AN OPENING FOR PEACE:
ISRAELIS, PALESTINIANS AND THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

By Justin Scott Finkelstein

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Particularly in the past few years, a wide array of pundits, experts and observers of the Arab-Israeli conflict have suggested that the two-state solution is dead. Secretary of State John Kerry's latest push for peace has not done much, if anything, to temper these opinions. Despite his proclamations—at times ubiquitous in the media—that the two sides are close to an agreement, Kerry is being met with far more pessimistic assessments among most Israelis, Palestinians and commentators.

This embodies part of a trend on both sides of the political divide: On the right, many argue that Palestinian hate and incitement against Israel and Jews, Palestinian maximalist demands and a general unwillingness to live in permanent peace with the state of Israel precludes the conclusion of any peace accord. On the left, many argue that America's enabling of self-destructive Israeli policies, such as the continued expansion of settlements and the entrenchment of the occupation, the rise of the Israeli right-wing, and a general inflexibility of the Israeli public and their leaders to make necessary concessions for peace are the primary reasons a two-state solution is unattainable. Still others—again, on both sides of the political spectrum—are ideologically against the principle of a peace agreement based on two states for two peoples; they argue that this would be fundamentally unjust to either the Israelis or the Palestinians. Some therefore argue for a continuation of the status quo or a one-state solution, wherein all people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea live in one democratic state.

Prominent in this discourse is the discussion about Israeli and Palestinian public opinion: What do most Israelis and Palestinians actually want? What solution do they accept? Is a two-state solution acceptable to most Israelis and/or Palestinians? How much support does a one-state solution garner among both publics? What do the Palestinian and Israeli publics mean when they speak of a two-state solution? Which two-state formula elicits the most positive response? The most negative response?

For answers to these questions, one is largely forced to rely on polls—which are always subjective and often partisan. How else to explain that a simple Google search of polls on Israeli and Palestinian public opinion brings forth almost innumerable contradictory results? The consequence of this has often been that commentators use data most aligned with their preconceived notions to support their arguments. So we are forced to ask ourselves yet another question: How do we disentangle these polls and arrive at some sort of conclusion about an accurate reflection of both Palestinian and Israeli public opinion?

THE JOINT ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PUBLIC OPINION POLL

Among the constellation of polls on Israeli and Palestinian public opinion, the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll may be the one most frequently cited by journalists and policymakers. Conducted once a year since 2003 by the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, the joint poll presents a representative sample of both Israelis and Palestinians with six main elements of a two-state solution based on the Clinton Parameters and the Geneva Initiative.[1] The six elements that comprise the surveyed agreement are:[2]

1) **Borders:** The entirety of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would make up Palestine, with the exception of 3% of the West Bank (to account for Jewish settlements). There would be proportional land swaps to make up for this.

2) **Refugees:** The solution for the issue of the Palestinian refugees would be based on UN Resolutions 194 and 242. All Palestinian refugees would receive financial compensation, and Palestinian refugees would be given 5 options for permanent residency:

   a) **Palestinian state**

   b) **Areas of Israel (pre-1967) swapped to Palestine**

   c) **Current country of residence**

   d) **A third country**

   e) **Israel (subject to the Israeli government's discretion)**

3) **Jerusalem:** East Jerusalem would be the capital of Palestine, with its Arab neighborhoods falling under Palestinian sovereignty and its Jewish neighborhoods under Israeli sovereignty. All of the Old City and the Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) would go to Palestine, except for the Jewish Quarter and the Wailing Wall plaza; those areas and West Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel.

4) **Demilitarized Palestinian state:** Palestine would have no army, but would have a strong security force and multinational forces to ensure its safety and security. Both Israel and Palestine would be committed to ending all violence against each other.

5) **Security Arrangements:** Palestine would have sovereignty over its land, water and airspace, but Israel would have the right to use Palestinian airspace for training purposes. Israel would maintain two security stations in the West Bank for 15 years, and a multinational force would monitor the borders between the two states and the implementation of the agreement by both sides.

6) **End of Conflict:** Upon the full implementation of the above agreement, the conflict would be declared over by both sides. Both Israel and Palestine would recognize each other as the homeland of its respective peoples.

