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DOES THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT STILL MATTER?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center at Brookings. I'm Martin Indyk, the Director of the Saban Center. "Does the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict Still Matter?" Some of you may think this is a question that has an obvious answer, but it's still an issue of great contention in Washington as I discovered only a couple of weeks ago via Brookings when we had a knock-down, drag-out fight with a colleague from the American Enterprise Institute. So the issue of whether the next President should undertake a new initiative as President Bush has finally done in his last year in office to try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will likely be a contentious policy debate at the end of this year and the beginning of next year.

Public opinion both in the Arab world and the larger Muslim world and indeed in the West as well will be an important factor in the calculus of the next President when it comes to deciding whether the costs and risks of investing in what has been so often

a forlorn effort of previous presidents and whether those costs and benefits make sense, and it is public opinion that we are here to discuss today.

Shibley Telhami, who is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Saban Center at Brookings and also holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland, has been doing polling in the Arab now for 5 years consistently and has come up with a series of polling data over time which gives us a very good feel of where this particular issue stands in the minds of people in the Arab world. We are very happy to be able to publish this week Shibley's analysis paper of his poll, and I know you all got copies of that, which directly addresses this question of does the Palestinian-Israeli conflict still matter in the minds of Arab people.

He is going to speak first in presenting his data in this regard. Then we're going to be joined by Steve Kull, who will be presenting his data which he is just releasing today about world opinion on the same subject of attitude toward the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. Steve is Director of worldpublicopinion.org and the Program on International Policy Attitudes or PIPA. He directs the PIPA Knowledge Network Poll of the American public and plays a central role in the BBC World Service Poll of Global Opinion and the polls that the Chicago Council on Global Affairs conducts annually on world public opinion. He is the principal investigator of a major study of social support of anti-American terrorist groups in Islamic countries and regularly appears in the American and international media providing analysis of public opinion. He has published in all of the important journals that deal with public opinion analysis, from "Political Science Quarterly" to "Public Opinion Quarterly," as well as places like the "Washington Post" and "Harper's."

His most recent book co-authored with I.M. Destler is "Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism" which the Brookings Press published. He is also a colleague of Shibley's at the University of Maryland where he is in the School of Public Policy.

As I said, he will speak after Shibley and present his data on world public opinion toward the Palestinians.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome first of all Shibley Telhami.

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks very much, Martin. Just a little perspective first of all on what I'm going to present. I've been holding public opinion polls in six Arab countries, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan, consistently for the past 6 years actually. I've done it also in the 1990s, but what has happened in the past 6 years is in many of the questions we repeat. So now we're in a position to do some time series analysis and to look at trends which often are the most interesting ones. I do this with Zogby International. Generally we have about a sample of 4,000, this year it is 4,400, people in those six countries.

What I'd like to do today is give you a sense of where Arab public opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict particularly in light of all the

events that have been taking place in the region. The Iraq war is the obvious one. The worries about Iran, the talk of a Sunni-Shia divide, the War on Terrorism, a lot of issues out there, Darfur in the Sudan, a lot of issues on the agenda of the Arab public, and has this issue, the Palestinian-Israeli issue, diminished in importance in the perception of the Arab public.

I'm going to talk later on about the connection between public opinion and governments, but recall this is really about public opinion in the Arab world and it is in the Arab world largely outside the Palestinian areas. I'll make some references to Palestinian public opinion, but it's in those six countries particularly.

I'm not going to do a PowerPoint. Those of you who picked up the paper that we published today, that the Saban Center published today, is out there on this same question of the presentation. Actually my presentation is on the paper that was released today and you have it there to look at it including the graphs, and those of you who have the paper may want

to refer to it because I'll make some mention of the trends.

The first question that I've been asking over time is how important is the Palestinian question to you personally. I don't ask foreign policy questions or domestic questions, I just ask that as an opening question. This is based on a theory and research that we've done even in America which says that the ranking of an issue is extremely important for the behavioral consequences and there's data to suggest that the more important an issue is, the more it is important for behavior, so the issue of importance is one that has to be addressed. Mind you, absolute numbers don't tell you a big story because we have to do them in a comparative perspective and that's why the time series is important to see what happened in the past 6 years and has this issue diminished in its importance over time.

If you look at it, it's interesting. In 2002, the first time we asked this question the same way, we had 73 percent of the Arab public say it's

either the single most-important issue to them and/or in the top three, so three-quarters of the Arab public ranked it as either number one or in the top three among all their issues. In 2008, the one that we carried out in March, 86 percent ranked the issue either the single most-important or in the top three. What's interesting, in the entire period from 2002 to 2008 is that it's been consistently ranked high with some variations, at least two-thirds of the public ranking it in the top three and going up to 89 in 2004. The lowest point was in 2005 with 69 percent ranking it as the single most-important or in the top three, and 2004 was the highest, even a little bit higher than 2008, where we had 89 percent.

I want to tell you that when you look at the trends and try to explain the variations, first these variations hold across countries. It is interesting that in every country it's the same trend, they're a little higher or a little bit lower in different countries, but the trend holds in all the countries. Second, demographics don't seem to matter much. In

fact, in many instances, it doesn't matter at all. Gender, for example, isn't really much of an issue.

A couple of them matter a little bit. For example, the higher your income, the slightly lower you rank this issue in your priorities. For example, the people who say my identity with the state is higher than my identity with Muslims or Arabs also tend to rank it slightly less than the others. And I say slightly less. The trend still holds across, but there is a variation that is somewhat there in relation to some demographic variables.

If you look at the variations over years, what explains the 69 percent lowest point in 2005, versus the 89 in 2004 and the 86 percent in 2008, when you look at the data there are two variables that are most telling. One is violence. The more violence there is on the Palestinian front, the higher the issue is ranked. It's obviously more on the radar screen of the public. Two, the more confrontation there is between the United States and the Palestinians, the higher the issue is ranked in the

priorities of the public. That's interesting actually when you look at three points. In 2004, this poll was taken right after the Iraq war and the focus was almost entirely on Iraq in the public. So what explains the fact that this was almost the highest point of ranking? It happened because there was so much violence and confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, there was the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the leader of Hamas, followed by the assassination of Rantissi, there was a lot of violence, there was a confrontation and isolation of Yasser Arafat, all of that raised the issue in the priorities of the public despite the Iraq war and the focus on the Iraq war.

In 2005 when the issue was ranked lowest, what happened in that year? It's interesting because that was right after Abu Mazen succeeded Yasser Arafat, Israel pulled out of Gaza, there was a dramatic reduction in violence, and the relationship between the U.S. and the Palestinians improved dramatically with Abu Mazen being invited to the White

House. So you can see those two issues in a way informing how the public ranks the Arab-Israeli issue and particularly the Palestinian-Israeli issue.

