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NEW POLL: American Jews Back Active US Role in Peace Process, Obama Administration Plans for Diplomatic Engagement

WASHINGTON — A new poll released today by J Street demonstrates continued strong support among American Jews for active American engagement in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for the Obama administration's push for assertive diplomacy in the Middle East generally.

This new poll – taken following both U.S. and Israeli elections and after the Gaza conflict – finds little movement in basic American Jewish views on Israel and the Middle East since J Street's first poll in July of 2008. The survey finds solid support in the Jewish community for J Street's essential proposition that peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a core Israeli and American interest and that the United States should take an active leadership role in achieving peace.

The full survey is available online at
http://www.jstreet.org/files/images/J_Street_Survey_March_2009_Final_Results.doc.
Analysis of the results can be found at
http://www.jstreet.org/files/images/J_Street_Survey_Analysis_032309.doc

American Jews are ready, by two-to-one, to work with a Palestinian unity government – including Hamas – to achieve a peace agreement with Israel. They overwhelmingly support active American engagement in bringing peace to the Middle East, even if it means disagreeing with Israel and the Palestinians publicly. Further, they support the U.S. having a “fair and impartial broker” as Middle East envoy rather than one who “sides with Israel.”

“Overall, this poll demonstrates that Jewish Americans take very sophisticated and nuanced positions when it comes to American policy toward the Middle East,” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, Executive Director of J Street. “While American Jews deeply support Israel, they recognize how vital peace is for Israeli and American interests, and are ready for the U.S. to play an active and engaged role in ending the Middle East conflict.”

“While some of the louder voices from the American Jewish community focus nearly solely on the need to confront Iran, on isolating Hamas or on military aspects of the conflict – American Jews as a whole understand that diplomatic engagement with Iran or with a unified Palestinian government including Hamas are essential Israeli and American interests.”

With a new government about to take power in Israel that may not actively support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the poll reveals strong support among American Jews for a final status “two-state solution.” By a 76-24 margin, Jews supported an agreement along the lines of one nearly

reached eight years ago,¹ and strongly approve of the U.S. taking action to try convincing both sides to accept it.

The results of the poll also demonstrate a sophisticated set of views on the latest conflict in Gaza. While American Jews – by three to one – “approved” of the recent military action that Israel took in Gaza, they also realize by 59 to 41 percent that it had either no effect on Israel’s security or in fact made it less secure. These views track J Street’s position on Gaza, which recognized that while Israel’s actions were justifiable and understandable, they did not benefit Israel’s long-term security.

“What we see throughout this poll is that support for Israel is strong and stable among American Jews,” said Ben-Ami. “When Israel is threatened, American Jews will rally to its defense. J Street too is unwavering in its commitment to Israel’s security. However, we – and American Jews as a whole – can move beyond simply choosing sides to ask what’s best for Israel. And on this question – throughout the poll – we see that American Jews support diplomacy, recognize that military force alone doesn’t necessarily enhance security, and are ready to engage with rather than isolate those with whom we have conflicts.”

The poll also finds:

- **Strong Support for President Obama and his policy in the Middle East:** President Obama begins his Middle East efforts with extraordinarily high personal favorability (74 percent favorable) and job approval (73 percent) among American Jews. Jews believe that President Obama is honest and trustworthy (76 percent), shares their values (73 percent), and that he is restoring America’s standing in the world (78 percent). Trust in the new American President also extends to his Middle East policy, with 72 percent approving of the way he is handling the Arab-Israeli conflict, 76 percent believing that he supports Israel, and 69 percent thinking that he “has a good vision for advancing Middle East peace.”
- **Middle East Peace Is a Core Interest for the U.S. and for Israel:** By a 51 to 32 percent margin, Jews believe Middle East peace is a core American interest. When asked whether military superiority alone or a peace agreement with a strong military would provide better security for Israel, Jews favor a peace agreement by a 49 to 36 margin.
- **American Jews Oppose Settlement Expansion:** By a 60 to 40 percent margin, American Jews oppose the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank based on “what they know” and after receiving short statements by supporters and opponents of settlement expansion. Simply put, attitudes toward settlements are highly negative and firmly held. Not surprisingly, opposition to settlements is higher among Reform (64 percent oppose) and unaffiliated Jews (69 percent oppose), in contrast to Orthodox Jews who strongly support settlements (80 percent support). But one very interesting demographic finding is the strong opposition (72 percent oppose) among Jews who give money to political campaigns.

¹ Details of the agreement include: a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza; internationally recognized borders that include some land swaps allowing for most Jewish settlers in the West Bank to be inside Israel while the Palestinians get comparable land areas in return; Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem become part of the new Palestinian state while Israel retains control of Jewish neighborhoods and the Western Wall in Jerusalem; international forces to monitor the new Palestinian state and border crossings; and financial compensation for Palestinian refugees while allowing some refugees to return to Israel if they meet specific family reunification criteria and the Israeli government approves.

- **Support for Engaging a Palestinian Unity Government Including Hamas:** 69 percent of Jews support the U.S. working with a unified Hamas-Palestinian Authority government to achieve a peace agreement with Israel, even when informed that the U.S. does not recognize Hamas because of its terrorism and refusal to recognize Israel. Interestingly, precisely the same percentage of Israelis in a recent Hebrew University poll support the government of Israel negotiating with such a unity government.
- **Deep communal divides on Iran:** In the wake of America's experience in Iraq, American Jews – like other Americans – are wary of going to war again in the Middle East. But there is also concern among Jews about Iran's nuclear development, and Jewish views are mixed when it comes to what America should do regarding Iran. When given the fundamental choice of whether the U.S. should militarily attack Iran if they are on the verge of developing nuclear weapons, Jews are split evenly 41-40. An unusually high 16 percent could not even bring themselves to a decision and just chose "neither." There is a similar 39-37 result when asked to choose between direct negotiations that provide Iran incentives to abandon their nuclear weapons program and sanctions that force Iran to choose between nuclear weapons and international isolation.
- **Including Avigdor Lieberman in the Government Will Weaken Ties to Israel:** When told about Lieberman's campaign slogan requiring Arab citizens of Israel to sign loyalty oaths and his threats against Arab Members of Knesset, Jews opposed these positions by a 69 to 31 margin. One in three believe their own connection to Israel will be diminished, if Lieberman assumes a senior position in the Israeli cabinet.

The demographics (such as denomination, synagogue attendance, age, region) and political measures (party identification, 2008 Presidential vote) in this survey track other surveys of American Jews, including the 2007 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the 2008 American Jewish Committee Annual Survey, and the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey.

Gerstein | Agne Strategic Communications designed the questionnaire for this survey of 800 self-identified adult American Jews, conducted February 28-March 8, 2009. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent; the margin of error in the split samples is +/- 4.9 percent.

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J Street was launched in April 2008 to promote meaningful American leadership to end the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts peacefully and diplomatically. J Street supports a new direction for American foreign policy in the Middle East and a broad public and policy debate about the U.S. role in the region.