



The 2014 Israeli Foreign Policy Index

Findings of the Mitvim Institute Poll

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MITVIM
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The annual public opinion poll of **Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies** on Israel's foreign policy has been carried out between September 9 and 11, 2014 by the Rafi Smith Institute and in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The poll was conducted among 500 men and women, as a representative sample of the Israeli adult population (Jewish and Arab sectors, aged 18 and older), with a 4.5% margin of error.

The main poll findings are:

The Israeli public is not satisfied with Israel's global standing, and thinks that Operation Protective Edge caused damage to it.

Israel's top foreign policy priorities, in the eyes of the public, should be: relations with the US, the peace process, Israel's public diplomacy, and relations with moderate countries in the Middle East.

The public thinks that improving Israel's foreign relations is dependent upon progress in the peace process, and that regional cooperation with Middle Eastern countries is possible.

The US, followed by Russia and Germany, is considered the most important country for Israel in the world. The public thinks that Israel-US relations should be improved, and regards Egypt as the most important country for Israel in the Middle East.

The public is split on the question of whether Israel belongs more in the Middle East, in Europe or in both in an equal manner; Israelis are not aware of the EU's offer to significantly upgrade relations with Israel after peace is reached.

Tzipi Livni, followed by Isaac Herzog, is perceived to be best suited for the position of Foreign Minister.

This report includes:

1. The detailed poll findings grouped under four categories: Israel's global standing, Israel's foreign policy conduct, foreign policy priorities and bi-lateral relations; regional cooperation and regional belonging.
2. Reactions to the poll findings by Mitvim Institute experts: Dr. Nimrod Goren, Dr. Ilai Saltzman, Prof. Elie Podeh, Dr. Ehud Eiran and Yoav Stern.
3. Reactions to the poll finding by Israeli public figures (Members of Knesset and former senior diplomats): MK Hilik Bar, MK Nitzan Horowitz, Nadia Hilou, Yigal Palmor, Dr. Alon Liel, and Prof. Itamar Rabinovich

Sample Breakdown

Age	
18-29	22%
30-49	39%
50+	39%

Nationality	
Jews	85%
Arabs	15%

Religiosity	Jewish sample
Religious	22%
Traditional religious	15%
Traditional non-religious	12%
Secular	51%

Right-to-left spectrum	Jewish sample
Right	30%
Moderate right	26%
Center	22%
Moderate left	12%
Left	10%

A. Israel's Global Standing

1. What is your overall assessment of Israel's current global standing?

	Total	
Bad - 1	8%	} 35%
2	7%	
3	10%	
4	10%	
5	23%	} 29%
6	13%	
7	16%	
8	9%	} 13%
9	1%	
Very Good - 10	3%	
Average	5.12	
Opinion holders	98%	

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Not Good (1-4)	35%	35%	34%
Mediocre (5)	23%	24%	13%
Reasonable (6-7)	29%	29%	24%
Good (8-10)	13%	12%	29%
Average	5.12	5.06	5.72

2. Do you agree to the claim that improving Israel’s foreign relations depends on progress in the peace process?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Strongly agree and somewhat agree	61%	59%	83%
Strongly disagree and somewhat disagree	37%	39%	13%
Don’t know/refuse	2%	2%	4%

3. As of today, how would you assess the impact of Operation Protective Edge on Israel’s global standing?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Israel’s global standing improved	24%	24%	17%
Israel’s global standing worsened	45%	43%	56%
Israel’s global standing did not change	26%	28%	13%
Don’t know/refuse	5%	5%	14%

B. Israel’s Foreign Policy Conduct

1. Henry Kissinger once said the “Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy”. To which extent do you agree with this statement?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Strongly agree and somewhat agree	67%	67%	60%
Strongly disagree and somewhat disagree	28%	29%	26%
Don’t know/refuse	5%	4%	14%