In 2008 it bumped up because it happened in March right after the Israeli incursion into Gaza where there were a lot of reports that over 140 Palestinians were killed, and so you can that those are the issues in a way that determined the fluctuation, but still it is a pretty steady trend. These are relatively minor fluctuations. The issue is important across time.

What about the Hamas-Fatah divide? It's interesting what has happened over the past couple of years because the Hamas-Fatah divide has raised two questions. One is what the Arab public opinion is on that divide. Two, how Arab public opinion now is going to evaluate what is good for the Palestinians. When the Palestinians are united you know what the Palestinian Authority says and that's good for the Palestinians. But what happens when they're divided?

How do you make up your mind on what's good for the Palestinians?

We have interesting trends here. First, if you look at the support, the question on the divide between Fatah and Hamas, we only asked it in 2006 and 2008 because obviously it's a new question. The trend is as follows. In both years, first, Arab public opinion prefers a unified Palestinian front. They prefer a Palestinian unity government over either a Fatah government or a Hamas government. Second, if they have to make a choice between the two, those who make a choice prefer Hamas over Fatah, and that is a clear trend despite all of what's happened in public opinion, despite the governments rooting for Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. It is clear that the trending is in that direction. We see that, by the way, trending in a similar way in Lebanon. Despite the talk of a Sunni-Shia divide, when you ask the Arab public outside of Lebanon, when you ask in the six countries that I asked, whether they side with the Lebanese government or whether they side with the

opposition led by Hizballah, the trend is that they support the opposition led by Hizballah, a plurality supports the opposition led by Hizballah, more than they support the Lebanese government. So there's no question that the trending of the divide has been more toward the militants and not away and so the judgment is going in that direction. It's not that the issue is coming down in importance, it is trending toward militancy in part because those who are seen to be moderate like Abu Mazen, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, the Lebanese government, A, do not seem to be delivering particularly in relations with Israel; and B, because also they're seen as best friends of the Bush Administration which is highly unpopular in the Arab world. It's getting very low scores in Arab public opinion.

The third point I want to make has to do with the relationship between this opinion on the Palestinian question and opinion toward the United States. Every year we ask a question about how people make up their minds about the United States. Every

year we have roughly three-quarters saying, and it's been consistent, that they base their judgment of the U.S. in policies and not on values. When you break down the policies, we've asked a question over the past 2 years which is, which of the following steps would improve your views of the United States most? We gave them spreading democracy in the Middle East, giving more economic aid to the region, withdrawing from Iraq, withdrawing from the Arabian Peninsula, brokering Arab-Israeli peace, withholding aid from Israel. The number-one answer in both 2006 and 2008 is brokering Arab-Israeli peace based on the 1967 borders. There is no question that that's trumping everything else. The second by the way is withdrawal of American forces from Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. That's actually gained in 2008 from 2006. So there is no question that at least in their perception, the judgments being made in large part are on the basis of their views of the Arab-Israeli issue.

The fourth issue I'd like to discuss is Arab public attitudes toward Israel. Here there are four

things I'd like to briefly mention. One is the degree to which the Arab public is prepared to accept in principle a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and the extent to which they oppose in principle a two-state solution. It's interesting that in 2006 and 2008 the only 2 years where we asked this question, you have a majority of the Arabs in principle supporting the two-state solution. In fact, if anything, from 2006 to 2008, the number of people supporting a two-state solution increased and the number of people who were in principle opposed to a two-state solution decreased, and particularly by the way in Saudi Arabia which was interesting in terms of when you looked at the countries and how it happened. That's the good side.

Here's the bad side. At the same time, the number of people who don't believe it's going to ever happen has increased and that is by the way a two-thirds majority. So while you have a significant majority saying that they would like to see a two-state solution, the vast majority doesn't believe it's

going to ever happen, not only is it not going to happen in the next 5 years, but it's never going to happen, so that's the pessimism I think that's driving their position toward militancy. That's how you can be in principle in support of a two-state solution and at the same time take a different policy position.

When you ask them, what happens if the two-state solution is no longer an option? What do you think is going to happen? Is it that then you're going to have one-state solution? Or are you going to have Israel essentially winning out and the Palestinians just simply giving up? Or are you going to have conflict and trouble for many years to come? Only small minorities believe that you would have a one-state solution and only small minorities believe that Israel would win out. The vast majority believe that you're going to have essentially devastation and conflict for many years to come and in fact in a way you can see how all of these are tied together, why they continue to support a two-state solution even though they're pessimistic about it because they're

worried about the consequences of its demise. It's all tied together.

The fourth point has to do with Israeli power. It's interesting because this is a question again that we started asking in 2006 after the 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war. We tried to see whether there is a deterrence effect. What happened to Israel's deterrence? Do people think Israel is more powerful, Israel is weaker, and so forth? What we found in both 2006 and 2008 is that only a minority believe that Israel remains strong and is likely to use that power to consolidate its position. A larger minority believes that Israel is now weak and it's a matter of time before it's defeated. And a plurality believes that no one can tell whether Israel is going to be more powerful or weaker with more uncertainty that is projected about what is going to happen. Again it all ties together. They are uncertain about what has happened. They think it's going to be devastating if the two-state solution collapses. Therefore they want it in some ways because they can't come up with

another option, and yet they don't think it's going to happen. So that's the kind of perception that you have dominating in the Arab world at the moment.

The prism through which Arabs see the world-
- I already mentioned that evidence shows that at least at the public level the Palestinian issue remains central in Arab perception. We have a lot of indirect evidence to suggest that it's still the prism through which Arabs see the world. I call it personally the prism of pain and I call it the collective identity prism of pain for the Arabs. It's not so much a judgment about the Palestinians as it is about who they are. Given their experiences in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is the prism of pain through which Arabs see the world. When you look at the evidence, it trumps all else. It trumps Iraq, it trumps the Shia-Sunni divide, and that is evidence in a number of issues. For example, when you ask them to name the two states that are most threatening to you, even in Saudi Arabia, even in the United Arab Emirates where you know people are worried about Iran, when you

know certainly the governments are worried about Iran more than almost anything else in the short-term, the vast majority of people in every one of these countries in both 2006 and 2008, in fact an increase in 2008, name the United States and Israel. Israel gets over 90 percent of people identifying it as one of the two top threats, the United States gets over 80 percent of the people identifying it as one of the two top threats, and Iran gets only about 10 percent of the public. In fact, it went down from 2006 to 2008 despite the talk about the Iranian threat. So you can see it's not that they don't think that Iran is a threat, by the way, they don't think it's one of the two top threats and if I were to ask them do you think Iran is a threat, an open question, I'll get a larger percentage, it is just in relative terms that that is not the prism through which they make an evaluation. I think you can see the same thing in questions like, Whom among world leaders do you admire most? The leaders you see are not the leaders who are making the case for confronting Iran, are not the leaders who are

