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NEW POLL: American Jews Continue to Support Obama Push for Two-State Solution, Back Strong U.S. Engagement

WASHINGTON— American Jews continue to support the Obama administration’s push for Middle East peace and seek strong U.S. leadership to resolve the conflict, according to a new poll released today by a pro-Israel, pro-peace group.

The J Street sponsored poll, conducted March 17-19 in the aftermath of escalating tensions between Israel and the United States after Israel announced new housing construction in East Jerusalem during Vice President Biden’s recent trip, was released today as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered major policy speeches here.

Like previous surveys, this poll finds solid support in the Jewish community for J Street’s position 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 survey is available online at www.jstreet.org/poll

American Jews by a four-to-one margin, 82-18 percent, support the United States playing an active role in helping the parties to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, with 73 percent of American Jews supporting this active role even if it means that the United States were to publicly state its disagreements with both the Israelis and the Arabs.

And by a 71-29 percent margin, American Jews support the United States “exerting pressure” on both the Israelis and the Arabs to make the necessary compromises to achieve peace. An earlier J Street poll last March found a similar level of support.

A majority of all American Jews, 52-48 percent, still support an active role even if the United States were to publicly state its disagreements with only Israel. American Jews are evenly split on support for exerting pressure on only Israel, a notion that J Street opposes.

“This poll and the others before it show that American Jews, who remain staunch supporters of Israel, recognize that peace is vital for Israeli and American interests, and that the United States must play an active and engaged diplomatic role if we are to end the Middle East conflict,” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, executive director of J Street.

Obama’s approval in the Jewish community is holding steady at 62 percent. Gallup reported 64 percent approval rating in an October 2009 poll. Obama’s approval rating among Jews is 15 points higher than among all Americans, 47 percent, according to a Gallup poll conducted during the same period. And in a hypothetical 2012 matchup against his most vociferous Republican critic during the last few weeks on Israel, Obama beats former Alaska Governor and Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin by 70-18 percent.

Notwithstanding nearly two weeks of sustained attacks on the Obama administration by many Jewish leaders and organizations, 60 percent of American Jews believe that it was Israel’s announcement of new housing in East Jerusalem that caused damage to U.S.-Israel relations, and 55 percent say the United

States was right to strongly criticize the Israeli announcement of new housing in East Jerusalem during Biden's visit.

American Jews agree that the United States should speak out publicly when it disagrees with Israel, yet some do show discomfort when the United States publicly disagrees only with Israel.

- 44 percent agree that the United States should publicly express our disagreements and request Israel to change certain policies, while 40 percent say the U.S. should keep such disagreements private.
- 42 percent say that ending the conflict requires the United States to serve as an honest broker and state our disagreements with both Israelis and Palestinians when it is necessary, while 39 percent say public criticism of Israel sends the wrong message to Israel's enemies.
- 53 percent say the relationship between the U.S. and Israel must be a two-way street that allows an honest public discussion and even criticism, while 47 percent say the Obama administration should work closely with Israel, make a conscious effort to move away from public demands and unilateral deadlines, and defuse tensions.

“The American Jewish community is wrestling now with the difficult challenges and choices that advancing peace will entail,” said Ben-Ami. “As the Obama administration moves forward toward the goal of achieving Middle East peace, they should be reassured that significant numbers of American Jews support their efforts and recognize that these efforts benefit the shared national interests of both the United States and Israel.”

Gerstein | Agne Strategic Communications designed the questionnaire for this survey of 803 self-identified adult American Jews, conducted March 17-March 19, 2010. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent; the margin of error in the split samples is +/- 4.9 percent. Gerstein | Agne contracted the research company Mountain West Research Center and Opinion Outpost to administer the survey by email invitation to its web-based panel, which is regularly updated and consists of nearly 900,000 Americans.

The demographics (such as denomination, synagogue attendance, age, region) and political measures (party identification) in this survey reflect other surveys of American Jews, including the 2009 Gallup Survey (reported on January 11, 2010), the 2008-2009 American Jewish Committee Annual Surveys, and the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey.

Gerstein | Agne is a Washington-based strategic research firm that conducts public opinion research for non-profit organizations, charities, civic institutions, candidates for elected office, and Fortune 500 companies. Jim Gerstein has conducted extensive public opinion research with American Jews and was involved in the Clinton Administration's outreach to the Jewish community. He has also conducted public opinion research in Israel, and was a member of the American team that oversaw the polling, focus groups, and paid media efforts for Ehud Barak's 1999 campaign for Prime Minister.

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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.