After presenting each of these six elements, the interviewees are asked whether or not they accept that part of the plan. Subsequently, the joint poll asks interviewees whether or not they support the package as a whole. Figure 1 below depicts all of the statistics gathered since the first joint poll was conducted in December 2003.

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[1] The Clinton Parameters was a last-ditch effort by President Bill Clinton to bridge the gaps in negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials in 2000 and the Geneva Initiative is an unofficial peace agreement drafted by several top Israeli and Palestinian former or then-current officials in 2003.

[2] The text of the peace plan presented here is largely copied from the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Poll. See http://pcpsr.org/survey/index.html#head3.

Figure 1: Support for Peace Plan Surveyed in Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll[3]

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Borders	ISR	47%	55%	53%	44%	46%	46%	47%	49%	51%	46%	44%
	PAL	57%	63%	55%	61%	56%	54%	49%	49%	63%	53%	52%
Refugees	ISR	35%	44%	43%	38%	44%	40%	36%	36%	42%	42%	39%
	PAL	25%	46%	40%	41%	39%	40%	37%	41%	45%	41%	46%
Jerusalem	ISR	41%	39%	38%	38%	36%	40%	34%	38%	38%	38%	37%
	PAL	46%	44%	33%	39%	36%	36%	31%	36%	40%	29%	32%
Demilitarized State	ISR	61%	68%	69%	62%	61%	64%	56%	62%	67%	70%	60%
	PAL	36%	27%	20%	28%	23%	27%	24%	24%	32%	28%	28%
Security Arrangements	ISR	50%	61%	62%	51%	53%	56%	49%	52%	63%	59%	52%
	PAL	23%	53%	43%	42%	51%	35%	34%	38%	50%	46%	52%
End of Conflict	ISR	66%	76%	80%	68%	66%	67%	68%	68%	70%	68%	66%
	PAL	42%	69%	64%	62%	66%	55%	55%	58%	63%	59%	63%
Overall Package	ISR	47%	64%	64%	52%	53%	52%	46%	52%	58%	56%	54%
	PAL	39%	54%	46%	48%	47%	41%	38%	40%	50%	43%	46%

As seen above, the joint polls have found that about 54% of the Israeli public consistently supports a two-state peace agreement based on the Clinton Parameters and the Geneva Initiative. While it additionally found that a considerable portion of the Palestinian public also supports these plans, the Palestinian approval rate since 2003 has been under 50% (around 45%). Furthermore, individual elements of the plan garner significantly different levels of support. Among Palestinians, for example, support for a demilitarized Palestine hovers at 27%, a whopping 18% decrease from overall Palestinian support for the package. Among Israelis, a similar story can be told about the proposed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem: on this issue, Israeli support only comes to about 40%.

Furthermore, it may be observed that the most significant uptick in support for the peace plans from both the Palestinian and Israeli publics occurred in December 2004. This may be attributed to longtime Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's death the prior month: Arafat came to be seen by a majority of Israelis as an impediment to a peace deal, and Palestinians knew this. Therefore, after his death, there was a flicker of hope—and with it, an acceptance

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[3] Chart taken from Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll, December 2012, http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p46ejoint.html.

of greater compromise—among both publics.

The joint poll also asks Palestinians and Israelis whether or not they support the [Arab Peace Initiative](#). The initiative, drafted by Saudi Arabia and unanimously approved by the Arab League in 2002, originally proposed a complete Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines (on all fronts—the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms) and an "agreed upon" solution to the Palestinian refugee problem in return for the normalization of relations between the Arab world and Israel. The plan signified the first time the Arab world publicly accepted Israel's existence and presented a comprehensive two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the initiative's insistence on a complete Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines on all fronts was a major sticking point for Israel and much of the international community, as Israel has counted on maintaining large Jewish settlements in the West Bank and at least some of the Golan Heights as part of any final peace deal and views the 1967 lines as indefensible. The vague language on the Palestinian refugee problem was also a point of contention. This was reflected in joint polls, which found only 20% to 30% of Israelis in support of the initiative.

