Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll (2016-2018)
Final Report

Role of Public Opinion in the Resilience/Resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

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PSR is an independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research. It was founded in 2000 with the goal of advancing scholarship and knowledge on immediate issues of concern to Palestinians in three areas: domestic politics and government, strategic analysis and foreign policy, and public opinion polls and survey research. PSR conducts policy analysis and empirical surveys and public opinion research and organizes task forces, study groups, meetings and conferences. Its work focuses on current public policy issues with a special reliance on empirical evidence as a tool to advance scholarship and understanding.

The Palestinian-Israeli Pulse is a joint poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in Ramallah jointly with the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) and the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research (TSC), Tel Aviv University. Funding for the *Pulse* was provided by the European Union (EU), the Netherlands Representative Office in Ramallah, and the UNDP/PAPP on behalf of the Representative Office of Japan to Palestine. Five joint polls have been conducted during the period between June 2016 and June-July 2018. The Palestinian sample size ranged between 1270 and 2150 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. The Israeli sample ranged between 900 and 1600 Israelis, with occasional oversamples of settlers and Arab citizens. The margin of error ranged between +/-2.5% and +/-3%.

The surveys tested the details of a permanent peace agreement, incentives for those who were opposed to the agreement, perceptions of the other and levels of mistrust and fear of the other, and alternative scenarios to the two-state solution, including both equal and unequal versions of one state, and a confederation of two states.

The polls were planned and supervised by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of PSR, Walid Ladadweh, head of PSR's polling unit, Dr. Tamar Hermann, the academic director of IDI's Guttman Center for Surveys, and Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin and Dr. Ephraim Lavie from TSC.

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Had Palestinian and Israeli negotiators reached a peace agreement any time during the past two decades, public opinion on both sides would have supported it. The same is probably true today, but reaching that support will be more difficult, as the starting point – the initial base of support – is weaker. Today, political leaders would need to work harder to win over a sufficient portion of the opposition on both sides. They will need adjustments or additions to the agreement, and external guarantees will be important as well. Under the right circumstances, a majority on both sides can support a permanent peace agreement. The public therefore, is not a direct obstacle to peace.

But at the same time, the public is not a driving force for peace on either side. The people are not taking the lead to demand progress from their leaders. Public despair helps sustain the conflict and ensure its perpetuation. Indeed, large portion of Israelis and Palestinians have elected, or would elect leaders who are unlikely to move ahead on peace at all. Public opinion in both Palestine and Israel is therefore not an impediment to an agreement but it will not drive one forward without a significant change of circumstances.

The guiding question of this research has been whether public opinion can be channeled away from the prevailing sense of inertia and despair. The study has sought to leverage the potential for public support, seeking all means by which the majority can still support peace.

To do this, we examine the following aspects here:

- What has happened to support for the two-state solution, and what are the main reasons for the erosion of support over the years? Who are the constituencies driving the decline in support?

- What is the map of opinions at present regarding the detailed items of a two-state agreement, which items present the greatest obstacles for each side – keeping each side apart?

- Are attitudes flexible and dynamic? Experience over the decades with actual changes in policy and negotiations indicates that they are. On this basis, we have asked throughout the project – can we confirm that attitudes are still flexible? What can shift the dynamics of slow erosion of support, and how can we reach a majority who state that they would support an agreement in the future?

I.   The Bad News: Declining support for the two-state solution and reasons for the shift

Over the three years of the project, support for a two-state solution has fallen steadily on both sides – not a precipitous crash but a slow decline.

The past decade has witnessed significant hardening of views among Palestinians and Israelis. Recent survey research findings[1] show an illustrative example, as in Chart 1 below. The findings show a drop in support for the two-state solution, during the period between 2006 and June 2018, from 71% among the Palestinians to 43% today and a parallel drop in Israeli support from 68% to 49%.   This is the lowest level of support for this concept among the two publics during the past two years of the Pulse, the lowest in more than a decade, when a steady decline in support began, and the lowest in almost two decades of joint Palestinian-Israeli survey research.

