American Public Attitudes Toward ISIS and Syria

A survey sponsored by the
Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland

in cooperation with the
Program for Public Consultation

presented at
The Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution

Shibley Telhami, Principal Investigator

Steven Kull, Evan Lewis, Clay Ramsay, and Katayoun Kishi provided assistance.
Peyton Craighill provided helpful comments.
Rachel Slattery and Elizabeth Pearce contributed to the presentation.
Survey Methodology

Fielded November 14-19, 2014

1008 American adults in sample

Online survey format

Margin of error is +/- 3.4%
Of the challenges facing the United States in the Middle East, which of the following do you believe threatens American interests the most?

- Israeli-Palestinian conflict: 13%
- Iranian behavior: 12%
- Instability in Libya: 3%
- Rise of ISIS: 70%
- Refused: 2%
Q20. Of the challenges facing the United States in the Middle East, which of the following do you believe threatens American interests the most?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian behavior in general</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instability in Libya</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If airstrikes aren't enough to stop ISIS, would you favor or oppose sending US ground troops to Iraq to fight against ISIS?

Oppose: 57%

Favor: 41%

Refused: 2%
Q28. If airstrikes aren't enough to stop ISIS, would you favor or oppose sending U.S. ground troops to Iraq to fight against ISIS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which of the following is closest to your view in JUSTIFYING the possible use of American ground forces?

- ISIS is an extension of *Al Qaeda* who we are at war with since 9/11: 43%
- ISIS can threaten our most vital *interests*, including at home: 16%
- ISIS threatens U.S. *allies* in the region, especially the Iraqis: 7%
- Most troubled by ISIS’s *ruthless behavior* and intolerance: 33%
- Refused: 1%
Q29. Which of the following is closest to your view in JUSTIFYING the possible use of American ground forces?

Democrats
- I see ISIS as a more dangerous extension of Al Qaeda with which... 41%
- I fear ISIS is in a position to threaten our most vital interests,... 15%
- I am most concerned about ISIS's threat to American allies in the... 13%
- I am most troubled by ISIS's ruthless behavior and intolerance of... 32%
- Refused

Independents
- I see ISIS as a more dangerous extension of Al Qaeda with which... 41%
- I fear ISIS is in a position to threaten our most vital interests,... 19%
- I am most concerned about ISIS's threat to American allies in the... 3%
- I am most troubled by ISIS's ruthless behavior and intolerance of... 32%
- Refused

Republicans
- I see ISIS as a more dangerous extension of Al Qaeda with which... 44%
- I fear ISIS is in a position to threaten our most vital interests,... 17%
- I am most concerned about ISIS's threat to American allies in the... 4%
- I am most troubled by ISIS's ruthless behavior and intolerance of... 34%
- Refused
1. The U.S. should stay out of the conflict with ISIS. The U.S. cannot determine the course of war in Syria and Iraq. Our involvement would be a slippery slope, going from air strikes, to military advisers, and ultimately to combat troops.

1. We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS. ISIS not only threatens our allies, if it succeeds in expanding and increasing its control of oil resources, it will become a greater threat to our interests.
Which of the following is closest to your view?

- We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS: 57%
- The U.S. should stay out of the conflict with ISIS: 39%
- Refused: 3%
Q30. Which of the following is closest to your view?

Democrats
- We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS: 52%
- The United States should stay out of the conflict with ISIS: 45%
- Refused: 31%

Independents
- We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS: 51%
- The United States should stay out of the conflict with ISIS: 44%
- Refused: 29%

Republicans
- We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS: 67%
- The United States should stay out of the conflict with ISIS: 31%
- Refused: 10%
1. Even if we commit a significant number of ground troops, it is unlikely that we can defeat ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

1. If we commit a large number of ground troops, we can defeat ISIS, but as soon as we withdraw, they, or something like them, will likely return.

1. If we commit a large number of ground troops, we can defeat ISIS well enough so that it is unlikely they or something like them will not return soon after we withdraw.
Which of the following is closer to your view?

- U.S. is unlikely to defeat ISIS: 22%
- U.S. can defeat ISIS but they will return: 56%
- U.S. can permanently defeat ISIS: 20%
- Refused: 3%
Q31. Which of the following is closer to your view?

**Democrats**
- Unlikely we can defeat ISIS: 24%
- US can defeat ISIS, but they will return: 55%
- US can defeat ISIS, and they will not return: 20%
- Refused: 27%

**Independents**
- Unlikely we can defeat ISIS: 27%
- US can defeat ISIS, but they will return: 53%
- US can defeat ISIS, and they will not return: 14%
- Refused: 14%

**Republicans**
- Unlikely we can defeat ISIS: 17%
- US can defeat ISIS, but they will return: 58%
- US can defeat ISIS, and they will not return: 24%
- Refused: 24%
Assessing Support for ISIS
What is your impression of how Muslims around the world feel about ISIS?

Muslim views are evenly balanced: 44%

Most Muslims oppose ISIS: 40%

Most Muslims support ISIS: 14%

Refused: 3%
Q27. What is your impression of how Muslims around the world feel about ISIS?

Democrats
- Views are about evenly balanced: 42%
- Most Muslims oppose it: 48%
- Most Muslims support it: 6%
- Refused: 0%

Independents
- Views are about evenly balanced: 53%
- Most Muslims oppose it: 31%
- Most Muslims support it: 13%
- Refused: 0%

Republicans
- Views are about evenly balanced: 41%
- Most Muslims oppose it: 35%
- Most Muslims support it: 22%
- Refused: 0%
How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS in the Middle East?