2. How do you assess the Israeli government's performance in foreign policy field?

	Total	
Bad - 1	11%	} 34%
2	7%	
3	8%	
4	8%	
5	16%	} 30%
6	12%	
7	18%	
8	13%	} 20%
9	3%	
Very Good - 10	4%	
Average	5.29	
Opinion holders	97%	

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Not Good (1-4)	34%	33%	46%
Mediocre (5)	16%	17%	13%
Reasonable (6-7)	30%	31%	17%
Good (8-10)	20%	19%	24%
Average	5.12	5.32	4.94

3. According to its mission statement, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is responsible for formulating, implementing and presenting the foreign policy of the Government of Israel. How do you assess the manner in which the MFA currently fulfills its mission?

Total		
Bad - 1	15%	} 41%
2	7%	
3	9%	
4	10%	
5	20%	} 27%
6	13%	
7	14%	
8	7%	} 12%
9	2%	
Very Good - 10	3%	
Average	4.80	
Opinion holders	95%	

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Not Good (1-4)	41%	39%	42%
Mediocre (5)	20%	22%	10%
Reasonable (6-7)	27%	27%	31%
Good (8-10)	12%	12%	17%
Average	4.80	4.78	5.02

4. Who do you think should lead negotiations between Israel and its neighbors, MFA diplomats or security personnel?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
MFA diplomats	48%	48%	44%
Security personnel	26%	26%	24%
Both	18%	19%	9%
Don't know/refuse	8%	7%	23%

5. Who do you perceive to be the best suited for the position of Foreign Minister?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Tzipi Livni	27%	27%	31%
Isaac Herzog	19%	19%	24%
Avigdor Lieberman	16%	17%	4%
Yair Lapid	13%	12%	19%
Naftali Bennett	12%	13%	2%
None of the above + Don't know/refuse	13%	12%	20%

Comparison between Assessments

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Israel's global standing	5.12	5.06	5.72
The government's performance on foreign policy	5.29	5.32	4.94
The MFA's fulfillment of its mission	4.80	4.78	5.02

C. Foreign Policy Priorities and Bi-Lateral Relations

1. Which of the following topics should top Israel's foreign policy agenda over the next six months? (The total exceeds 100% as respondents could mention up to two answers)

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Relations with the US	36%	38%	19%
The Israeli-Palestinian peace process	34%	30%	71%
Public diplomacy	32%	34%	19%
Relations with moderate countries in the Middle East	22%	21%	27%
Relations with the European Union	16%	17%	14%
The Iranian nuclear project	12%	13%	4%
Relations with countries in East Asia	9%	9%	7%
Relations with Russia	6%	6%	2%
Other	1%	1%	0%
Don't know/refuse	3%	3%	4%

2. Which are the three most important countries for Israel in the world? (Respondents could mention up to three countries)

	Total	Jews	Arabs
The US	95%	97%	80%
Russia	33%	34%	23%
Germany	32%	34%	9%
Great Britain	27%	27%	24%
Egypt	27%	25%	49%
China	20%	21%	8%
France	16%	17%	10%
Japan	4%	4%	2%
The Palestinian Authority	4%	3%	18%
Jordan	3%	3%	4%
Turkey	2%	2%	2%
India	2%	2%	0%
Canada	2%	2%	2%
Other*	5%	4%	14%
Don't know/refuse	2%	2%	7%

* Other responses included Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Arab world in general, Iran, and the European Union.

3. How do you assess the current level of Israel-US relations?

	סה"כ
Bad - 1	2%
2	1%
3	6%
4	8%
5	20%
6	18%
7	21%
8	18%
9	3%
Very Good - 10	3%
Average	6.09
Opinion holders	99%

Groupings: 1-4 (17%), 5-7 (39%), 8-10 (24%)

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Not Good (1-4)	17%	17%	9%
Mediocre (5)	20%	20%	22%
Reasonable (6-7)	39%	42%	25%
Good (8-10)	24%	21%	44%
Average	6.09	6.02	6.76