making the case for a Sunni-Shia divide. In fact, remarkably, the three most popular leaders right now in an open question are non-Sunni Arabs in a world in which we're talking about the Sunni-Shia divide. Hassan Nasrallah's numbers went up from 2006 to 2008. He is still the single most-popular leader in the Arab world with over a quarter of the Arabs saying that he is their favorite leader. And what you have, what this tells you by the way, is not that people love individuals in particular, sometimes they don't even know much about them, the reason I asked this question is to look at the prism through which they're making an evaluation. This is a defiance prism largely, not always, sometimes it is an embracing agenda, but mostly it's a defiance prism. It is people telling you this is essentially an anti-American position, it's an anti-Israeli position, it's defiance of American foreign policy, it's particularly a defiance of Israel, it's an evaluation of the world through the conflict between Israel and the Arab states. You see that in multiple other questions that this is the

prism to this day that defines perceptions in the region.

What's the consequence of all of this? I'll end with that. Remember that I'm talking about public opinion and not about governments and you might add is it relevant therefore for governments? Is it relevant for behavior? Let me just give you three points on this that are worth thinking about. First, even aside from public opinion, think about the centrality of this issue when people talk about it's no longer important. Maybe it's no longer important for some, but you think about the conflict and how alive it still is, it certainly is central to the Israelis and the Palestinians, it is certainly central to the Syrians who are still in a state of war with Israel with their territories occupied since 1967, it is still central to Lebanon which faced a war in 2006 that was devastating, and could face another war. A lot of people think that this is not over between Israel and Hizballah. Think about how consequential it is to Egypt despite the fact that Egypt has a peace

treaty with Israel. They have just had a breakout of Palestinians a few months ago into Egypt that was consequential and Egyptians are very worried about the collapse of negotiations in a way that Gaza becomes their problem and the consequences for them economically and politically, the link between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, what would happen in Jordan if there's a collapse of the peace process where you have possibly a third Intifada or they have to worry about Israeli unilateralism and its consequences for the Hashemite Kingdom. All of that is immediately important and separate and even from public opinion is still immediately important and if you look at the trends in the Gulf where clearly there are other issues that are important to the governments in the Gulf at the moment, the governments in the Gulf are worried about the consequences of the Iraq war, they're worried about what might happen with Iran, they're worried about the rise of Iranian power, they're also focused on their accumulated wealth as a consequence of the oil crisis. Yet even when you look

at their assessment of how these issue impact them, they worry about Iran when you talk to the Saudi government and when you talk to many other governments, it isn't so much that Iran is going to invade them or isn't so much that Iran is going to use their nuclear power if they have it against them, their worry is that Iran is going to be empowered in a way that it is going to be able to use things like the Arab-Israeli conflict to radicalize the region against them, to destabilize them, and they all believe that this issue is the source of instability and the main source of mobilization. And not to mention obviously that in a world in which we have evidence of an increase in nonstate actors, Hizballah and Hamas were clear cases although Hamas now is partly in government, that this issue clearly plays into the hands of nonstate actors and it remains very important. Thank you very much.

MR. KULL: Good morning and thanks for coming. I'm going to be reporting this morning on a poll that was done by the worldpublicopinion.org

consortium. It's a consortium of research centers around the world that are collaborating on polls on an ongoing basis. The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland manages this project. And because it's a collaborative project, not every country is asked every question in the poll as you'll see.

As part of this poll we have 18 countries that participated in various ways, and the poll was conducted between January 10 and May 2. Overall there were 18,792 respondents in all of these different countries. I'm not going to go into a lot of depth on this. All this material is available to you in the handouts that you have. The margin of error is generally in the 3 to 4 percent range. Sometimes it was done face to face. Sometimes it was done by telephone. In most countries it's a national sample but in some it's an urban-only sample. The countries that we have here represent approximately 59 percent of the world population. Some of the questions were also asked in the Palestinian territories.

There are a number of key questions we were after in a broad sense. The first one was, are people taking sides. They're seeing this conflict. They're intense. It gets a lot of attention in the news. It's an ongoing narrative. Are they in a sense rooting for one side or the other? So we asked, In the Israel-Palestinian conflict do you think your country should take Israel's side, take the Palestinian side, or not take either side? The dominant answer was that they favored their country not taking either side in 14 out of the 18. We can see that the blue bar in the middle represents those who say not take either side, and it's an overwhelming majority in Mexico, Peru, and interestingly, in the United States. This is not a new finding, the 71 percent in the United States saying not take either side. That's been a consistent position for some years, but overwhelming majorities in France, Britain, Ukraine, Spain, 58 percent in Russia, 55 percent in Nigeria. When we come into the Middle Eastern area, still 54 percent in Azerbaijan, Turkey leans slightly

toward taking the Palestinian side with 42 percent favoring that, 38 percent not taking either side. Iran and Egypt are the only countries to take a real strong position in favor of taking the Palestinian side with 63 percent in Iran and 86 percent in Egypt.

Turning now to Asia, South Korea, a very large majority with 82 percent saying not take either side, though among those who say take one side, they lean slightly to Israel's side, as by the way does the United States. China, 74 percent not take either side, Thailand, 64 percent. Indonesia, another Muslim country, a more divided response with 38 percent favoring the Palestinians, 43 percent not either side. Then the Indians are kind of evenly divided between all of these positions. On average across all of these countries, 20 percent favor the Palestinians, 7 percent favor the Israelis, but 58 percent say not take either side. So the picture overall leans slightly toward the Palestinians, but the dominant position is to not take either one.

The next thing we've tried to find out more about is how do people feel about the different parties. Do they blame some? We thought about different ways to ask this question and settled on the idea that we should ask, How are each of the parties doing in terms of doing their part to resolve the conflict? There's the question. I would like to know how well you think various parties are doing their part in the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we asked about Israel, the Palestinians, the U.S., the Arab countries, and then for a few countries we asked about the European Union and Britain and Russia, a much more limited sample.

First, Israel. The options were very well, somewhat well, not well at all, or not very well. The assessment of Israel is not too good. Right down the line, the brownish bar on the right are those who say not well at all or not very well, and the U.S. up there with 59 percent saying that Israel is not doing its part well, and as you can see, it goes right down the line. Nigerians are a little higher, 38 percent

giving Israel good grades, but still more are saying not very well; Egypt, the Palestinian territories, of course, so right down the line. India has a slight plurality saying very well, but on average across all the countries, 54 percent give Israel poor ratings and just 22 percent give them positive ratings.