Chart (1): Palestinian and Israeli support for the concept of a two-state solution between 2006 and 2018
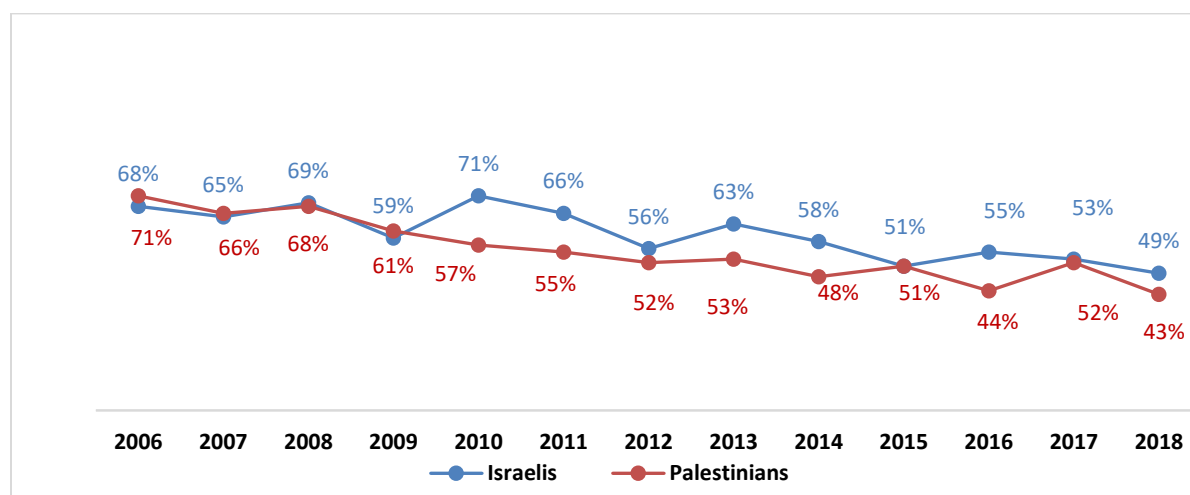
The most troubling aspect of the decline in the level of support for the two-state solution is the fact that the youth in particular are the least supportive. As chart 2 below shows, Palestinians and Israeli Jews between the ages of 18 and 24 are the least supportive of the idea. In fact, among Israeli Jews, only 27%, compared to 51% among those who are over 55 years or older, are still supportive. While, among the Palestinians, the gap for same two groups in narrower, 41% to 55% respectively. The fact that age is such a decisive factor is highly instructive. This could mean that the future will bring even lower levels of support for this solution.

Chart (2): Today's support for the two-state solution among Palestinians and Israeli Jews by age group (June 2018)
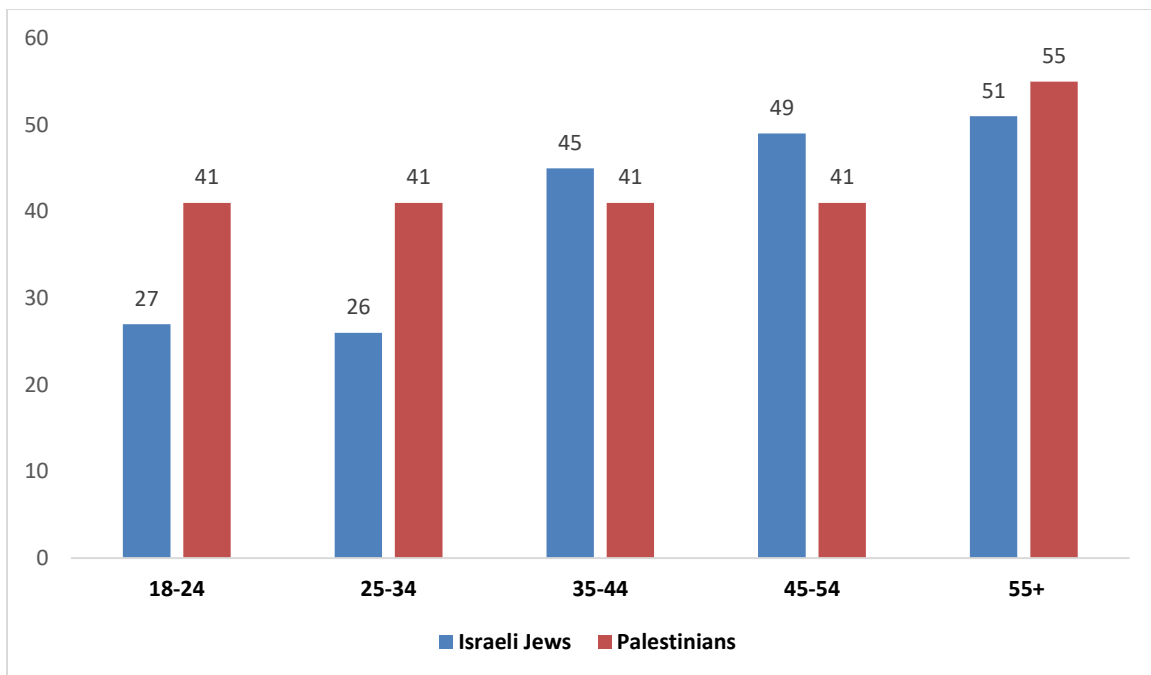
Other findings confirm the trend of decline in support for compromise. For example, support for a comprehensive peace agreement package, along the terms of the Clinton Parameters of 2000, the Geneva Initiative of 2003, and the outcome of the 2008 bilateral negotiations between the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, has also dropped over the past 15 years.[2] For example, while in December 2004, right after the death of Yasser Arafat, support for a comprehensive peace package stood at 54% among Palestinians and 57% among Israeli Jews, attitudes shifted by December 2014 when only 38% of the Palestinians and 41% of Israeli Jews supported that same package. In June 2018, in response to a similar-- but not identical—package, only 37% of the Palestinians and 39% of Israeli Jews gave their support (46% among all Israelis, factoring in high support from Arab citizens of Israel).