D. Regional Belonging and Regional Cooperation

1. Do you believe that regional cooperation between Israel and the countries of the Middle East is possible or impossible?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Possible	69%	67%	85%
Impossible	28%	29%	15%
Don't know/refuse	3%	4%	0%

2. Should Israel negotiate and cooperate with the new Palestinian government, which is supported by both Fatah and Hamas, or not?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
Israel should negotiate	45%	43%	64%
Israel should not negotiate	50%	52%	31%
Don't know/refuse	5%	5%	5%

3. Where do you think Israel belongs? More in the Middle East, more in Europe, equally in both Europe and the Middle East, or neither in Europe nor the Middle East?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
More in the Middle East	28%	29%	15%
More in Europe	25%	24%	34%
Equally in both Europe and the Middle East	28%	28%	24%
Neither in Europe nor the Middle East	16%	16%	20%
Don't know/refuse	3%	3%	7%

4. Several months ago, the EU has offered Israel and the Palestinians an unprecedented economic, political and security aid package should they sign a peace agreement. The package is to include the upgrade of ties with the EU to a Special Privileged Partnership level - the highest level for a non-member state. Have you heard about this EU offer to Israel?

	Total	Jews	Arabs
I have heard	14%	15%	10%
I have not heard	86%	85%	90%

Reactions to the Poll Findings by Mitvim Institute experts

Dr. Nimrod Goren, Chairman of the Mitvim Institute and a lecturer at the Hebrew University

The findings of the Mitvim Institute poll show that while the Israeli public defines itself as mostly right-wing, it tends to support foreign policy positions that are typically more associated with the center-left. The peace process emerges as a central issue for the Israeli public, as a condition for improving Israel's foreign relations and as a key foreign policy priority on its own. Furthermore, the fact that Israelis believe in prospects for regional cooperation and attribute significant importance to Egypt, indicate that the Israeli public may be inclined to support a regional peace initiative.

The poll also reveals that the public is not satisfied with a variety of aspects related to Israel's foreign policy: Israel's global standing, the government's handling of foreign policy, the ability of the MFA to fulfill its mission, and the identity of Israel's current Foreign Minister. This is a cause for concern, and implies that a fundamental change is required in Israel's foreign policy and in its manner of conduct. The Mitvim Institute is working to bring along such a change, by developing and advancing a new, multi-regional, pro-peace and inclusive, Israeli foreign policy paradigm, which will enable Israel a fresh start among the nations.

Dr. Ilai Saltzman, Board Member at the Mitvim Institute and a lecturer at Claremont McKenna College, USA

Traditionally, the MFA is excluded from the core of the decision making process on Israeli Foreign Policy. The Prime Minister's Office, the army and the security echelon have been the ones to fill that dominant role. This means that changing global realities are observed in Israel through a narrow lens, i.e. almost exclusively through the security perspective. In the past, when Israel had to deal primarily with traditional military threats, this was a legitimate practice. In recent years, however, the situation is much different. The military arena has become intertwined with the political and diplomatic ones, with military-related events such as Operation Protective Edge serving a political purpose. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is now a desire among the Israeli public to see the MFA play a more significant role in the formulation and management of the country's foreign policy, even if it comes at the expense of the security establishment.

The survey also shows that for an overwhelming majority of the public, the US is the most important country for Israel. At the same time, the findings also reveal that most people understand that the relationship between Jerusalem and Washington is not on good terms. Given the political and security- and some would say even economic-dependence of Israel on the US, the last five years have been wasted. The Israeli government-especially Prime Minister Netanyahu, failed to translate US commitments to the security and wellbeing of Israel into a positive relationship for both parties. In such a period of difficult diplomatic and security challenges, Israel cannot afford to lose the support of Washington and the American involvement in the region.

