. However, this did not stop MSNBC.com from describing it as "...a decline in those who believe the U.S. relationship with Israel should be closer" (October 8, 2001). This reporting is doubly sloppy, as the question wording in the two polls being compared had changed, impairing comparability of the results:

First poll:

*"Have Tuesday's events made you think that the United States' relations toward Israel should be closer, more distant, or stay the same?"*

Second poll:

*"Has the war on terrorism made you think that the United States' relations toward Israel should be closer, more distant, or stay the same?"*

While most Americans still want U.S. policy to be officially neutral — not take either side in the Middle East conflict — whatever shift in sentiment that has occurred (Gallup's poll shows an 11-point swing in the preceding 14-month period) is away from neutrality in the direction of taking Israel's side:

*In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, take the Palestinians' side, or not take either side? (CNN / USA Today / Gallup Polls)*

	Sept. 14-15, 2001	July 6-9, 2000
Israel's side	27%	16%
Palestinians' side	1%	1%
Not take either side	63%	74%
No opinion	9%	9%

Most people reject the idea that diminished ties to Israel would reduce acts of terrorism in the U.S.:

*Do you think that reducing U.S. ties to Israel would reduce the amount of terrorist acts directed against the United States? (Newsweek Poll, Oct. 4-5, 2001)*

Yes, would reduce terrorist acts	27%
No, would not	63%
Don't know / Refused	10%

America's traditional support for Israel has not been diminished since September 11. Most importantly, the majority of Americans do not believe that distance from Israel will deter terrorists from their violent agenda.

### **8) Should the level of American support to Israel be changed?**

On questions of financial assistance to Israel — among Americans, foreign aid is rarely popular under any circumstances — the Gallup Poll, which trends these opinions, shows most Americans want both military and economic aid to Israel to be maintained and a smaller percentage want it increased. The percentage of Americans wanting aid decreased has declined over a two year period, by about 12-14%.

*Thinking about the financial aid the United States provides Israel for military purposes, do you think U.S. military aid to Israel should be increased, kept the same, or decreased? (CNN / USA Today / Gallup Polls)*

	Sept. 14-15, 2001	July 22-25, 1999
Increased	16%	10%
Kept the same	47%	42%
Decreased	30%	44%
Eliminated	1%	< 0.5%
No opinion	6%	4%

*Thinking about the financial aid the United States provides Israel for economic purposes, do you think economic aid to Israel should be increased, kept the same, or decreased? (CNN / USA Today / Gallup Poll, Sept. 14-15)*

	Sept. 14-15, 2001	July 22-25, 1999
Increased	8%	8%
Kept the same	55%	45%
Decreased	29%	41%
Eliminated	1%	1%
No opinion	7%	5%

Another poll asked a similar question about changes in support for Israel, although this one did not specify whether “support” refers to economic or military support, less tangible forms such as political or moral support, or a combination. This item shows that most Americans (two-thirds of those questioned) favor no change in the status quo:

*Do you think the United States should increase its support for Israel, decrease its support for Israel, or keep it about the same? (ABC News poll, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

Increase	13%
Decrease	13%
Keep the same	68%
No opinion	6%

The New Atlantic Initiative / Chicago Sun Times poll (Oct. 12-14, 2001) contained a similar question but offering a simple yes or no option about maintaining U.S. support:

*Should the United States continue its support of Israel?*

Yes	73%
No	15%
Don't know / Refused	12%

### **9) How sympathetic do Americans feel toward Israel versus toward the Palestinians?**

These poll findings contain little evidence that popular opinion in the U.S. shows diminished sympathy for Israel. If anything, the data indicate movement in the opposite direction —toward heightened sympathy with the Jewish state, possibly in recognition of international terrorism as our common foe. A consistent majority of Americans, 51%-55%, sympathize more with Israel; between 8-14% sympathize more with the Palestinians — an imbalance which appears to have widened since the terrorist attack on the U.S.:

*From what you know about the situation in the Middle East, do your sympathies lie more with Israel or more with the Palestinians? (Los Angeles Times Polls)*

	Sept. 13-14, 2001	January, 1998
Israel	51%	48%
Palestinians	8%	14%
Neither (volunteered.)	24%	Not reported
Don't know	16%	Not reported

*In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinian Arabs? (CNN / USA Today / Gallup Polls)*