Still, the constituency for a two-state solution is still the largest on both sides, relative to those who support only some other approach.

Explaining the Decline

We identify three main sources of opposition and decline.

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[2] The package typically includes components such as a de-militarized Palestinian state, an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 or Green Line with equal territorial exchange, a family unification in Israel of 100,000 Palestinian refugees, West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall under Israeli sovereignty and the Muslim and Christian quarters and the al Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount under Palestinian sovereignty, and the end of the conflict and claims.

First, as in the past, part of the opposition to a two-state resolution emerges from the value system of minority groups who are highly motivated and highly opposed for ideological reasons: the national-religious and Haredi Israelis and the Palestinian Islamists. Most Palestinians, close to 70%, are in fact secular nationalist, not Islamists. Similarly, nearly 80% of Israelis are secular or traditionalists; only about one-fifth to one-quarter are religious or ultra-religious. However, traditionalists are significantly more likely to oppose peace than secular Jews as well, albeit for somewhat different reasons from the hardline, ideological opposition of the most religious Israelis.

Second, mutual perceptions of each side are generally poor; only a minority on each side expresses trust in the other or believes the other side supports peace. The majority on both sides believes that the other side does not want peace, is not trustworthy, does not support the two-state solution, and believes that the other side entertains deep-seated but hidden long term aspiration to wipe out the other side from existence.

Third, the main development over the last two years is a clear decline in perceptions that the two-state solution is even viable. At present, the two publics are highly skeptical about whether it is possible to reach a two-state solution given the wide-ranging spread of settlements: in June 2018, a majority of Palestinians (56%) and a plurality of Israelis (47%) say it is no longer feasible, in a mild upward trend on both sides. Indeed, the perception of viability is a critical driver of support for compromise. The decline in perceived viability goes hand in hand with a decline in support, as shown in the following graph.

Chart (3): Palestinian and Israeli perceived viability and support for the two-state solution
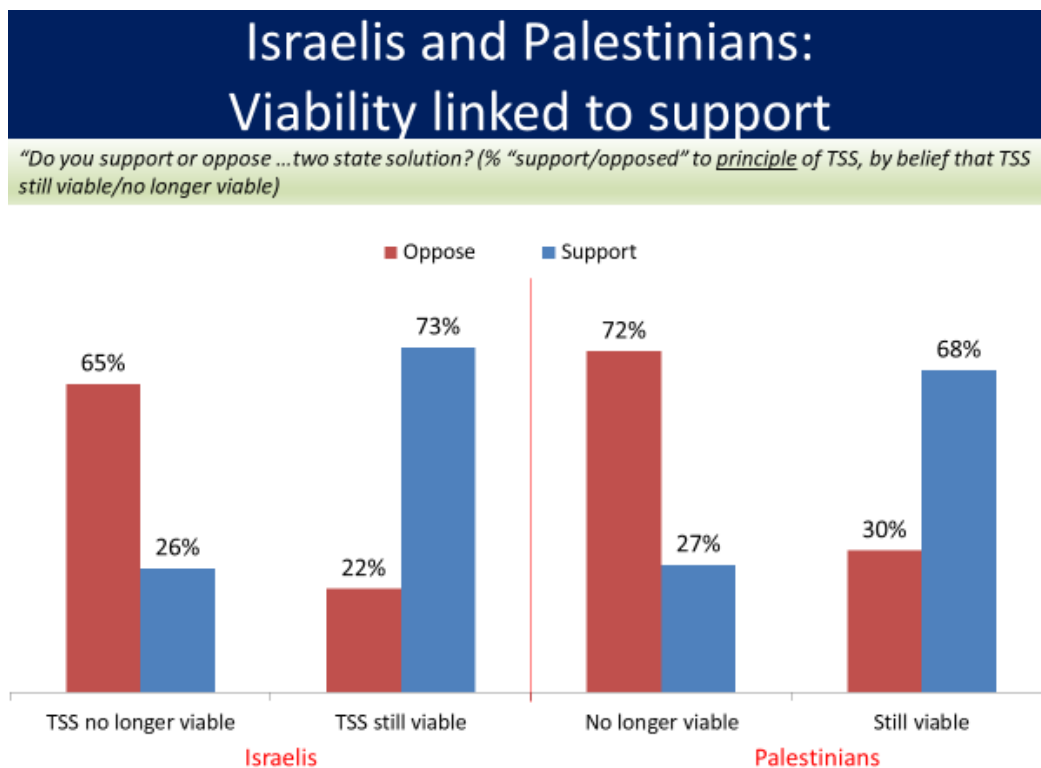
This decline in both perceived viability and support is clear when considering trends on the Israeli side: there is a clear decline on these measures among the left, seculars and to some extent the centrist population, more so than on the right (who begin at a lower rate and remained mostly constant). These communities are not ideologically opposed to a two-state solution – but their perception that it is no longer viable is causing them to lose hope and therefore support.