Prof. Elie Podeh, Board Member at the Mitvim Institute and a lecturer at the Hebrew University

The high percentages among both Jews and Arabs believing in the notion that regional cooperation between Israel and its neighbors is possible is particularly impressive in light of the deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians in the peace process. Many may believe that it is precisely this regional cooperation that may be a way beyond this impasse. The findings also indicate broad public understanding and internalization of the processes in the Middle East that led to the alignment of interests between Israel and the "moderate" Arab States (i.e. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States). In addition, they point out that the Israeli society is riper than in the past to accept the Arab Peace Initiative, which offers a regional Arab umbrella to promote the political process.

The poll findings also relate to the issue of Israel's regional belonging, which is related to the question of identity. According to the findings, it appears that the Jewish population has a greater degree of ambivalence about Israel's place in the region; the public is split on whether Israel belongs in the Middle East, in Europe or even in both Europe and the Middle East. Among the Jewish population, 52% see Israel as part of Europe, yet 57% do not deny its place in the Middle East, whether fully or partially. These findings are inconsistent with the limited importance attributed by respondents to regional players such as the Palestinian Authority, Jordan or Turkey. Egypt is unique in this regard, and the importance attributed to it among the public may be a result of the central role it played during Operation Protective Edge. The findings strengthen the argument that the question over Israel's place in the region, which has accompanied Israel since its creation, has yet to be properly answered, and that there should be greater public awareness about it.

Dr. Ehud Eiran, Board Member at the Mitvim Institute and a lecturer at Haifa University

Although currently there is no political initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian track, the Israeli public still attaches utmost importance to this issue, seconded by relations with the US. Since a main pillar of the Israeli-American alliance is hinged upon relinquishing Israeli control over the Palestinians, or at least the existence of a political process with them, there is likely to be strong public support for a renewed attempt by the Israeli government to better manage its relations with the Palestinians. This is an important finding, among others, inasmuch as it contradicts the notion that the general public has lost interest in the peace process. It should also reinforce the efforts of civil society organizations to formulate an informal Israeli-Palestinian agreement on borders and security issues (and possibly other issues as well), perhaps resulting in an offer of an alternative diplomatic horizon.

Yoav Stern, Task-team member at the Mitvim Institute and a commentator on Arab affairs

The Mitvim Institute poll reveals a number of significant differences between the attitudes of Arab citizens of Israel on foreign policy and the attitudes of Jewish citizens. This is most tangible in the finding that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is considered more necessary by Arab citizens than by Jewish citizens. The former support it unconditionally and believe that it is a prerequisite for improving Israel's standing in the world, while the latter believe less in the negotiations and its positive effects on Israel's position. However, it seems that Arab citizens more than Jewish citizens overestimate the power and status of the State of Israel on the world stage, and in its relations with the US. In both cases, Arabs believe that Israel's standing is better than the extent to which Jews view it.

Regarding Israel's immediate surroundings, Arab citizens feel similarly much more "connected," responsive and sensitive to Israel's relations with its neighbors, whom they consider as fellow members of the Arab people and the Arab world in general. For instance, a large majority of (Israeli) Arab respondents in the survey believe that regional cooperation between Israel and the countries of the Middle East is possible - a higher figure than among the Jewish respondents. The Jewish majority in Israel should try to truly understand the position of the Arab citizens of Israel, for these positions are key to understanding the positions of the other Arab nations in the region.

Reactions to the Poll Findings by Israeli Public Figures

MK Yehiel (Hilik) Bar (Labor), Chairman of the Knesset Lobby for the Promotion of a Solution for the Israeli-Arab Conflict

The Mitvim Institute poll shows that the Israeli public thinks that continuing on the current foreign policy course will not lead to an improvement in Israel's global standing. Instead of promoting the issues that the public regards as most important-strengthening relations with the US and promoting the peace process-the government is doing the opposite. It refuses to negotiate with the new Palestinian government, and it creates tension in its relations with the US. After Operation Protective Edge opened up the opportunity for Israel to cooperate with the moderate countries of the Middle East, the government squandered it

and missed the opportunity for a renewed peace process. Israel must not continue to ignore the regional incentives for peace offered by both the Arab League and the European Union. These incentives could help lead to a breakthrough in the peace process and to greater integration of Israel into the Middle East and Europe. Israel deserves a different foreign policy, and the Mitvim Institute poll shows that the public understands this and demands change.