Secretary Kerry seemed to grasp at least part of the problem and in the spring of 2013, he was able to convince a number of key officials in the Arab world to amend the plan to allow for minor land swaps to the 1967 lines. Both before and after the amendment, majority Palestinian support has been recorded (anywhere from 51% to 65%), although the last joint poll, conducted in December 2013, found only 47% of Palestinians in support of it (50% were opposed). Conversely, large majorities of Israelis continued to reject the proposal even after it was amended, with support remaining at only around 20% to 30%. Reasons for the continued Israeli rejection remain speculative, but it may be inferred that Israelis are still concerned about the vague language on the refugee issue and have qualms about the lack of explicit security arrangements and details regarding the fate of the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms. Moreover, Israelis may have less trust in any peace plan that comes from the Arab world.

Finally, the joint poll also periodically asks both Israelis and Palestinians for their opinions about the formation of one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, with equality for both Arabs and Jews, in order to solve the conflict. Its findings have been clear: Only about 25% to 30% of the Israeli and Palestinian public supports this type of solution. The last joint poll that asked this question, released in June 2013, was consistent with these numbers.[4] A survey conducted independently by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research more recently, in December 2013, found that while support for the one-state solution rose marginally to 32%, opposition remained strong, at 66%.

POLLS THAT CORROBORATE THESE FINDINGS

Numerous other polling centers have corroborated the findings of the joint poll shown above. A Gallup poll conducted in August and September of 2012, for example, found that 52% of Jewish Israelis and 85% of non-Jewish Israelis support (and 40% of Jewish Israelis and 5% of non-Jewish Israelis oppose) "a situation in which an independent Palestinian State existed alongside an independent state of Israel." It found that 70% of West Bank Palestinians also supported this (28% did not), while 48% of Gaza Strip Palestinians expressed support (and 51% did not). Taken altogether, the Gallup survey shows clear majority support on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides for a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Figure 2 presents the complete results of the survey:

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[4] See "Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll, June 2013," http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2013/p48ejoint.html. For Palestinians, see "Poll Number (50) ," Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, December, 2013, http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2013/p50e.pdf.

Figure 2: Gallup Survey from August/September 2012[5]

Would you support or not support a situation in which an independent Palestinian State existed alongside an independent state of Israel?				
	Jewish Israelis	**Non-Jewish Israelis**	**West Bank Palestinians**	**Gaza Strip Palestinians**
	%	%	%	%
Support	52	85	70	48
Not support	40	5	28	51
No opinion	8	9	1	1
2012				
GALLUP				

A poll conducted in November 2013 by multiple American, Israeli and Palestinian organizations and overseen by Shibley Telhami, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, also came up with important information.[6] Presenting a detailed peace plan to Israelis and Palestinians similar to the one used by the joint poll—with the notable addition of a provision wherein Palestinians recognize Israel as "a state of the Jewish people and of all its citizens"—it found that 54% of Israelis but only 41% of Palestinians accepted the plan. However, the poll then asked respondents whether their opinions would change if the other side (either the Palestinians or Israelis) publicly accepted the deal, after which Israeli support rose to 63% and, remarkably, Palestinian support jumped to 59%.

In this vein, it is also important to note that the December poll conducted by the Palestinians Center for Policy and Survey Research (mentioned earlier) found that while only 46% of Palestinians accepted the Clinton/Geneva peace plans after they were first presented, 50% of Palestinians said they would vote in favor of the plan if it were put to a referendum, 25% of those originally opposed said they would change their minds if the package included an Israeli acknowledgement of responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, 18% would change their minds if the package included an Israeli acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative, 22% would change their minds if Palestine were offered $30 to $50 billion in order to settle and compensate refugees and 21% would change their minds if the European Union offered Palestine membership. On the Israeli side, a poll conducted in May 2013 found that if Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu were to accept the amended Arab Peace Initiative, 69% of the Israeli public would as well.[7] These findings may have significant implications about under what conditions the Palestinian and Israeli publics are most willing to accept a two-state solution.[8] Finally, the poll overseen by Shibley Telhami also found that only 21% of Israelis and 30% of Palestinians positively view a scenario wherein "Israel and the Palestinian Territories would become one state with Israelis and Palestinians as equal citizens."