	Sept. 14-15, 2001	Aug. 10-12, 2001
Israelis	55%	41%
Palestinian Arabs	7%	13%
Both (volunteered.)	4%	7%
Neither (volunteered.)	20%	18%
No opinion	14%	21%

*On another subject, in the Middle East, are your sympathies more with Israel or more with the Palestinian Authority? (ABC News, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

Israel	52%
Palestinian Authority	14%
Both (volunteered.)	7%
Neither	15%
No opinion	11%

Although 20% of the American public might have changed their sentiments, among that segment that feels differently, more of them shifted their sympathies to Israel than to the Palestinians:

*Did the terrorist attack on the United States change your sympathies in the Middle East, or not? (Los Angeles Times Poll, Sept. 13-14, 2001)*

Yes	20%	→	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">                     10% Israel                      2% Palestinians                      3% Neither                      5% Other /DK                 </div>
No	73%		
Don't know	7%		

A late October New York Times / CBS News poll posed the “greater sympathies” question a bit differently — as a choice between Israel and the “Arab nations”:

*In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or more with the Arab nations? (New York Times / CBS News polls)*

	Oct. 24-28, 2001	April, 1998
Israel	48%	60%
Arab nations	19%	13%
Neither (volunteered.)	13%	3%
Both (volunteered.)	3%	10%
Don't know / No opinion	17%	14%

Here, we notice a modest decline in relative sympathies since the Spring of 1998, when the question was last presented to a national sample. Because of the 3 year time gap between the two surveys, it is impossible to attribute this shift to the September 11 attacks. Despite this change, the numbers indicate that Americans nevertheless retain greater empathy with Israel than with Arab countries in the Middle East.

Over half of the American public admits that the September 11 attack has given them a better understanding of the threat that Israel faces from suicide bombers.

*Have the events of the last week given you a better understanding of the threat that suicide bombers present in Israel, or do you feel it hasn't changed your perception of Israel's situation? (Institute for Jewish & Community Research Poll, Sept. 14-18)*

Yes – has provided better understanding	53%
No – hasn't changed perception	40%
Don't know / Refused	7%

It is probable, given the data from other polls, that the 40% who have not changed their understanding already understood the threat of suicide bombers in Israel. The feared backlash against Israel in American public opinion is not evident in these polls either.

### **10) Should the U.S. support establishment of a Palestinian state?**

Should the U.S. support a Palestinian state at the current time? Here, three polls show inconsistent results. Although the questions are not worded identically, in the Newsweek poll, a minority, 33%, of Americans think that this is a good idea — a level of support that has not changed much since Newsweek last asked this question five years earlier (35% then answered “yes” then). The ABC News poll, taken only days later, suggests the opposite. If anything, one would expect fewer people wanting to “recognize Palestine as an independent nation” (a more immediate commitment) than “favor creating a Palestinian state.” While the discrepancy is puzzling, it could be that recognition implies that the state already exists, while creation of a state seems much more pro-active. In a New York Times/CBS News poll, taken at the end of October, support for a Palestinian state falls in between the Newsweek poll and ABC News poll results — with no stronger support than the latter, despite the emotionally appealing language (“Palestinian homeland”). This latest survey also shows that the narrow plurality support for a homeland has not budged since 1998, when the question was last asked by the New York Times and CBS News. Together, the polls show only 33-38% of Americans favor the creation of a Palestinian state, while 55% support recognizing a state, if established.

*Do you think that — at this time — the United States should or should not favor creating a Palestinian state? (Newsweek Polls)*

	Oct. 4-5, 2001	June, 1996
Should favor	33%	35%
Should not favor	39%	39%
Don't know	28%	26%

*Do you think the United States should or should not recognize Palestine as an independent nation? (ABC News poll, Oct. 8-9, 2001)*

Should	55%
Should not	28%
No opinion	17%

*Do you favor or oppose the establishment of a Palestinian homeland in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip? (New York Times/CBS News polls)*

	Oct. 25-28, 2001	April, 1998
Favor	38%	38%
Oppose	29%	28%
Don't know / No opinion	33%	34%

Apart from an obvious bias in question wording, The Sun Times poll produces a similar proportion who believe in the inefficacy of this change:

*Do you believe that after the World Trade Center terrorist attack, if the United States forced Israel to give up territory to Yasser Arafat for a Palestinian state including the dividing of Jerusalem, that it would end terrorism against the United States, or would it encourage terrorism by rewarding those who support terrorism like Arafat? (New Atlantic Initiative / Chicago Sun Times poll, Oct. 12-14, 2001)*

Would end terrorism	10%
Would encourage terrorism	62%
Don't know / Refused	29%

Rewarding Arafat at this time seems to most Americans as a way to encourage terrorism.