MK Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz), Chairman of the Knesset Lobby for Regional Cooperation

The Mitvim Institute poll suggests enormous potential and support among Israelis for regional cooperation, in contrast to the destructive politics of the Netanyahu-Lieberman leadership. Israel is currently facing an opportunity unlike any other since the state was founded to promote a diplomatic initiative with all moderate forces in the Middle East, yet its leadership has fled from it. Netanyahu chooses time after time to maintain the status quo of the conflict, despite the grim evidence of the results of Operation Protective Edge. This is because the prime minister and his senior partners have no strategic vision and no foreign policy - another thing that stood out in the findings of the poll. The government's fixation on the settlements issue and its refusal to move ahead on the Palestinian track are the root of the problem. Those who will pay price for this political destruction is first and foremost the citizens of Israel.

Nadia Hilou, former Member of Knesset and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies

It is very important that the Mitvim Institute poll included Arab respondents, unlike many polls that do not include an Arab sampling. This is an important positive message towards the Arab citizens who are supposed to be equal, and integrated into Israel's social, economic, political and public life. The survey revealed some differences in the positions of Jewish and Arab respondents, deriving mainly from the differences in attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in relation to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. The Arab public attaches more importance to the peace process than does the Jewish population. This is reflected especially in the responses to the questions about priorities in foreign policy and the linkage between Israel's foreign relations and the peace process. Ending the occupation and the resumption of the peace process is of high importance for the Arabs because they are part of the Palestinian people. Moreover, I think that ending the conflict would have a beneficial effect on Arab-Jewish relations and everyday life in Israel. The poll findings also suggest that Arab respondents clearly support negotiations with the Palestinian reconciliation government, and attach more importance than do the Jewish respondents to relations in the Middle East, especially with Egypt and the Palestinian Authority.

Yigal Palmor, Former Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The poll findings point to a sense of ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion among the public, and a number of conflicting answers indicate that: most of the public believes that progress in the peace process would improve Israel's foreign relations and that Israel should strive to cooperate with the moderate states in the Middle East, yet the countries which the public considers most important

for Israel are the US, Russia and Germany, whereas the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Turkey are considered by only a negligible percentage of respondents as important. In addition, promoting Israel's public diplomacy is perceived as a major objective; however, concurrently there is much indifference to the (unsuccessful) public diplomacy efforts made by the EU to promote the European incentive for peace. The contradictions and confusion reflect, in all likelihood, the lack of consistent, comprehensive and reasoned reference to foreign policy on the part of the political leadership on both the left and right. When foreign policy is being discussed, it is done in a too localized and incidental manner, and the media is reluctant to broaden and deepen the issues at hand. It seems, therefore, that the majority of the public finds it difficult to formulate a coherent approach towards a field on which it rarely receives clear and complete information from the recognized authorities.

Dr. Alon Liel, former Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Mitvim Institute poll findings indicate that the Israeli public does not see Iran as Israel's cardinal problem, believing that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more dangerous than Iran. In addition, the attempts by senior politicians in Israel to portray Israel as being far different than others in the region, and in fact a European and not Middle Eastern country, have failed - the Israeli public is not convinced and sees its country as an integral part of the Middle East.

Prof. Itamar Rabinovich, President of the Israel Institute and former Israeli Ambassador to the US

I read with great interest the findings of the poll conducted by the Mitvim Institute. I was encouraged by the fact that Israeli public opinion is portrayed in this poll as possessing much more awareness than is generally assumed, and as concerned with the substantial and image-related damage caused to Israel by the continuation of the status quo. There is a good basis here for policy change, which could be picked up by a political leadership that will actually desire change.

For Further Information:

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