II.   Mapping the opposition: Which aspects of negotiations and peace are obstacles?

On several critical issues, Israelis today are much more of a problem than the Palestinians; and on others, the Palestinians pose a greater problem.

In the most general sense, the Israelis are content with the status quo of continued occupation while the Palestinians are highly dissatisfied with it. This gap is most striking when observing the responses to a question about the overall conditions of life in Palestine and in Israel. Israelis show general contentment, with about half who say things are good and only 18% in June 2018 who say things are actually bad or very bad (the remainder are in-between); while just 15% among Palestinians say conditions are good – the vast majority, 62%, say conditions are bad. The more content Israelis are with the status quo they are the more likely the Israeli public will continue to support right wing politics and politicians. Most Israelis, including the mainstream, remain opposed to dismantling settlements, a critical requirement in any peace agreement.

Palestinians show significant flexibility on a critical issue for Israelis: demography and the maintenance of a Jewish majority. Nearly half of the Palestinians is willing to accept a permanent agreement that allows only one hundred thousand refugees, rather than all 6 million, to return to their homes and property inside Israel. On the other hand, the majority of Palestinians opposes mutual recognition of the two-states as the homeland of their peoples, and show strong commitment to the principle of the right of return to '48 Israel – which prompts high resistance and backlash from Israelis. Further, the geo-political division between Gaza/Hamas and the West Bank/PA and the inability to transition to a democratic political system and a pluralistic civil society constitute an impediment to mutual confidence-building with Israeli society.

When examining the specific items of a two-state agreement as based on previous rounds of negotiations and adjusted over time the pattern of gaps between the two sides is clear. The two sides are highly polarized or mutually rejectionist over the issues of:

- Demilitarization of the Palestinian state (59% Israelis support this, Palestinians reject it with just 20% support)
- Refugee arrangement of a two-state solution (48% of Palestinians support it, but just 21% of Israeli Jews)
- The issue of dividing Jerusalem along the lines of the two-state plans receives only minimal support, between one-fifth and one-quarter on both sides and the majority of both sides reject it; this finding has been consistent throughout the period of the project

- Even the basic issue of borders to divide the land based on mutual territorial swaps receives the support of a minority on both sides, albeit more than the Jerusalem compromises