Turning to the Palestinians, not too much of a picture. In some countries it's more negative like in the U.S., but the Nigerians are divided, and the Egyptians and not surprising. The Palestinians give the Palestinians a good score or good rating, and also the Indonesians. The Chinese interestingly are divided 40 percent positive, 36 percent negative. On average across all the countries, 47 percent give the Palestinians a poor rating, 28 percent a positive rating. Overall, 13 countries were negative on Israel, 10 countries were negative on the Palestinians, so the Palestinians do slightly better but get fairly poor ratings.

How well is the United States doing its part? This doesn't come out very well either. In

fact, on average it comes out quite negative. Americans are divided on their evaluation of the U.S., and the Nigerians give the United States fairly good ratings, but that's the only bright spot. The Indians are divided, the Thais are divided with many not responding, but for the most part the U.S. gets poor ratings as far as doing its part to bring about peace in the Middle East.

The Arab countries. This isn't too pretty a picture either. The Egyptians, 71 percent give the Arab countries a positive rating, 50 percent of the Indonesians, and actually 40 percent of the Chinese, so you get a plurality there, and the Indians are divided and the Nigerians are divided, but other than that, it's a predominantly negative picture with 11 out of the 15 countries giving a negative rating, and on average excluding Egypt, 48 percent give a negative rating, 23 percent a positive rating. Obviously people are frustrated. They're not really rooting for one side or the other, but they don't seem to see any team that they're particularly enamored with.

We also asked some questions about the Quartet and the limited number of countries. In France and Britain we asked about the European Union and whether they're doing a good job and doing their part well. The French leaned to the negative view as did the British with a negative view that the European Union is not really doing its part. The Russians, with many not answering, leaned in the positive direction in their assessment, and when the British were asked about Britain's role, they leaned also in a negative direction.

The next thing that we thought we would do was to try to get a sense of how do people feel about whether the international community should in some way take a larger role, should it take a more engaged role, should it try to step up to the plate in some way. We thought about a number of ways of getting at this question and the best idea we could come up with is to talk in terms of the United Nations in terms of the U.N. Security Council taking a more engaged role to address the problem because the parties seemed to

be at such an impasse as Shibley further elaborated today.

We asked, here are some things that the U.N. Security Council could offer to do if Israel and the Palestinians were to come to a peace agreement. Please say whether you favor or oppose the U.N. Security Council saying that it would be willing to send a peacekeeping force to enforce the peace agreement, to make a commitment to protect Israel if it is attacked by its Arab neighbors, to make a commitment to protect Arab countries if they are attacked by Israel. Some of these are rather significant steps for the Security Council to take obviously.

Looking at the first one on sending a peacekeeping force to enforce the peace agreement, this gets rather robust support. On average, 67 percent, two out of three, endorse the idea of the U.N. offering to say if you come to peace agreement we will send a peacekeeping force, you have majorities in most countries endorsing this view, and 16 out of 17

countries that answered the question have at least a plurality favoring the idea. It's interesting that in Egypt 64 percent, the Palestinian territories 63 percent, and what's interesting too is that in these countries, particularly in the Palestinian territories, they express a lot of negative views of the United Nations suggesting frustration that the U.N. isn't doing more, more than it is a real negative view of the United Nations itself, though many assume that this would not be a viable idea because you see so much evidence of negative attitudes toward the U.N. in the Palestinian territories and in the Middle East as a whole. But in fact, there's strong support for the U.N. playing this role, and only one country, Ukraine, divided, and in the U.S. 61 percent.

The idea of making a commitment to protect Israel if it is attacked by its Arab neighbors, again really quite a dramatic step. This is not something mild. Nonetheless you get fairly significant support for it. On average, 45 percent support the idea, 36 percent oppose it, and 11 out of the 16 countries gave

it an endorsement including 53 percent in the U.S. The two countries that really stand out in their opposition to it are Egypt and the Palestinian territories, so you have opposition there. But Ukraine leans against it, Russia leans against it, but these are rather smallish numbers; India divided and so on.

Making the commitment to protect Arab countries if they are attacked by Israel. This actually overall gets more support. On average, 55 percent support this idea and 13 out of the 16 countries lean in a positive direction. The U.S. is the country most opposed to it with 50 percent opposed, but 38 percent in favor, and Ukraine leans against it, Russia leans against it, but there isn't any really large opposition and you see that there is no country that has a majority opposed.

Just to summarize, the key themes that we found if you were to sort of summarize world public opinion and characterize it as a singularity, we would be saying that they don't want their governments to

take sides, they favor an even-handed approach, they think all the parties are not doing their part, the Israelis, the Palestinians, the U.S., the Arab countries, the Quartet, to the extent that any of those questions are asked there is not much confidence that any of the parties are doing their part. Coming back to the theme here, the question of how important is to people, I think the fact that significant numbers, majorities and pluralities on every point were ready to have the U.N. Security Council offer to send a peacekeeping force, to offer security guarantees to Israel, to offer security guarantees to the Arab countries, this to me is a strong indication of the importance that people around the world attach to the issue and their feeling that some action is needed. Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much Steve, and thank you, Shibley. I wanted to start by coming back to the issue I raised in introducing both of you which is in a sense what you would say to the next President as he weighed whether it was worthwhile for him to

invest in this and he wanted to know what the response would be. The first question is, Shibley, do you have any sense from your polling that President Bush got any kind of credit for trying in the sense that Annapolis took place a few months before you were out in the field, where he convened the Israelis and the Palestinians and the Arab states basically and world powers as well? Did he get any credit? And would the next President really get any credit for trying?

MR. TELHAMI: Let's start with that last point which is about how they evaluated President Bush's late diplomacy, particularly Annapolis. By the time that took place, people had completely lost faith. If you look for example in the poll, we ask a question not only about whether they had a favorable view of the U.S. or not, but whether they have confidence in the U.S. or not. That confidence measure had gone down so much that they didn't trust the American and the Bush Administration's intentions, they didn't trust that they were trying do the right thing, they thought it was too little too late. That

was kind of the analysis. So in that sense people weren't taking it seriously.

The way to look at it in terms of what moments-- they did see that there were opportunities. If you look back immediately after 9/11 when there was a window of opportunity before the lead-up to the Iraq war and the talk about a Palestinian state, there was a little bump. When you look back in 2005 when Abu Mazen first became President and opened up the possibility of a new relationship with the U.S. and he was invited to come to the White House, you have a slight improvement in the views of the U.S., so it's connected.