Furthermore, an American nongovernmental organization, the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, has commissioned polls since November 2003—the last one was published in November 2012—that show majority support for the two-state solution among the Jewish Israeli public. The Abraham Center-commissioned polls present interviewees with a peace proposal slightly less far-reaching than the one proposed by the joint poll. The only significant differences are that the Old City would be under international control (not split between Israeli and Palestinian sovereignty) and the Palestinian refugees would only have the option of returning to the Palestinian state. The polls have found that an average of about 60% of the Jewish Israeli public endorses the proposal. Moreover, when presented with an "enhanced package" that includes additional perks such as a mutual defense treaty with America and the agreement being conditioned on Hamas's disarmament, the average approval rating of

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[5] Chart taken from Lydia Saad and Elizabeth Mendes, "Israelis, Palestinians Pro Peace Process, but Not Hopeful," Gallup, March 21, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/161456/israelis-palestinians-pro-peace-process-not-hopeful.aspx.
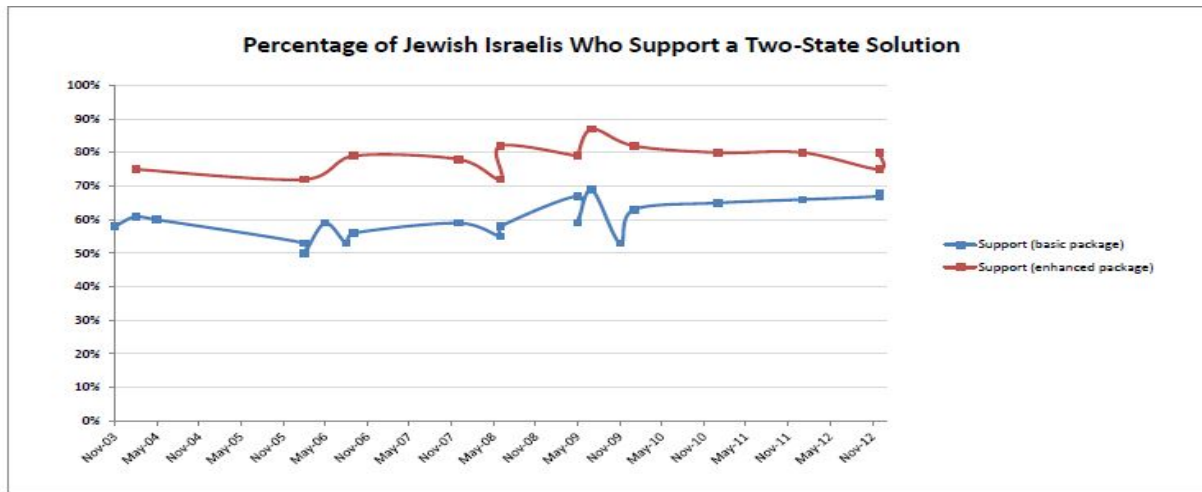
[6] "Israeli and Palestinian Public Opinion on Negotiating a Final Status Peace Agreement," The Brookings Institution, December 6, 2013,
http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2013/12/06%20public%20opinion%20israel%20palestine/israel%20palestine%20opinion%20poll%202.pdf.

[7] Akiva Eldar, "Most Israelis Back Arab Peace Initiative," Al-Monitor, May 27, 2013, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/most-israelis-back-arab-peace-initiative.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter).

[8] The poll also found that a strong majority of 60% of Palestinians think the Palestinians leadership should reject any American attempt to force them to accept the proposal, which has significant implications as well.

the two-state proposal soars to about 75% among Jewish Israelis. These figures can be seen in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace Survey[9]

The Daniel Abraham Center commissioned another poll in November 2013 which found that 67% of Israelis would vote for a peace agreement with the Palestinians (ostensibly based on two states) that Netanyahu brought to a referendum.[10] The poll did not present interviewees with an outline of the prospective agreement, which likely demonstrates the confidence the Israeli public has in Netanyahu to oversee the negotiation of a peace agreement that meets Israel's vital interests.

Polls conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), based in Tel Aviv, have come up with similar findings. INSS studies have shown that from 2003 to 2012, an average of 56.4% of Israelis have supported "the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza in the framework of a permanent settlement."[11] Its latest survey, conducted in 2012, also found a large plurality of Israelis in support of a two-state solution with similar details to the one presented in the joint poll.

Other polling organizations have also obtained results that show strong support for a two-state solution among Palestinians. The Ramallah-based Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, for example, found in its latest survey—conducted in November 2013—that a strong plurality of 48.1% supports a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. (Its previous poll, conducted in March 2013, had very similar findings). As seen in Figure 4 below, the poll also gave respondents the opportunity to support "a bi-national state on all of Palestine where Palestinians and Israelis enjoy equal representation and rights" (as an alternative to the two-state solution), to which only 21.3% of Palestinians responded approvingly:

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[9] Chart taken from "Polls," S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, http://centerpeace.org/polls/.