III.   Encouraging Signs: why the public is not an impediment to peace

Despite the inauspicious starting point, three positive indicators remain: public preference for diplomacy is relatively high, no other concept is more popular than the two-state solution, and incentives designed to increase support for compromise have proven to be highly effective.
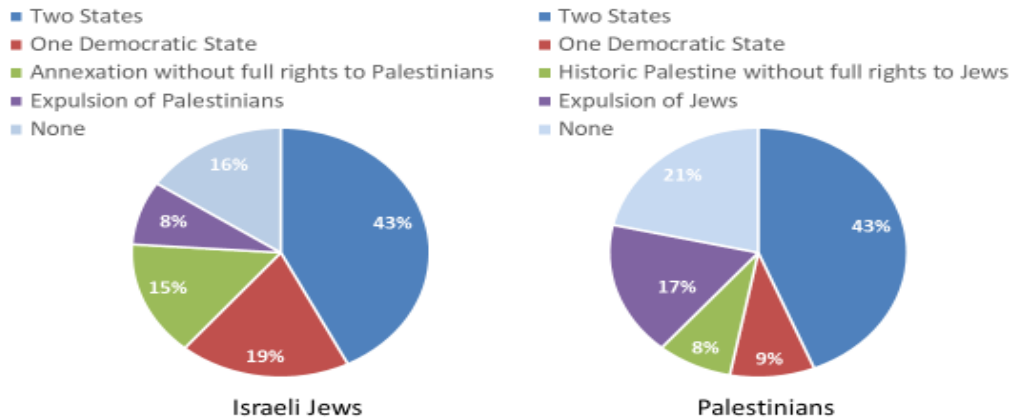
First, despite the alarming developments regarding the *substance* of peace, the preference of the two publics is for peaceful *means* of conflict resolution. By June 2018, over forty percent of the Palestinian (41%) and Israeli public (45%) preferred reaching a peace agreement as the best means of changing the status quo. Only one-quarter (27%) of Palestinians and one- fifth of Israelis preferred violence or armed struggle as the preferred means of change. However, there are dangers here too: The portion of Israelis who believed "a definitive war" is the next step has risen eight points over the last year, from June 2017. The portion of Palestinians who support uprising rose sharply in December 2017, then dropped dramatically again in June. This shows how quickly both publics can come to support military strategies. Following the brinksmanship in Gaza in November, it is likely that large portions on both sides could come to support a new war.

The second positive indicator is that despite the gradual decline in support for the two-state solution, this approach remains by far, the most preferred solution by the two publics. As one can see in the following figures, alternatives, such as a democratic one-state solution, an apartheid one-state reality (one in which one side controls the entire land and denies equal rights to the other side), and expulsion (one in which one side expels or "transfers" the population of the other side) remain less popular than the two-state solution. The core constituencies for the strongest of these alternatives on each side, those who would support these, and only these alternatives, are less than half the size of the two-state constituency (19% of Israeli Jews support one equal state compared to 43% for two states; 17% of Palestinians support the transfer approach, compared to 43% for two states), as seen in the figures below.

Chart (4): Support for the two-state solution and core support for three alternative options among Palestinians and Israeli Jews, June 2018 (supporters of the two-state solution were not asked about the other three alternatives)

TSS – still stronger than alternatives

"Support or oppose (each option)?" (% of Jews and Palestinians who support each option, removing overlap with other options in descending order: Two states, one democratic state, one state without full rights to other group, expulsion of other group)

Israeli Jews legend:
- Two States
- One Democratic State
- Annexation without full rights to Palestinians
- Expulsion of Palestinians
- None

Palestinians legend:
- Two States
- One Democratic State
- Historic Palestine without full rights to Jews
- Expulsion of Jews
- None

Israeli Jews: 43%, 19%, 15%, 8%, 16%

Palestinians: 43%, 9%, 8%, 17%, 21%

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This data shows the two-state constituency, and those who would not support it but would support one of the other options, as a portion of the total population. The category called "other" refers to respondents who rejected all options, or respond with "do not know."

A closer examination of the split within the Palestinian side shows that support for the two-state solution is greater than the support for any of the alternatives in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and most importantly among supporters of all factions except Hamas: among Hamas supporters in 2018, the highest portion support none of the approaches, and a slightly higher portion support expulsion than two states. The most religious support two states at a lower rate than the less religious – similar to Israeli Jews.

A similar examination of the Israeli Jewish side shows that support for the two-state solution is highest only among secular and traditional Jews, but not among the religious (who prefer apartheid over all other) and the Ultra-Orthodox (where the two states constituency is the same size as those who support an apartheid approach). When looking at the Israeli political spectrum, support for the two-state solution is highest among those who place themselves on the left and the center but not among those who place themselves on the right. Those who place themselves on the right side of the Israeli political spectrum prefer apartheid over all others.

This affirms the initial observation that while the population of both sides can still come to support two states, the process of getting there is held back by specific minorities who form the hard core of opposition on both sides.

The third and most important factor is the consistent finding over the last two years of survey research that support for a comprehensive agreement can be significantly increased, to levels that exceed two thirds on both sides, if various constituencies are given a stake in its success. For Palestinians, the most effective incentive, the one that persuades the greatest number of those who initially opposed an agreement, is the release of Palestinian prisoners as part of the agreement. This incentive alone causes over half of the opposition to change their minds and support an agreement, increasing total support for the comprehensive package to 70%. Similarly, access to the Israeli labor market and free movement for the two peoples between the two states are almost as effective. Intangible incentives, when offered to Palestinians, can be as effective. For example, an Israeli acknowledgement of the historic and religious roots of the Palestinians in historic Palestine or the Israeli recognition of the Arab and Islamic character of the Palestinian state is highly effective.