We've seen it by the way historically. People think that all we have now is the data that we have since 9/11, there were data available prior to 9/11 and not only ones that I've done, but even the State Department itself was doing some private data collection in the 1990s about whether people have confidence in the U.S. or not. They were actually clever enough to think that the confidence measure is

important, that it wasn't just public opinion do you like America or not. Here's an interesting fact. If you look back to the year 2000, you were in the Clinton Administration. It was the lead-up to the Camp David Accords that were to take place in July 2000. Arabs were not particularly happy with American foreign policy in the sense of saying they always believed the U.S. was biased toward Israel. They did then too. It wasn't like they thought Clinton was even-handed, they thought he was trying to be fair and they still thought he was biased. But when the State Department polled in Saudi Arabia in spring 2000, over 60 percent of the Saudis said that they had some confidence in the United States of America. Why? Because they thought the U.S. was actually trying to get it done and there was a perception contrary to the pessimism perception which says now there will never be a two-state solution, in 2000 the prevailing perception even among people who didn't perfectly like the two-state solution said it's over. It's coming to an end. It's going to happen. It's around the

corner. The U.S. is playing its part. People are accommodating themselves. Over 60 percent of Saudis have confidence. You have the collapse of the Camp David negotiations in 2000 and a new poll was taken in the fall that drops almost 20 percentage points in confidence. By the spring with the advent of the Palestinian (inaudible) the election -- Bush Administration it drops down further and it continues to drop after 9/11. 9/11 wasn't the only thing. In fact, the drop in confidence begins really earlier with the collapse of the Arab-Israeli negotiations and I think that's the thing that we have to keep in mind, that the confidence and the attitudes toward the U.S. have been very much connected in public Arab eyes to what happens on the Arab-Israeli issue.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. You preempted my second question. Steve, what was interesting to me about some of your data that surprises me was particularly because you covered European attitudes and Arab attitudes, Southeast Asian attitudes. The Muslim world was well represented. Europe was well

represented in your polling. What was surprising to me was that the Palestinians fared relatively badly there because my presumption has been that the Palestinians actually enjoy strong support in those areas. Do you have an explanation for that?

MR. KULL: Criticism of Israel is sometimes interpreted as support for the Palestinians. What we see consistently particularly among the Europeans is frustration with both sides and a desire for an even-handed approach so that it's a kind of a pox on both your houses response. But what stands out in the kind of discourse between the United States and Europe is that Europeans and others in Asia too criticize the U.S. for favoring Israel and that is interpreted as being pro-Palestinian, but as we look closer that's not really what we're seeing.

MR. TELHAMI: May I add to that? It by the way should be underscored even in the American arena. The other side of the coin is we assume the American public is very pro-Israel. When you look at the numbers you have over 70 percent who want an even-

handed policy, but in some ways that's not the most important finding. The important finding is people who care most deeply about that issue -- so when you look at the minority who actually do take positions, who actually do take sides, in the U.S. among those who take sides, a 7 to 1 ratio favors Israel, so 21 to 3 percent, and that has increased over the past 5 years by the way, it was a little bit less than that, that has actually increased. In the international community when you look at it, it actually favors the Palestinians. When we look at the minorities who do take sides, that's usually an indication because people might think that the current policy isn't even-handed so when they're calling for even-handed they're not calling for not changing the policy and that shows that you're not doing enough. So it's a critique of policy because the outcome is not even-handed. They want an even-handed outcome so we must not conclude from that that they don't want change, it is that their notion isn't a notion of bias, the notion is everybody seems themselves being relatively fair.

MR. KULL: I just want to add though that Americans do feel warmer toward Israel than the Palestinians just on a thermometer scale or who do you like better or something like that and if you force them to choose between them though they'll come out more on the Israeli side. But if you ask them who do you blame more, one side or the other, many will just not answer the question because that just doesn't describe their experience. So if they had the opportunity to be even-handed, the clear majority goes in that direction, but that's a policy-oriented position. On an emotional level, they feel closer to Israel.

MR. INDYK: India and Nigeria. Both seem to be more even-handed than pro-Palestinian which also is interesting given the traditional role as leaders of the developing world. That seemed to be unusual.

MR. KULL: I think that there is a prevailing perception that it's not a question of one over the other, that those kinds of stances are ineffective and that we need to look to the United

Nations, we need to look to cooperative approaches, and there's no solution in rooting for one side over the other.

MR. INDYK: Your polling, Shibley, is kind of contradictory. As you pointed out, on one hand, Arab public opinion supports a two-state solution but on the other hand, doesn't believe it's going to happen. I wonder if you look at the various questions you asked and particularly the way in which defiance and militancy tends to get more support; so Hamas and Hizballah getting growing support and the heroes are those who are calling for the destruction of Israel rather than calling for peace with Israel. Is there a trend here in Arab public opinion that is questioning the permanence of Israel? Have we gone through a change first of all in support of the idea of making peace with Israel, and now is the pendulum swinging back, the idea that maybe actually it's possible to think about wiping Israel off the map?

MR. TELHAMI: It's an interesting question, it really is, and I grapple with this. I try to also

look at it in designing some of the questions and trying to get at some of these aspects. You can't really ask them directly as such. I want to say two things about it. First, the fact that you have those two contradictory findings is not surprising in a way because we've seen it on the Israeli-Palestinian front not just in the Arab world but for many years particularly after the collapse of negotiations at Camp David. Israelis, the majority, said they support two states but a majority didn't think the Palestinians wanted it, they didn't trust that it was going to happen, and so they could be pro-peace and elect Sharon to break bones or the Palestinians could be pro-peace and elect Hamas because they don't think the Israelis want it, so Israelis only understand the language of force in their minds. So that's not in a way surprising. That's I think why effective diplomacy has to create possibilities because part of the game is to have a credible process that people can believe in to change their assessment of prospects. That's one.

Overall you wonder whether the permanence issue is creeping in or the militancy issue is creeping in. As to the militancy issue, I don't buy the argument that it's a principled embrace for militancy because we have a lot of data that shows that it's not a principled embrace of militancy, that it is primarily instrumental and it's primarily defiance. We have much data to support that. But nonetheless, the trend is in that direction by default because when you ask people to take sides or to give them the option to blame both sides or to call for a national unity government, still a plurality of Arabs want to see a national unity government among Palestinians, not support Hamas and not support Fatah. But if they're forced to take sides, they increasingly think that Hamas is more effective than Fatah.

If you take that a little bit and think about it regionally, I think it has regional consequences because we don't only see it in relation to Hamas, we see it also in relation to Hizballah, and that's why a lot of Arab governments are worried.