[10] "Perceptions and Positions Regarding the Consequences of Attaining/Not Attaining a Peace Agreement with the Palestinians," Midgam Research and Consulting, November 2013. It may also be noted that an additional question in this survey found that Israelis are split on whether or not the agreement put to a referendum would receive majority support, with 50% of Israelis believing it would and 50% believing it would not. This may exemplify the level of pessimism among the Israeli public about the possibility of actually reaching a peace agreement.

[11] Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, "The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012," The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), April 2013, http://d26e8pvoto2x3r.cloudfront.net/uploadimages/systemfiles/memo126e%20(2)410001833.pdf. See pp. 77-78 for statistics. Surveys referred to were conducted in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2012.

Figure 4: Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre Survey[12]

Q17**. Some believe that a two-state formula is the favored solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, while others believe that historic Palestine cannot be divided and thus the favored solution is a bi-national state on all of Palestine where Palestinians and Israelis enjoy equal representation and rights. Which of these solutions do you prefer?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza
	n= 1200	n= 750	n= 450
Two-state solution : a Palestinian and an Israeli state	48.1	45.6	52.2
Bi-national state on all of historic Palestine	21.3	23.9	16.9
Palestinian State *	13.3	12.7	14.2
Islamic State *	0.8	1.2	0.0
Others	1.5	0.3	3.6
No solution	11.3	12.1	10.0
I don't know \ No answer	3.7	4.2	3.1

* These answers were not included as part of the options read to the interviewee

A poll conducted by the Ramallah-based Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) center in December 2013 also found that a majority of Palestinians endorse the framework of a two-state solution to end the Arab-Israeli conflict:

Figure 3: Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) December 2013 poll[13]

Do you support the principle of a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with Israel?			
-----------------------------	West Bank	Gaza	Total
Support	56.6%	44.0%	51.9%
Oppose	40.2%	54.9%	45.7%
Don't know	3.2%	1.1%	2.4%

[12] Chart taken from "Poll No. 79, March 2013 – Reconciliation, Obama Visit and Security Coordination," April 10, 2013, http://jmcc.org/documentsandmaps.aspx?id=861.
[13] Chart adapted from "Results of an Opinion Poll: Negotiations, Evaluation of Government and Elections," Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), January 2, 2014, http://awrad.org/page.php?id=nUJi6KP8Jsa9850458AxjqZP9J5Si.

Yet another Ramallah-based Palestinian research center, Near East Consulting, came up with complementary results in its latest survey of the Palestinian public, published in April 2012. Querying interviewees about their views on a one-state solution that allows Palestinian refugees to return to their homes (in pre-1967 Israel, with no other alternative solution presented), the survey found that 76% of Palestinians opposed the one-state solution.[14]

POLLS THAT COMPLICATE THE PICTURE

Despite the above evidence of significant support for a two-state solution (and much less support for a one-state solution) among both the Israeli and Palestinian publics, the statistics have been hotly contested. On the Israeli side, a 2009 poll conducted by an Israeli research organization, Maagar Mochot, and Israel's Channel 2 found that 51% of Israelis oppose and only 32% support a two-state solution. And another poll conducted in 2013 by the Geocartographia organization showed that 45% of Israelis oppose and only 40% support the two-state solution.

Yet when looking at the precise formulation of the questions asked in these surveys, it becomes evident that semantics played a large role in the results. For instance, the question presented for the 2009 poll asks "In light of the experience with disengagement, the Second Lebanon War and the war against Hamas in Gaza, do you support or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria?" By invoking the violence that Israel has faced after other withdrawals before asking the question, the pollsters received a predictable answer. The 2013 poll also had an oddly formulated question: "Are you for or against the concept that two states for two peoples (Israel and Palestine) is the desirable solution for a peace agreement with the Palestinians?" Like the other poll, this survey does not ask interviewees simply if they would *accept* the two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict; rather, it asks whether or not it is the "desirable" solution. It may also be noted that the survey recorded that 14% of interviewees either had no opinion or refused to reply. This is a high percentage that could have a significant impact on the findings.