BOX 1: Role of incentives in increasing Palestinian support for a permanent peace package

Top 10 incentives proposed to Palestinians, June 2016-June 2018
% percentage of those who changed their mind from opposition to support
1. Israel releases all Palestinian prisoners--**56%**
2. Palestinian laborers continue to work in Israel-- **44%**
3. Israeli acknowledgement of historic/religious roots of Palestinians in historic Palestine-- **44%**
4. Israel recognizes Arab-Islamic character of Palestinian state-- **42%**
5. Palestinian refugees currently living in refugee camps receive land/homes in Palestinian state-- **42%**
6. Free movement for both sides in two states-- **40%**
7. Israel to recognize Nakba, provides compensation-- **39%**
8. Palestine will be democratic-- **37%**
9. Marwan Barghouti supports package-- **34%**
10. Israel acknowledges responsibility for refugee problem-- **34%**

Similarly, an Israeli acknowledgement of responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem and/or an Israeli apology to the refugees for the suffering they have endured since 1948 can change the attitudes of a large minority of those opposed to compromise. Finally, leadership can play a significant role in increasing Palestinian support for compromise: Marwan Barghouti's support for a comprehensive peace package can convince a third of the Palestinian opposition to switch position from opposition to support.

Similarly, on the Israeli side, both tangible and intangible incentives can increase the level of support for such a comprehensive package that implements the two-state solution from a large minority to approximately two-thirds. Effective tangible incentives include the following: compensation to Israeli Jews who left property behind in Arab countries when they immigrated to Israel after 1948 and assurance of permission for all Jews to visit the Temple Mount (al Haram al Sharif) and Palestinians changing textbooks to remove incitement against Jews; a defense treaty with the US, and peace, normal relations, and economic ventures with Arab countries. Ongoing security cooperation with Palestinians raises total support to nearly 60%. A

combination of two such incentives can increase the support among Israeli Jews to more than 60%. Intangible incentives such as a Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and an acknowledgement of the Jewish historic and religious ties to the land are also highly effective. Public endorsement of the peace package by leaders, such as Netanyahu, can also be an incentive to change minds of nearly 30% of those who oppose the plan.

BOX 2: Role of incentives in increasing Israeli support for a permanent peace package

Top 10 incentives proposed to Israeli Jews, June 2016-June 2018
% percentage of those who changed their mind from opposition to support
1. Jews allowed to visit the Temple Mount/al Haram al Sharif -- **47%**
2. Palestine to commit to ongoing security cooperation like today-- **44%**
3. Pal recognizes Israel as Jewish state, Jewish historic and religious ties to land-- **43%**
4. Compensation to Jews from Arab countries-- **41%**
5. State of Palestine will be democratic-- **40%**
6. Guarantees by the US, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia-- **39%**
7. Regional peace with Arab states-API-- **37%**
8. Pal change textbooks, removes incitement-- **35%**
9. Acknowledgement of Jewish historic/religious roots-- **35%**
10. Israelis and settlers allowed to be residents in Palestine-- **35%**

Improving the agreement

In our fifth survey in the series and after two years of testing, in a pilot test, the top three incentives that were effective on both sides were incorporated into the basic agreement itself. None of these three are inherently controversial, and are perceived by both sides as win-win aspects rather than as a concession to the other:

- Ensuring that the Palestinian state would be democratic
- Providing guarantees from Arab countries and the US
- Full normalization and greater integration into the Arab Middle East following an agreement, as per the Arab Peace Initiative

The results of this pilot experiment showed a success for the research process: when tested among half of the sample as the core two-state peace plan, while the other half of respondents were offered only the original plan, the improved plan performed significantly better. Among Palestinians, 42% supported the new plan, five points higher than those who supported the original one; among Israelis the improved plan reached a majority for the first time in this phase of polling: 53% - although only 45% among Israeli Jews. By contrast, the original plan received the support of 46% of all Israelis but only 39% of Israeli Jews. Most importantly, the new plan achieved much stronger results among key constituencies within Israel – such as self-defined centrists, who went from 44% to 58% support when the two half-samples were compared. But gains were also clear among the toughest groups of ideologically opposed respondents. On the

Palestinian side the gains were fairly even across different sectors but especially – and critically – among the religious respondents, and the youngest (18-22).