That's the sort of trend that is worrisome to them. We see it and we can trace it. But if you add to this a sense that it's happening among Palestinian elites which is more and more people don't think the two-state solution is ever going to happen, you hear that a lot from Palestinian elites, many are leaving that, and so what are they going to support other than a one-state solution? You hear that also among the public, but what's interesting is that when you ask the public opinion, A, what is likely to be the consequence of the collapse of the two-state, they don't say the demise of Israel, a plurality says we don't know what's going to happen. A minority says it's a matter of time before Israel is defeated, more people think that Israel is likely to be defeated than Israel is likely to win, but more people believe that no one can tell, it's uncertain, and when you ask them about what is likely to happen if the two-state solution collapses, the vast majority say it is going to be protracted conflict, they don't say Israel is going to disappear. So their assessment isn't really about

Israel is going to disappear. You find all these contradictions, otherwise they would have bailed out on this.

One additional point is that in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict there was always a war between Israel and the Arab states about whose side time is on. Early on the Arabs believed that time was on their side -- Israel used the settlement issue to actually make time on its side.

MR. INDYK: To try to demonstrate that time was on its side.

MR. TELHAMI: To demonstrate that time was on its side, that the longer you go the more they're going to take from the land. But that was predicated on Arabs accepting the two-state solution and Israel could use settlements as an instrument to effect the sense of time as long as the Arabs embraced the two-state solution. If you take the two-state solution out, you get to a point where settlements are actually working exactly against-- time was on our side because people are thinking time is demographic now again,

it's not about the two-state solution. I think the psychology of that is going to be really important. I don't think people are internalizing this. There's something going on here that is bigger that is psychological and it's all tied together and I think we're focused on these small trees when there is a bigger forest out there that is changing.

MR. KULL: Let me add to that. In focus groups that I've done in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, something that you find is, at the beginning of the focus group people are very obstreperous and rejecting of the notion of a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, but by the end of the focus group, almost everybody endorses it. In a poll we asked, do you favor settlement based on 1967 borders and in both Israel and the Palestinian territories it was in the 40s saying yes and the others saying no. We took those who said no and asked, is that because you think your side should have more territory or you just don't think the other side is ever really going to do this, that there is any

settlement that's possible because of the other side? They were approximately divided on that question, but if you put together those who said it's just because the other side won't do it with those who said we are willing to do it, we got actually the exact same number on both sides, 72 percent, and it's either explicitly or implicitly supporting the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

MR. INDYK: One quick question before we go to the audience. In that question you had about international forces, U.N. forces, you used the word to enforce an agreement whereas the U.N. forces have been involved and multilateral forces have been involved in monitoring the agreements in the Arab-Israeli arena.

MR. KULL: We purposely tried to raise the bar a bit on that.

MR. INDYK: The response you got was positive in enforcing the agreements?

MR. KULL: It was still positive, yes. We didn't spell out everything what if, what if, what if,

but by adding the question about the security guarantees we were trying to raise the possibility that this could involve at some point some use of forces.

MR. INDYK: Let's go to the audience. Please wait for the microphone and identify yourself, and put a question mark at the end.

MS. MIZRAHI: Jennifer Mizrahi from "The Israel Project." Congratulations on the work that you've done which is extraordinary. I have two questions. One is did you get a sense that there is any credit for Israel for the withdrawal from Gaza in the Arab world? Did you have a sense that they saw it on the news, that it impacted their views toward Israel? Number one.

Number two, you asked an extraordinary question twice now on what would get people in the Arab world to feel more positively toward America. Have you asked that question regarding trying to get them more open toward Israel, more supportive of a two-state solution?

MR. TELHAMI: On the first question, I did ask a question in 2006, I don't have the results right here, but you can actually go to either the Saban Center website or the University of Maryland Sadat website, we posted the results. There is a question about why you think Israel pulled out of Gaza, and here is my recollection because the numbers are not in front of me for this one. My recollection is that the vast majority of people did not believe Israel did it for peaceful reasons, that Israel did it because Hamas forced it out or Israel did it in order to consolidate its control over the West Bank which was a question that was there. So they didn't give Israel credit for that. It was seen to be as a unilateral move intended to bolster Israel's interests and not to take Palestinian interests into account.

Nonetheless you can't just look at the direct indicators, you have to look at the indirect indicators, and the indirect indicators I suggest to you if you look back at that year of 2005 it was the year when the conflict becomes somewhat less important

so that there was a consequence of the reduction of violence and tension where the issue becomes less important for the public even whatever public views are so that you have to look at all of that together. I think it's consequential, but obviously they're not going to give Israel direct credit for that.

On attitudes toward the U.S., I'm not sure I understood what you meant by that.

MS. MIZRAHI: I asked the question (inaudible) things the U.S. could do to build more support for America. Did you ask a similar question about what could Israel do to build support for Israel?

MR. TELHAMI: No, I didn't. Let me just say a couple of things in terms of perspective on this. This project was not just a public opinion project, it was really kind of an intellectual project over many years, intended to be at least a 10-year dataset that's going to be available to all scholars to analyze about the relationship between media opinion and identity in the Arab world. That is, we're

tracing what people are watching on television how many times a week, what they're doing on the internet, and whether there's a relationship between those sorts of things and their views on core issues, not just foreign-policy issues. Israel is a small part of this. Their views of America, views of social issues, views of the role of religion, views of women, views of Arab politics, views of identity, who they are, the Muslim, Arab, Egyptian, Jordanian, et cetera. So all of these things are being analyzed and so for that reason it has a component on the Arab-Israeli issue because it's important and as you know, with all of these are budget limits and there are also time limits because you want to repeat as many questions as you can to have 10 years of data. So you often add questions particularly that are topical and important and sometimes that you think are going to inform you, but you have to stick with the base core that you have so you can have statistical analysis that is meaningful over time. So we add some every year.

We've added this year particularly topical ones, but can't really do all that much with what we have.

MR. INDYK: Other questions? Another pollster I see with his hand up. David --

MR. : Thank you both for a very interesting presentation. I want to turn to the very first question that was discussed about the priority of the Palestinian issue and ask about another Zogby poll that was done in 2004 in the same countries, the same six Arab countries, in the very same year that your question shows the highest priority ever for the Palestinian issue. But when Zogby asked that question in an open-ended way rather than asking how important is the Palestinian issue in your priorities, but just asking people what are your priorities, the Palestinian issue didn't even make the top three in any of the same countries. Instead, the top three priorities that people identified on their own without prompting by the pollsters were as you might expect family, work, and health. So I want to ask if you could comment on that discrepancy.

MR. TELHAMI: Sure. I think first of all there are two things you have to keep in mind. As I said, you can't look at the absolute numbers when you're comparing. What you're trying to do is find out variations and whether it's consequential for correlating with opinion and whether there's change over time. So the fact that you might get 80 percent doesn't mean that in reality if you ask them rank it in comparison to your job or rank it in comparison to whether there's going to be war between you and a neighbor that it's going to rank that way. No question. So I mean that's clear.