Peace Index polls (surveys conducted almost monthly by The Israel Democracy Institute) published in July and August of 2013[15] have also provided fodder for those insisting Israelis do not accept a two-state solution that allows for a viable Palestinian state. For example, in a September article for the Open Zion Blog in The Daily Beast, commentator Jerry Haber claimed that Israelis do not support the two-state solution and used the aforementioned polls as proof.[16] The center of concern in the July poll was the question that asked Israelis to consider a situation wherein Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have reached a peace settlement that included "security arrangements for Israel, a demilitarized Palestinian state, international guarantees, and [a] declaration of the end of conflict by the Palestinians." The survey then recorded opposition and support for four additional compromises that would be on the table in this scenario: on borders, Jerusalem, settlements and the Palestinian refugees.

On borders, the survey suggested a withdrawal to the 1967 lines with territorial swaps; on Jerusalem, it proposed the "transfer of the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem to the Palestinian Authority, and a special arrangement for the holy places;" on settlements, it proposed an evacuation of settlements except for Ariel, Maaleh Adumim and settlement blocs; and finally, it proposed and Israeli recognition "in principle" of the Right of Return, with the return of a small number of refugees to Israel and financial compensation for the others. The poll found that for each one of these compromises there was either a plurality or majority in *opposition.*

How to explain this? In the end, the results of this poll came down to methodology. If one compares the level of support for each of the compromises surveyed in the Peace Index poll to similar compromises proposed in the joint poll, one will find somewhat similar numbers: On the proposal for settlements and borders, the joint poll has found an average of 48% support, while the Peace Index poll has come up with 41%; on Jerusalem, the joint poll has shown an average of 38% in support versus 44% support in the Peace Index survey; and finally, on the refugee issue, the joint poll has found an average of 40% in support, while the Peace Index poll recorded 28% in support. On the latter issue, it should be noted that the joint poll does not propose that Israel accept the Palestinian Right of Return "in principle," as the Peace Index poll does—which is probably the main reason for the large disparity on the refugee issue between the two polls. Aside from that, statistics from both the Peace Index poll and the joint polls are fairly

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[14] April 2012 Near East Consulting (NEC) survey, http://neareastconsulting.com/press/2012/April2012-PR-EN.pdf.

[15] See The Israel Democracy Institute Peace Index Polls, Year 2013, http://peaceindex.org/indexYearsEng.aspx?num=20.

[16] Jerry Haber, "Reading Lustick Carefully," The Daily Beast, September 20, 2013, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/20/rereading-lustick-carefully.html.

comparable. The tough issues the Peace Index poll surveys are indeed beyond what most Israelis are usually willing to concede for a peace agreement; it is only when one combines those compromises in a package that also includes strong security arrangements that *overall* support rises above 50%.

In his analysis of the August Peace Index poll, Haber points to a sentence in the summary prepared by its compilers that says the results of that month's poll "strengthen our previous finding that there is currently no sweeping support for the two-state solution and indicate that the Israeli public is not losing sleep over the basic premise of the negotiations that without two states a bi-national reality will emerge." But when looking at the poll, one finds that only two questions were asked about the two-state solution, and its findings do not indicate any less acceptance of a two-state solution among Israelis than in other polls. The August Peace Index poll asked interviewees 1) whether or not the failure to achieve a two-state solution would lead to a binational state, and 2) whether or not they agree that the two-state solution is dead. On the former, the poll found the Israeli public virtually split, and on the latter it found that a majority of 54% believe that the two-state solution has *not* yet died. There was no question that asked whether or not interviewees would accept a certain two-state solution; the sentence Haber quotes is therefore misleading.

On the Palestinian side, the idea that a majority or a very significant amount of Palestinians support a two-state solution has also been hotly contested. In February 2007, for example, the website The Electronic Intifada reported a poll published by Near East Consulting that found 70% of Palestinians in support of a one-state solution. And indeed, upon looking up the poll (seen in chart form in Figure 5) on the Near East Consulting website, one finds that when asked whether they support or oppose "a one-state solution in historic Palestine where Muslims, Christians and Jews have equal rights and responsibilities", 70.4% of Palestinians said they support this scenario, whereas only 29.6% responded that they oppose it:

Figure 5: February 2007 Near East Consulting Poll[17]

Support or opposition to a one-state solution in historic Palestine where Muslims, Christians and Jews have equal rights and responsibilities					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Support	528	65.5	70.4	70.4
	Oppose	222	27.5	29.6	100.0
	Total	750	93.1	100.0	
Missing	99.00	55	6.8		
	System	1	.1		
	Total	56	6.9		
Total		806	100.0		

[17] Chart taken from Near East Consulting, General Monthly Survey, February 2007, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/all/p22/out_freq_q27.php.