Changing minds

In the final survey, we also conducted a second experiment, a continuation of the pilot test mentioned above. Taking the eight most successful incentives on each side, we moved a step beyond the optimism of positive incentives and told each side about a corresponding incentive that would be offered to the other side. The goal was to mirror a realistic scenario in which each side will have to confront the other side getting incentives and gains that it might not like, but simultaneously enjoying its own incentives. Would support for the agreement based on incentives for each side, but alongside incentives for the other side change the dynamics?

Box 3: Pairing zero-sum incentives

Eight paired incentives offered to both sides, June 2018
1. Two states to recognize each other's <u>religious/historic roots</u> in historic Palestine/Land of Israel
2. Palestine to acknowledge the Jewish <u>character</u> of Israel; Israel to acknowledge the Arab and Islamic character of Palestine.
3. An agreed number of Israelis, including <u>settlers</u>, to live as permanent residents inside Palestine; an agreed number of Palestinians, including <u>refugees</u>, to live as permanent residents inside Israel
4. Palestine to commit to ongoing <u>security cooperation</u> like today; Israel to commit to releasing all <u>Palestinian prisoners</u>
5. Jews to be allowed to visit al <u>Haram al Sharif/ the Temple Mount</u>; Israel to allow Palestinians to visit Muslim and Christian <u>holy sites in Israel</u>
6. <u>Jews from Arab countries</u> to be compensated for lost properties; Israel to recognize the Nakba/ <u>apologize</u> for the suffering of refugees
7. Palestine and Israel to change <u>school textbooks</u> to remove incitement against each other
8. Palestine to end <u>boycott campaign</u> against Israel; Israel to end its opposition to Palestine joining <u>international organizations</u>

The basic finding is that these pairs showing mutual gains in addition to the regular plan for a two-state peace, were not as successful as one-sided gain. All respondents were asked about the pairs, and some stated that the paired incentives made them more likely to support an agreement - others said it made them less likely. This was the case on both sides. The survey therefore calculated the net gain for support of an agreement after adding those who switched to the original level of support or opposition.

For the Israelis, six of the eight pairs were able to raise the total support and four of them pushed total support over 50%. The pair offering to change Palestinian textbooks, while Israelis would do the same, raised support to 61%.

**Chart (5): Original Plan: Israeli Jewish support/opposition after incentive pairs,** June 2018

"Does this make you more or less likely to support the agreement?" (% total support or opposition after defections & switchers, Israeli Jews, for original comprehensive package)
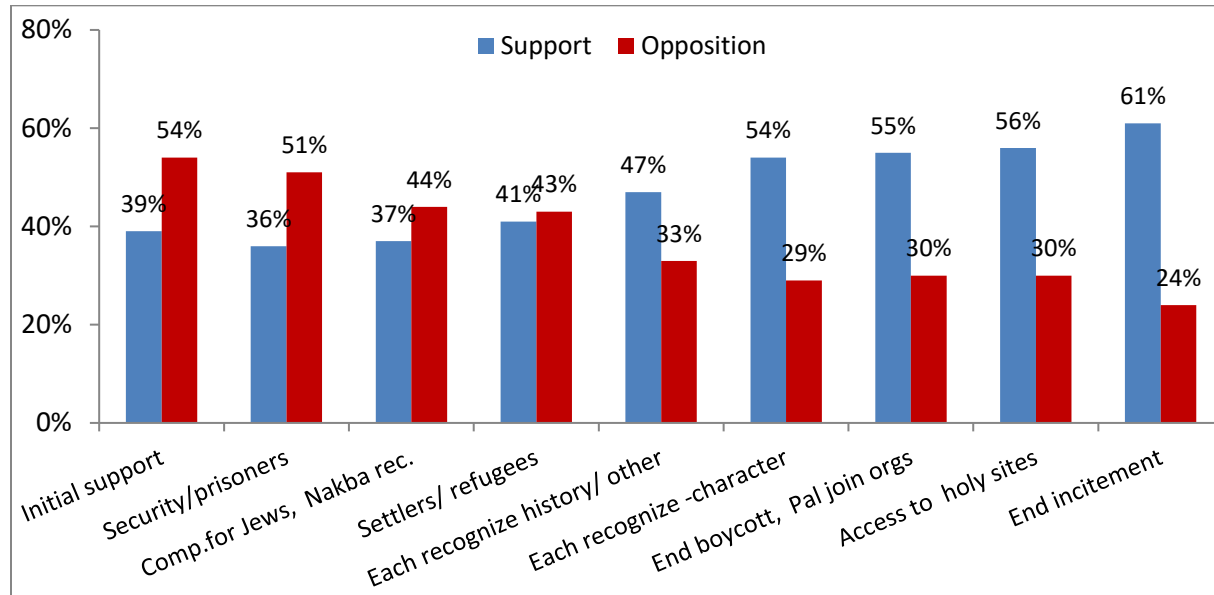
For Palestinians, the pairs were not as successful: just two of them raised support above the original level, but not by a significant margin. Further, in all cases, opposition to the plan remained higher than support. Still, the findings affirmed earlier tests – the strongest incentive pair involved the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Chart (6): Original Plan: Palestinian support/opposition after incentive pairs, June 2018