## CONCLUSION

Assertions that the American public holds Israel, or U.S. support for Israel, responsible for the September 11 attacks on America are unfounded. Although some recognize such a linkage, this is at most one of several factors seen to be at play — not the only reason nor the most important.

More significantly, far fewer Americans — no more than between ten percent and twenty-five percent, depending on the question asked — want the country's tight relationship with Israel changed, even if some of them see a connection with the attacks. Most do not believe that a distancing of the U.S. from Israel would be efficacious in reducing Arab or Muslim enmity or the likelihood of future attacks. If anything, this opinion analysis shows that support for Israel is steadfast — and might have even increased since September 11. Our analysis turns up instances documenting how the press's reporting of these perceptions and their meaning has not always been accurate or fair.

Similarly, the U.S. public appears to have grown more sympathetic toward Israel in its ongoing struggle with the Palestinians; possibly also more sympathetic toward Israel vis-à-vis her conflicts with other Arab neighbors. The American people hold widespread perceptions that some countries, such as Iran and some groups,

such as the Palestinian Authority, are actively engaged in terrorism. In the case of the Palestinians, they cannot be both terrorist and victim. Any country that is seen as linked with terrorism will engender antipathy, not support, from the American public.

Well over half of all Americans hold an image of Israel encircled by enemies who desire her destruction as a nation, while less than fifteen percent believe that most Arabs accept the legitimacy of Israel's existence. It is not surprising, then, that more than three-quarters of the U.S. public think Israel is right in taking "whatever action is necessary" to protect its citizens and nation against those who threaten them.

The polls show that Americans recognize the necessity for Arab and Muslim cooperation in fighting terrorism, but with two caveats: that support for Israel remains and we not become too cozy with countries viewed as engaged in terrorism such as Syria and Iran.

Although no one can predict what the future will bring, as of six weeks since World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, the feared backlash in American public opinion against Israel has not materialized. Little in these polls suggests that it will.

## SID GROENEMAN

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## GARY A. TOBIN

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## THE INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH & COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Dr. Gary A. Tobin, *President*

### **Introduction**

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research, located in San Francisco, is an independent research institute that is devoted to the study of contemporary American Jewish life. The Institute serves as a national and international think tank providing policy-oriented research findings to Jewish and other communities.

### **Mission**

The Institute is dedicated to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information that will transform and improve the quality of Jewish life. Our work informs the general community as well. The Institute's work is based on the belief that change requires information — knowing who we are, how we are structured, what needs to stay the same, what needs to be improved, what needs to be abandoned, and what needs to be created.

### **Goal**

Our goal is to produce information that is easily readable and accessible. The work of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research is vigorously disseminated to be put to practical use.

### **Functions**

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research conducts research; holds conferences, and publishes books, articles, monographs and reports.

### **The Research Agenda**

Our work is designed to create debate. We want to challenge conventional wisdom and

existing norms. We want to think about how the Jewish community can grow in new and exciting ways. Research can help guide these processes. We focus on major findings and policy recommendations — what are the most important things we learned and what are the recommended ways to act based on what was found.

### **Current Research**

The Institute engages in research in areas that are often unexplored. For example, we are currently conducting:

- Research about Jewish philanthropy including patterns of giving. We explore motivations for giving, and the growth and character of foundations.
- A study of racial and ethnic diversity in the Jewish community. Asian, African-American and Latino Jews are a growing segment of the Jewish population through adoption, intermarriage, and conversion, and along with those of Sephardic or Mizrahi descent, are under-represented in the organized Jewish community.
- Research about the American public's attitudes about Israel, U.S. support for Israel, and the attitudes of American Jews about Israel.
- Studies of ethnic heritage and religion in the United States. Our studies focus on Americans switching their religions, practicing more than one religion, and creating new religious forms.