- Not at all: 18%
- Not very: 42%
- Somewhat: 32%
- Very: 8%
- Refused: 1%
Q32. How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS in the Middle East?
How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS and carry out attacks in the U.S.?

- Not at all: 14%
- Not very: 36%
- Somewhat: 39%
- Very: 11%
- Refused: 1%
Q33. How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS and carry out attacks in the US?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Democrats: 41% Not at all, 36% Somewhat, 11% Very
Independents: 33% Not at all, 33% Somewhat, 9% Very
Republicans: 10% Not at all, 32% Somewhat, 13% Very
Do you think support among Americans for ISIS is likely to be:

- Support for ISIS greater than for Al Qaeda: 17%
- Support for ISIS less than for Al Qaeda: 25%
- About the same: 56%
- Refused: 2%
Q34. Do you think support among Americans for ISIS is likely to be:

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Greater than support for al Qaeda</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than support for al Qaeda</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Syria and ISIS
Q.35

WHICH IS CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW?

1. If we expend enough resources to train and arm the moderate Syrian opposition, it could stand up to both ISIS and the Assad regime.

1. The Syrian opposition is too weak and divided. Even if we give it significantly more resources it cannot effectively stand up to both ISIS and the current regime of Bashar al-Assad.
Which of the following is closer to your view?

Syrian opposition can stand up to ISIS and Assad - 30%

Syrian opposition cannot stand up to ISIS and Assad - 65%

Refused - 5%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Syrian opposition can stand up to ISIS and Assad</th>
<th>34%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syrian opposition cannot stand up to ISIS and Assad</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Syrian opposition can stand up to ISIS and Assad</th>
<th>30%</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Syrian opposition cannot stand up to ISIS and Assad</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Syrian opposition can stand up to ISIS and Assad</th>
<th>26%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syrian opposition cannot stand up to ISIS and Assad</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assad has killed his own people with chemical weapons and is as bad as ISIS. There is no way to resolve the war in Syria without removing the Assad regime. Do you find this convincing or unconvincing?

- Very convincing: 18%
- Somewhat convincing: 52%
- Somewhat unconvincing: 18%
- Very unconvincing: 9%
- Refused: 3%
Q36. Assad has killed his own people with chemical weapons and is as bad as ISIS. There is no way to resolve the war in Syria without removing the Assad regime. Do you find this convincing or unconvincing?

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very convincing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat convincing</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unconvincing</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unconvincing</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We should not fight the Assad army and let it fight ISIS. Do you find this convincing or unconvincing?

- Very convincing: 12%
- Somewhat convincing: 48%
- Somewhat unconvincing: 27%
- Very unconvincing: 9%
- Refused: 4%
Q37. We should not fight the Assad army and let it fight ISIS. Please select whether you find it convincing or unconvincing.
So now do you think the US military should or should not fight Assad’s army in Syria?

- Should not: 72%
- Should: 25%
- Refused: 4%
Q38. So now do you think the US military should or should not fight Assad’s army in Syria?

Democrats
- Should not: 71%
- Should: 24%
- Refused: 25%

Independents
- Should not: 72%
- Should: 25%
- Refused: 24%

Republicans
- Should not: 72%
- Should: 26%
- Refused: 24%
Issue Linkage
Q.19

WHICH IS CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW?

1. The escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw more support among Muslims worldwide and to focus more attention on confronting Israel and the U.S.

1. Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect either the support for ISIS or its strategies. Its aims are independent of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and it’s unlikely to draw more supporters because of it.
Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

Palestinian-Israeli violence is likely to be used by ISIS to draw support: 64%

Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect support for ISIS: 30%

Refused: 6%
The escalation of Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw more support.

Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect either the support for ISIS or its strategies.

Q19. Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The escalation of Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw more support.</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect either the support for ISIS or its strategies.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q19. Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

- Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw support
- Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect support for ISIS
- Refused

In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

- Lean toward Israel: 73%
- Lean toward neither side: 61%
- Refused: 25%
Q20. Of the challenges facing the United States in the Middle East, which of the following do you believe threatens American interests the most?

- The rise of ISIS
- Instability in Libya
- Iranian behavior
- Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

- Lean toward Israel: 74%
- Lean toward neither side: 70%
- Lean toward Israel: 1% Instability in Libya, 17% Iranian behavior, 8% Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- Lean toward neither side: 3% Instability in Libya, 19% Iranian behavior, 14% Israeli-Palestinian conflict
In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Q27. What is your impression of how Muslims around the world feel about ISIS?

- Most Muslims oppose ISIS: 33%
- Muslim views are evenly balanced: 42%
- Most Muslims support ISIS: 24%
- Refused: 8%
Q28. If airstrikes aren't enough to stop ISIS, would you favor or oppose sending U.S. ground troops to Iraq to fight against ISIS?

In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

- Lean toward Israel: Favor 61%, Oppose 38%
- Lean toward neither side: Favor 31%, Oppose 66%
In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Q30. Which of the following is closest to your view?

- **Lean toward neither side**: 50%
- **Lean toward Israel**: 76%
- **The U.S. must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS**: 21%
- **The U.S. should stay out of the conflict with ISIS**: 47%
- **Refused**
In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

- Lean toward Israel: 14% Very, 47% Somewhat, 30% Not very, 9% Not at all
- Lean toward neither side: 10% Very, 35% Somewhat, 39% Not very, 15% Not at all

Q33. How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS and carry out attacks in the US?

- Very: 14%
- Somewhat: 47%
- Not very: 30%
- Not at all: 9%
- Refused: 15%