"Does this make you more or less likely to support the agreement?" (% total support or opposition after defections & switchers, Israeli Jews, for original comprehensive package)
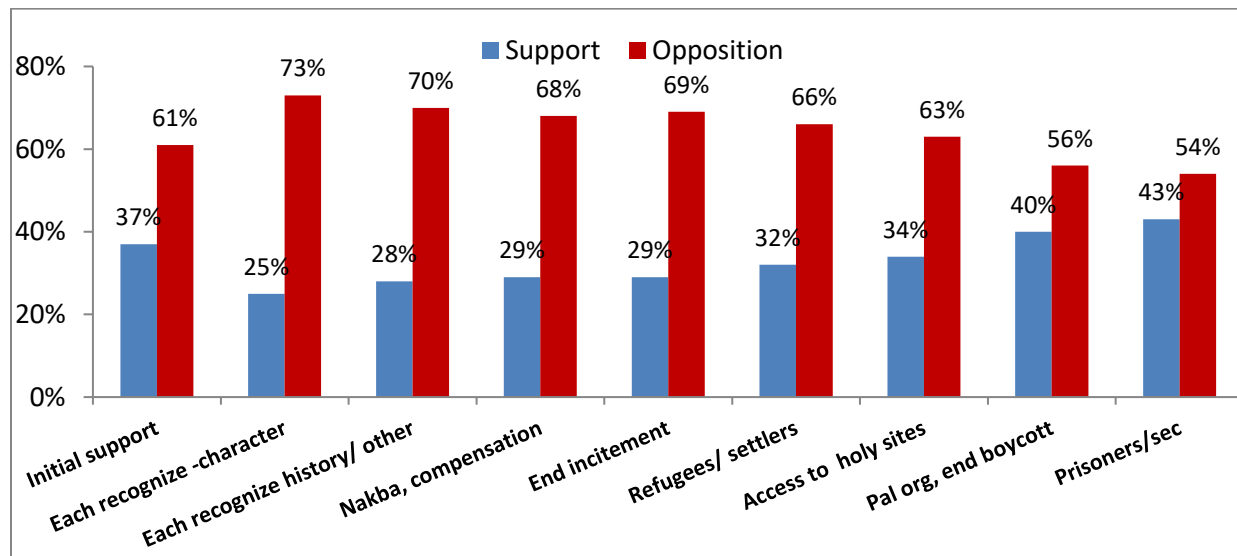
Conclusion and Recommendations

The most critical factor leading to declining support for a two-state agreement is the perceived lack of feasibility. Breaking down the reasons for this perception we find different aspects on the two sides: For Israelis, the sense that the status quo is good enough leads to complacency. For Palestinians, the sense that settlement spread has gone too far, abandonment by the US as a negotiator (and increasingly by the Arab world) is leading to the conclusion that there is no hope.

Both of these can be changed: The American-led peace framework that is expected to be released can remind Israelis that even the American President believes that reaching a resolution is a priority that cannot be permanently deferred.

For Palestinians – the plan is unlikely to provide true independence and sovereignty, but it can be an opportunity to respond by proposing the right kind of plan as long as attention will be focused on the issue. The core elements of that plan can be drawn from the successful items that have emerged from this research.

Raising the level of perceived feasibility is key.

Beyond that, two further recommendation are worth pursuing: Any regional development that will contribute either to increased likelihood of reaching a plan or successful implementation of a plan, should be considered a top priority. Strengthening the institutions of Palestinian political and civic life is such an aspect: it will provide greater immediate benefit to Palestinians, but also significantly strengthens the prospects for both Israeli and Palestinian acceptance of a two-state solution at any point. And in reality it will probably make that solution more sustainable.

The final recommendation is to continue searching for incentives that are mutually acceptable. Our research will continue this process through survey experiments based on policy analysis. The more new ideas that can be incorporated into an old plan, or adjustments that are perceived as mutually beneficial, the greater the possibility that visionary leaders in the future will have a basis for making peace.

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Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

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