In addition, the survey reported that about three quarters of the Palestinian public believe Israel does not have the right to exist. The survey also registered one of the lowest levels of support among the Palestinian public for Hamas to change its position that Israel should be eliminated (this question was asked often in Near East Consulting polls), with just a slight majority—50.8% to 49.2%—responding that Hamas should change its stance.[18]

However, the cited poll has internal contradictions, and it is problematic to look at the question about a one-state solution in a vacuum. For instance, in a different question within the same survey, interviewees were asked whether or not they support or oppose a peace settlement with Israel. The poll found that 70.3% of Palestinians support and only 29.7% oppose a peace agreement—almost the exact opposite of the findings for the question on a one-state solution. Furthermore, when interviewees were asked whether Hamas should "use all of its efforts to reach a peace agreement with Israel," a remarkable 63.1% responded in the affirmative, while only 36.9% responded in the negative. These results are consistent with other Near East Consulting polls conducted over the past several years.

A poll published in November 2007 (just several months later) by Near East Consulting provided more interesting twists. As seen in Figure 6, it found that a majority of Palestinians prefer a two-state solution to the conflict:

Figure 6: November 2007 Near East Consulting Poll Results[19]

Support for potential bases to a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Two states for two peoples	516	48.8	53.5	53.5
	One bi-national state in historic Palestine	142	13.4	14.7	68.2
	A Palestinian state on all historic Palestine	307	29.0	31.8	100.0
	Total	965	91.3	100.0	
Missing	99	92	8.7		
Total		1057	100.0		

The November 2007 poll also found that a majority of 69% of Palestinians oppose Hamas's position on the elimination of Israel, a number more consistent with numerous other polls conducted by Near East Consulting.[20]

Nevertheless, Near East Consulting polls conducted in April 2008[21] and May 2009[22] each found that a majority of

[18] See Near East Consulting, Palestinian Peace Pulse, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/peace/22/.
[19] Chart taken from Near East Consulting, General Monthly Survey, November 2007, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/peace/211/out_freq_q21.php.
[20] See Near East Consulting, General Monthly Survey, Online Poll Results, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/all/results.php.
[21] Near East Consulting, General Monthly Survey, April 2008, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/all/p34/#Peace.
[22] Near East Consulting, "NEC's monthly monitor of Palestinian perceptions towards politics and economics," May-June 2009,

55% to 70% of Palestinians support *both* **a two-state and a one-state solution to the conflict (two questions were asked in each poll, one about a one-state solution and another about a two-state solution[23]). This lends credence to the idea that Palestinians do support a one-state solution, yet it fleshes out a larger trend: Palestinians usually accept the two-state solution as well. A poll conducted by Near East Consulting in July 2008[24] that found about 65% of Palestinians in support of "two states** *for two peoples*" **(emphasis added) is notable in this vein because it seems to demonstrate that the lion's share of Palestinians who were found to support "two states" in the other polls understand that this would entail Israel retaining its strong Jewish majority in a final peace agreement.**

Finally, the Near East Consulting polls also consistently show that a large majority of Palestinians do not believe Israel has the right to exist. Yet, as seen in those same polls (and in many others), surveys also show that Palestinians are likely willing to reconcile themselves to Israel's existence in the form of a two-state solution. Crucially, Palestinians may not have to accept Israel's *right* **to exist in order to accept its simple existence.**

Another [poll](#) that complicates the picture was conducted jointly by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (PCPO) and the The Israel Project (TIP) in 2011. It found that 66% of Palestinians believe that the real Palestinian national goal should be to start with a two-state solution but then work towards making the whole area one Palestinian state. Some observers have dubbed this the "two-stage" (as opposed to two-state) solution, wherein the Palestinians make tactical concessions in the short term in order to conquer the Jewish state and turn it into an Arab state in the long term. Interviewees were also asked whether or not they agree with President Obama's statement that "there should be two states: Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people and Israel as the homeland for the Jewish people." 34% of Palestinians accepted this idea, while 61% opposed it. Nevertheless, a contradiction appears within the survey: responding to a different question, a majority of Palestinians said they accept the idea of two states based on the 1967 lines for peace.

