

PRESS RELEASE
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NEW POLL: American Jews Defy Conventional Wisdom On Israel and the Middle East

**Overwhelmingly Support Aggressive U.S. Leadership to Resolve Israeli-
Palestinian Conflict as well as Diplomacy with Iran**

Strongly Oppose Alliance with Pastor Hagee

WASHINGTON— Days before Senator Barack Obama travels to Israel and Pastor John Hagee convenes the largest Christian Zionist conference in Washington, a new J Street poll reveals a remarkable gap between the attitudes of American Jews and the conventional wisdom about how Jews view America's role in the Middle East.

The in-depth survey -- commissioned by J Street, the political arm of the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement and conducted by Jim Gerstein, principal of Gerstein/Agne -- gauges the pulse of the American Jewish community on issues and dynamics central to the debate over America's Middle East policy.

"The survey results are very eye opening. When presented with both sides of the debate over U.S. policy in the Middle East, American Jews strongly favor the United States using its leverage to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict," said Gerstein.

Instead of holding the hawkish, hard-line positions often expressed by many established Jewish organizations and leaders, American Jews actually overwhelmingly support assertive peace efforts and an active U.S. role in helping Israelis and Arabs to resolve their conflict.

"American elected officials and politicians have for years fundamentally misread the American Jewish community," said Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's executive director.

"Not only in setting American policy but in charting their political approach to the Jewish community, America's political leaders need to look beyond the loudest voices from the community to the opinions actually held by the broad majority of American Jews. Understanding this dynamic could help shift not only American policy, but dramatically affect the chances for peace and security for Israel and the Middle East."

Among the polls key findings:

◆ **Middle East Peace Is a Core Interest for the U.S. and for Israel:** By a 55 to 30 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 50 to 34 margin.

◆ **George Bush Not “Best Friend Israel Ever Had”:** Sixty-one percent of Jews believe that Israel is less secure as a result of President Bush compared to 25 percent who believe Israel is more secure as a result of his presidency.

◆ **America Should be Assertive in Middle East Diplomacy:** The survey finds that American Jews strongly support assertive American diplomacy rather than letting the parties work out the conflict on their own. The survey included an extensive exercise, first asking people whether they support the United States playing an active role in helping the parties resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Initial support for this general statement is 87 percent. Support remained strong even after respondents were asked if they would still support an active role if it meant the U.S. publicly disagreeing with both the Israelis and Arabs or exerting pressure on both parties to make compromises: 75 percent supported public disagreement 70 percent supported the U.S. applying pressure on Israel. “Firm support” – that is, the number of people who supported all three statements – is 66 percent.

◆ **American Jews Favor Compromise in Israeli-Arab Negotiations:** Jews are very favorably disposed toward the compromises and positions outlined in the 2000 Camp David summit and in other negotiations. Large majorities support negotiating with Israel’s worst enemies (76 percent), withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for full peace like the arrangements with Egypt and Jordan (58 percent) and withdrawal from most of the West Bank (59 percent). Jews overwhelmingly believe that the Israeli government would not agree to a dangerous peace deal, and 81 percent “will support any agreement the Israelis make with their Arab enemies.”

◆ **Pastor Hagee and Christians United for Israel (CUFI) Viewed Very Unfavorably:** Pastor Hagee is fairly well-known among Jews (65 percent name identification) and quite disliked (7 percent favorable and 57 percent unfavorable).

◆ **Jews are very wary of military action against Iran.** When presented with several statements about the Middle East by a Congressional candidate, respondents were most supportive of someone who says talking with Iran is not appeasement and America should pursue direct diplomacy. Statements invoking military action against Iran test poorly throughout the survey. For example, only 26 percent of respondents were much more likely (and 48 percent total more likely) to support a Congressional candidate arguing that America should support Israel if it preemptively strikes Iran.

◆ **2008 Election:** Jews are more supportive of Barack Obama over John McCain (62 to 32 percent) and the Democrats over the Republicans in Congressional races (69 to 27 percent).

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 2006 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 June 29 - July 3, 2008. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent; the margin of error in the split samples is +/- 4.9 percent.

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.

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