

European poll identifies Israel and US as greatest threats to world peace

Brian Smith
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A recent European Commission public opinion poll has found that 59 percent of respondents believe Israel represents a threat to world peace. This put Israel at the head of the poll with the US, North Korea and Iran in joint second place at 53 percent, followed by 52 percent for Iraq, and 50 percent for Afghanistan.

The poll was undertaken by Eurobarometer and interviewed 7,500 people, (500 from each European Union member state). Each person was shown a list of 15 countries and asked to indicate which they considered to be a threat to world peace or not. Other countries on the list included Pakistan, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, China, Russia, Somalia and the European Union (EU) itself.

The survey also indicated that two thirds of Europeans believe that the US-led war on Iraq was wrong.

The poll's findings were slammed by the Israeli government and press. The Israeli embassy in Brussels said that it was "not only sad but outraged. Not at European citizens, but at those responsible for forming public opinion."

Israeli minister for Diaspora affairs, Natan Sharansky, accused the EU of anti-Semitism and invoked the Holocaust—stating that the EU "would do well to stop the rampant brainwashing against and demonising of Israel before Europe deteriorates once again to dark sections of its past."

The US-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre condemned the poll for defying logic. It also accused Europe of anti-Semitism and demanded that the EU should be thrown out of the so-called Quartet group (the US, the United Nations, Russia and the EU) and excluded from the Middle East "peace process"—the ongoing efforts to foist Washington's "Road Map" on the Palestinians and bring the intifada against Israel to an end.

Israeli ministers have recently been insisting that a modern definition of anti-Semitism should include criticism of the way the State of Israel chooses to protect itself, defining that criticism as an overt attack on Israel's survival and therefore on the Jews as a people.

Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom was one of the few who rejected claims of anti-Semitism. He linked the poll to Europe's efforts (and particularly France's) to position itself as an alternative or at least a counterweight to the US. "This isn't necessarily a matter of anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian; it's a much broader issue of expressing views different from the US, to establish itself as a power."

He cited a number of recent incidents of Israeli-European cooperation, including the EU's foiling of a Palestinian initiative to send the "separation fence" issue to the international court at The Hague.

Former Israeli foreign minister Alon Liel also warned against knee-jerk reactions. "Our natural predilection is to pull out of the drawer our usual weapon of self-defence—the weapon of anti-Semitism—but this is probably the wrong place to do so."

The polls varied substantially across Europe, with as few as 48 percent of Italians considering Israel a threat and as many as 74 percent of the Dutch. Israel was, however, considered the greatest threat to peace by the vast majority. The Greek poll was the exception as it considered the US, with 88 percent, to be the greatest threat to peace followed by Israel, with 61 percent.

European Union ministers and spokespersons were keen to distance themselves from the poll's findings. Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, who currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU, condemned the results and telephoned Ariel Sharon's office. He claimed to be "surprised and indignant" at the findings

and said that he was convinced that they did not represent the real attitude of Europeans towards Israel.

Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini claimed that the poll was based on an ambiguous question, and criticised the “false signal” that the survey sent out.

European Commission president Romano Prodi expressed his concern about the findings and portrayed them as an expression of anti-Semitism rather than an accurate indication of public hostility to Israel’s brutal subjugation of the Palestinians. They “point to the continued existence of a bias that must be condemned out of hand,” he said, and “to the extent that this may indicate a deeper, more general prejudice against the Jewish world, our repugnance is even more radical.”

Interestingly, there was no attempt to find a similar excuse for public fear of the US as a threat to world peace.

Britain, meanwhile, it has been revealed, is selling arms to Israel in breach of its own guidelines, knowing full well that the equipment is intended for use in the Occupied Territories. Exports approved by the British government this year cover categories including leg-irons, electric shock belts, and chemical and biological agents. They also include categories covering mortars, rocket launchers, anti-tank weapons, military explosives, and infrared and radar sensors.

According to British government arms control guidelines, exports will be blocked “if there is a clear risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression” or to “provoke or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions,” or “if there is a clear risk that the recipient would use the proposed export aggressively against another country, or assert by force a territorial claim.” It is hard to identify any other use for electric shock belts than internal repression, but in any event, Israel clearly fulfills all of these negative criteria.



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