So on the one hand, the survey showed that Palestinians only tactically want to temporarily accept a two-state solution when presented with the idea of doing so, but on the other hand it showed that when asked about the 1967 lines in return for peace, there is also acceptance of this idea (which roughly reflects the findings of the Near East Consulting polls). It may also be noted that the TIP/PCPO poll only asked interviewees whether they *want* **the solution to the conflict to be based on two states, not whether they would accept it (as is done in the joint polls).**

A PATH FOR PEACE?

When simply asked whether they are willing to accept a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is virtually always majority (or plurality) support among Israelis and usually among Palestinians as well. However, it is the precise details of such a solution that makes maintaining a consensus complicated.

For Palestinians, the question of whether or not a two-state solution is the most *desired* **solution remains open. Yet one near-certain position does emerge from the polls: regardless of whether or not Palestinians** *want* **one state or two, anywhere from a large minority (or plurality) to a majority of Palestinians are** *willing to accept* **a solution wherein two states, Israel and Palestine, exist side by side in peace. Importantly, however, for the two-state solution to be acceptable to Palestinians the borders will have to be based on the 1967 lines (limited land swaps would be acceptable), East Jerusalem will have to be the capital (with the exception of Jewish neighborhoods), and some refugees must be allowed to return to pre-1967 Israel.**

For Israelis, the situation is a bit different. No reputable poll has ever found a majority of Israelis in favor of a one-state solution. The question for Israelis is simply under what conditions a two-state solution is acceptable. The few polls that have found the Israeli public opposed to a two-state solution reveal that security concerns are perhaps the most important deciding factor. Therefore, in order for the two-state solution to be acceptable to Israelis, there must be a strong security arrangement, and the security arrangements should be trumpeted by Israeli officials in order to receive as much support as possible. The polls also show that for Israeli support to stay above 50% the final borders between Israel and Palestine cannot fall precisely on the 1967 lines; there will have to be some land swaps. Finally,

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http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/all/files/2009/pppmay09final.pdf.

[23] In both polls, the results are presented under the phrases "level of support for a two state solution" and "level of support for a one state solution," respectively. The exact question presented to interviewees is not included.

[24] Near East Consulting, General Monthly Survey, July 2008, http://neareastconsulting.com/surveys/all/p37/out_freq_is5.php.

Israeli (and Palestinian) support for a two-state solution is highest and most consistent when interviewees are presented with all parts of such a peace plan—not only the most difficult, such as borders, refugees and Jerusalem.

Yet support for a two-state solution with all the details listed above is fragile. It may yet be true that the two-state solution is dead and some of the issues commentators point to are borne out by reality. A major factor could be that the people who accept a two-state solution support it much less than those who oppose it are against it. Just because majorities on both sides may support a peace agreement based on two states does not mean that a strong and determined minority would not be able to prevent it from happening. This could turn out to be the decisive factor for the failure of a two-state solution if it indeed never comes to fruition.

Conversely, it is important to remember that when either the Israeli or Palestinian public is more optimistic about the chances for peace—as they were after Arafat's death in 2004—support for a two-state solution rises. While pessimism currently reigns, there is no telling when this could change. On the Israeli side, studies showing that public opinion is significantly swayed by the official position of the Israeli government may have a historical precedent: before Israel committed itself to a complete withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in the context of the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, Israelis were largely opposed to such a move. Yet soon after the government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin publicly agreed to a full withdrawal in return for peace, Israeli public opinion followed. Interestingly, the Israeli government may hold similar sway on Palestinian public opinion. As mentioned, there is solid evidence that suggests Palestinian support for a two-state solution based on the Clinton Parameters and Geneva Initiative would rise significantly above 50% if the government of Israel officially accepted those or similar plans. These trends further solidify the body of evidence indicating that among all Palestinians and Israelis living between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea, there is more of a consensus on the two-state solution than there is for *any* alternative. Both Palestinian and Israeli decision makers would be well to consider this as they barter over their people's respective futures.