But what we've found is that if you're doing analysis, that is extremely important because you could tell still there are people who rank it higher than others. So the question is, are the opinions of people who rank it higher going to be different on some of those issues than people who don't and how does the trend change over time. I don't recall the one that you mentioned because Zogby particularly was actually including domestic and specified I think a

variety of issues but the timing also matters as I suggested. Whether or not you have it at a time when there is a lot of violence, whether you don't have it at a time when there's a lot of violence, so it varies, but that's why you really do need this trend over time. I think that you can't look at a particular survey and say this is absolute information that tells you exactly how they rank it so I think that's precisely why the project was intended to be at least a 10-year project so that we can have data to compare over time.

MR. INDYK: Let's take a question for Steve. Is there a question for Steve? Ambassador Lewis?

MR. LEWIS: Steve, I was fascinated by your concentration on the U.N., an easy alternative. Let's put it that way. Did you ever ask a question in any of those countries, would you support your own country providing troops for such a U.N. force?

MR. KULL: Yes, we didn't ask that specifically on this question. We have asked it in regard to Darfur. You get a kind of mixed result.

European countries tended to have majorities, Russia is lower, some of the poorer countries tend to be lower, but it tends to be divided. A lot of D.K.'s, in that particular case they didn't --

MR. INDYK: D.K.'s?

MR. KULL: Pardon me, don't knows. Pardon me. Which is more of, I need to get more information kind of thing. Again I don't have the actual answer to your question, but I think the Darfur example is a good case to look at because it has a lower profile internationally than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even in that context you get fairly significant support for countries sending their own troops.

MR. INDYK: Rami Khouri in the back?

MR. KHOURI: Thank you. Rami Khouri from AUB in Beirut. I'd like to ask Martin actually a question.

MR. INDYK: I get to ask the questions.

MR. KHOURI: Or either of the panelists. I thought Shibley's focus actually articulating the idea of the prism of defiance was very important. Those of

us who live in the region have seen this going on for many years. It seems to suggest that large numbers of people in the Arab world, also in Iran and Turkey you see this and Pakistan maybe, are shifting from a kind of acquiescent protest, a kind of passive protest, into a more activist response to the conditions that plague their lives, whether it's corruption or abuse of power or Israeli occupation or Western troops come into the region or a combination of all of these. The shift from a passive protest to a more dynamic, responsive, defiant, resistance type either mindset or activity on the ground with people joining Islamist movements and other movements seems very significant. And the fact that these people also still support a two-state solution by and large which both of your polling suggests. What are the implications of this for Western policymakers? The Israelis obviously will have to make up their own minds and they're starting to look at negotiating opportunities again. But the implications for Westerners, for American, British, E.U., policymakers to come to grips with this reality

of this very significant change which also may present an opportunity for significant diplomatic engagement in the Arab world.

MR. INDYK: Maybe Shibley wants to answer. I'll give you my view of it. One conclusion is that time is not on the side of a solution and therefore it's important to engage and what's interesting about that conclusion is precisely the conclusion that George W. Bush reached after 7 years of trying the opposite in believing that there was no point in engagement. So if George W. Bush came around to that opinion, and I think most European policymakers are already there, so I would think it's reasonable to expect that whether it's President McCain or President Obama that they too will see that it's in American interests to try to solve this sooner rather than later. Do you want to add anything?

MR. TELHAMI: I think that if you listen to the campaign rhetoric certainly on the Democratic side, it's hard to know where the reality of a McCain presidency will be to pick up where Bush ended up, I

think in fact you did see that he did internalize the fact that this is a central issue more than in the past. But I think the Democratic critique of the Bush Administration's policy across the board certainly in Obama's campaign but also Hillary's campaign and policy around the Democratic party have all been critiquing the administration because they blame the current stalemate and failure on the fact that this administration has not done enough and has not ranked this issue high on its priorities over the past 7 years. So I'd expect that that would be a different stage as we head into a new administration.

Having said that, a new President is going to have some priorities jump on the agenda regardless. One is the Iraq war. Whether there's a withdrawal or whether you stay is still going to be a top priority of the next President; the economy; Iran is an issue. So this issue is going to be competing on the agenda and it's going to be hard to know how the next administration will deal with it.

MR. PLOTNIK: Thanks for the presentation. It was wonderful. My name is Mitchell Plotnik. I'm the U.S. representative of B'Tselem. I noticed in the data regarding the two-state solution as you pointed out there's still very clear support for it. I think one of the fears in Israel is the question of Palestinian refugees. The Saudi plan addresses this by talking about an agreed-upon solution for the refugees. That hasn't entirely I think assuaged the fears in Israel. I think polling data in the Arab world that really supported something less than an absolute right of return and a compromise on this issue would be helpful. But I'm wondering given the steady support and even increased support for a two-state solution is there also a trend one way or the other regarding a solution to the refugee problem and if so where did it start and where is it now?

MR. TELHAMI: I don't poll on that issue because that's not really something that I have done personally. I could tell you my interpretation. I'm not only a pollster, I'm a specialist on this issue

and I go there frequently. I'm in the Middle East almost every month and certainly talk to people and do the traditional scholarship. That's one way of figuring out also whether your polling -- as Rami could sense being in Beirut, he has a sense of whether this makes sense or not. You can do that on a number of issues without necessarily polling.

My sense on the refugee issue is two things, that first, most Arab public opinion is, if the solution is acceptable to the unified Palestinian government it will be acceptable to them. Second, in some instances particularly in Lebanon, what happens to the refugees in those countries matters a lot and so it is also an issue for them separate from the Palestinian question. So those two have not changed and in some ways in fact they have increased in importance. I think that the ultimate status of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is becoming more of an issue given what's happening in Lebanon itself.

MR. INDYK: But if there were to be a compromise on the right of return or in fact if the

right of return would be dropped in favor of compensation and resettlement in other countries for the most part other than Israel, do you think that there would be support for that kind of compromise in the Arab world?

MR. TELHAMI: If you have a consensus Palestinian government that signs a peace treaty with Israel that resolves the refugee question in whatever way that it wants I think the majority of Arab public opinion will support it. And I say the only caveat is what I suggested which is there are some particular issues like with Lebanon they certainly have to worry about what the status is for the refugees in Lebanon.

MR. KULL: I just wanted to add that it's real important when you look at polling data that you recognize that sometimes this is a bargaining behavior, that people are taking a strong stance, it doesn't mean that they are fixed on that position. Also on the refugee question, there was an interesting poll that was done of refugees asking them if they want to return to the territories or if they want to

return to Israel proper, and the majority said that they do not want to return to Israel proper, that they would actually prefer to live in the territories. When this was released, Shikaki actually conducted it, it created a little pandemonium and he was actually chased into his office. This isn't what people wanted to be said at this point. Why? Because it's not a good bargaining position for the public to take that position.

