

## Dovish, but still devoted

**In their combination of Israel-devotedness with policy-dovishness, British Jews actually bear similarities to their demographic counterparts in Israel - those who are highly educated, in most cases not Haredim, and descendants of Jews who lived in Eastern and Central Europe from 1881 to 1939.**

By Steven M. Cohen

According to a survey released last week, conducted among more than 4,000 respondents throughout the United Kingdom, a certain influential population group critical for the support of Israel in the U.K. and for Israel's public image holds a rather intriguing set of positions.

By a three-to-two majority, members of the group see Israel as "an occupying power in the West Bank." Among those with an opinion on the matter, a majority believe that "most Palestinians want peace with Israel." Those with strong views on the issue, by a five-to-one ratio, oppose Israel's expansion of "existing settlements in the West Bank." A two-to-one majority of respondents (67 percent to 28 percent ) believe "Israel should give up territory in exchange for guarantees of peace with the Palestinians." An even more lopsided majority in effect endorses the creation of a Palestinian state, agreeing by a 77- to 15-percent margin that "a 'two-state solution' is the only way Israel will achieve peace with its neighbors."

Those with strong views among the group are just about evenly split on whether "Israeli control of the West Bank is vital for Israel's security." They cap off this series of dovish positions with an implicit critique of Israel's refusal to have anything to do with Hamas: 52 percent vs. 39 percent of this influential group in the British population believes "Israel should negotiate with Hamas."

In short, without much of a stretch, this group sees Israelis as occupiers and Palestinians as peace-seekers. It opposes expanding Jewish settlements, favors territorial concessions by Israel and establishment of a Palestinian state, questions the security value to Israel of holding onto the West Bank - and even calls for Israelis to negotiate with Hamas.

So, who exactly makes up this influential British population group with views so much at variance with those of the government of Israel? Are they university faculty? Church leaders? Journalists working for major media outlets? Senior diplomats in the Foreign Office? Corporate leaders with business interests in the Middle East?

Actually, the data derive from a mass survey of British Jews, conducted in January and February of this year by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research with the philanthropic support of the Pears Foundation.

One wonders whether these startling results derive from a biased sample. But the researchers (David Graham and Jonathan Boyd ) managed to obtain a sample that is statistically representative in terms of age, geography, education and a variety of Jewish identity variables. (Disclosure: I served as a consultant on the study in its concluding phases. ) But even more critical to the credibility of the findings is the strikingly Israel-engaged profile presented by these selfsame respondents. Consider the following:

Almost all the respondents (95 percent ) have visited Israel - more than twice the comparable number among American Jews; one in five, in fact, have lived in Israel (and, obviously, returned to the U.K. ). More than four-fifths say that Israel plays an important role in their Jewish identities. As many as 72 percent consider themselves Zionists (about three times the figure for U.S. Jews ). Even more (77 percent ) believe that Jews have "a special responsibility to support Israel."

Those surveyed endorse Israel's right to self-defense, with three-to-one majorities agreeing both that Israel's military action last year "in Gaza ... was a legitimate act of self-defense," and (by the same margin ) that the security fence separating Palestinians and Israelis "is vital for Israel's security." By an overwhelming majority of 87 percent to 9 percent, too, they see Iran as "a threat to Israel's existence."

The sample does appear to do a very reasonable job of representing those British Jews who identify themselves as such. In any event, this is not a group that is in any way alienated from Israel. By and large, these are Israel-engaged Zionists who have high regard both for the Jewish state and its moral claim upon them. Moreover, they are highly security-conscious, keenly aware of threats to Israel and Israelis, and prepared to strongly endorse measures to protect them from attack - whether by terrorists from the territories, or nuclear bombs from Iran.

In their combination of Israel-devotedness with policy-dovishness, British Jews actually bear similarities to their demographic counterparts in Israel - those who are highly educated, in most cases not Haredim, and descendants of Jews who lived in Eastern and Central Europe from 1881 to 1939. These are the sorts of Israelis who have voted for Kadima, Labor and Meretz.

To date, Britain's "devoted doves" as they may be called, have restrained broadcasting their views largely out of deference to Israel's democratically elected government with whose policies they largely disagree, and possibly due to their acutely minority status in the U.K., where they constitute a fraction of 1 percent of the general population. But recent developments in the Continent, the U.S., and Israel itself may well stimulate the U.K.'s devoted doves to adopt a more public and strident profile - as their counterparts have done elsewhere over the last year or more.

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