MR. CHEN: Chow Chen , freelance correspondent. I have an observation and suggestion. It's very good that everybody has faith in U.N. security. So if we have U.N. security peacekeeping force there, then we can have a very good environment there. The next thing is this, nobody has faith in these four parties, Palestine, Israel, U.S., and the Arabs. So if we do this three decades the way of doing business we're going to get nowhere so I think that if we have a U.N. peacekeeping force making peace there and have a peaceful environment then also we get U.N. security to handle the settlement, so I think

then we can move forward. I think your two reports are quite informative and just need to have a creative way to do the business. Thank you.

MS. CAO: This question is for both guests.

MR. INDYK: Who are you?

MS. CAO: Theresa Cao with Shalom International. Are you aware that U.S. foreign policy that directly imperils Israel, her border and her security, directly impacts us and imperils America and our borders and our security? That's point number one, because there's a text called 'As America has Done to Israel' which cites all the way back to the Nixon era every time that our nation, America, imperils Israel's borders that we in turn are imperiled as a nation. Lastly, with regard to the present-day Annapolis Summit and this disengagement plan-- we as a nation are under the greatest threat ever as all of us are very aware. So the key I believe is that in order to secure America and our borders that it is critical that U.S. foreign policy secure Israel's borders as well.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. Let's go for some questions this time. I know I can rely on Gary for questions.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from "The Mitchell Report." Shibley and Steve, I noticed that neither of you addressed the question, speaking of conflicts, of whether Bill Clinton is really going to support Obama in the campaign and I'm wondering whether you'll look into that.

There are two things that I think I get from your poll, the first of which is I think you said that relative to the first question there's fairly a high degree of unanimity across the six countries and across demographic cohorts; not much difference. Then the second piece of course is something that Martin has touched on before which is this: on the one hand they believe in a two-state solution, on the other hand they don't think they're ever going to get there. What I'm after is some sense of a world view in those six countries, some issue on which there wouldn't be demographic unanimity, something that happens outside

their sphere of influence that sort of gives us a context-- two or three examples. I understand that it's not in your poll and it's not the purpose, but if you were to ask them about China and Tibet or India and Pakistan or Darfur, what might we learn about them that in a sense we're not learning from understanding that they really don't like us and they really don't like Israel and they really don't think there's going to be a solution?

MR. INDYK: Do they like Tibet?

MR. KULL: I can add something to that because we've polled in both Israel and the Palestinian territories on a whole range of international policy issues and it's rather remarkable how much Israelis and Palestinians agree. I can't pick them all out of the air nor are we trying to do that, but if you'd like I can provide that to you. It's surprising.

MR. TELHAMI: Just a quick one on this, too. We have certain opinions even in this poll where they're more divided, particularly Hamas versus Fatah.

Only minority support Hamas more than Fatah. They're kind of divided still, but they're learning toward Hamas. The same thing in Lebanon about Hizballah and the government. One of the interesting things is there are online unscientific polls all the time and Aljazeera.net actually in Arabic has almost a daily poll on all issues that are confronting people and sometimes they get a large number of participants who are reading Aljazeera.net. Obviously it's not scientific.

One of the things that I notice is whether there are trends in that poll. They ask you the question, you can actually click and get the results without voting which is not like the others where they keep it from you so I always click. But before I click I have (inaudible), can I predict what it's going to be. In most cases I could predict. In some of the questions like the ones that we talked about, you can tell that 80 percent or more, usually almost 85 percent, are going to be in one direction and about 11 to 15 percent will be in another direction. But

there are issues and they're not frequent, but there are issues. Once a week there's one issue or so where people are much more divided, where it's not predictable. I mentally cannot predict by looking at that issue, and there are a number of them like that.

MR. INDYK: Like what for instance?

MR. TELHAMI: Tibet, for example, or the role of China and a variety of issues of that sort you can find that they're not central to them.

MR. INDYK: The last question I'm afraid from Ori Nir.

MR. NIR: I'm Ori Nir with Americans for Peace Now, and I'd like to ask you a cynical Israel-centric question which would sound a little like a tongue-twister. That is, why does it matter whether it matters to people in the Arab world and in the world whether the Palestinian-Israeli conflict matters to them as long as it matters less and less to the party that really matters which is Israel? In other words, polls have shown that Israelis care less and less about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So the

question to Steve is why is Israel not included in the

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MR. KULL: Why what?

MR. NIR: Why didn't you poll Israeli public opinion on this? And to Shibley, what is the message that you think Israeli policymakers should take from your findings?

MR. TELHAMI: First of all, as you know, in my case of course I don't poll Israel because this is an Arab -- I don't even poll Muslims outside of the Arab world. This is really about the Arab media and public opinion, so that's not an issue although I look at those obviously. I don't even poll the Palestinians. I look at polls on the Palestinians. That's not what I do. But if you're an Israeli government official, what you need to know first of all is the huge gap between Arab governments and the public on these issues that they care most about, the kind of pressure that Arab governments are facing in the kinds of positions that they're taking whether it's the Jordanian government, the Egyptian

government, or the Saudi government, that gap is growing. So if you're dealing with this and you're trying to formulate a policy, you have to understand that.

Second, I think the degree of pessimism if you, A, believe that's an important issue to the Arab public, B, the Arab public is pessimistic about the prospects of a deal, then C, the consequence is more support for militancy, so those are things that flow out of the data.

MR. KULL: Israel participated in the last round. They didn't participate in this round. They were going to. They didn't get the money together. Our partner at the University of Tel Aviv had nothing to do with the topic. We would have loved to have had them. Maybe they will be on board next time.

Why is it important? World public opinion does matter to people. Public opinion matters to people. If somebody says I don't care what anybody else thinks they're lying. Even George Bush who says I don't care about polls did respond to the polls

saying that the United States was unpopular in the world and devoted substantial resources to addressing the problem apparently not all that effectively but he put some effort into it.

What we're dealing with here is the force of legitimacy and legitimacy creates order in the states and legitimacy is a big factor in relations between states. So I think any policymaker who is trying to deal with their relations with the rest of the world is instinctively going to be attentive to public opinion elsewhere and there is no question that the Israeli government is attentive to world public opinion. If you don't have public opinion on your side it creates costs, and if you do it decreases costs in all kinds of dimensions. So I think it's ultimately rational, and even if it weren't, it's an emotional reaction that people have as well as something that contributes to the sense of legitimacy.

MR. INDYK: I think as to Israeli polling data Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University both do extensive polling, but maybe we should do some too.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming,
and thank you Shibley and Steve for fascinating
presentations.

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