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-Media Release-

Public Supports Middle East Road Map Plan

Favors Stronger Pressure on Both Israel and Palestinians

Bush Not Seen As Playing Strong Leadership Role

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College Park, MD: A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll finds that the American public supports the road map plan. Though most Americans are not well informed about the plan, 55% said they have a positive view of it. When they were informed about its key elements, support rose to 74%. A strong 64% endorse the idea of working as part of the 'quartet' (which also includes the UN, the EU and Russia). A majority (58%) believes that as a result of the Iraq war, Bush is in a stronger position to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict and 55% believe that a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would significantly lower the risk of terrorism against the US.

Steven Kull, director of the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) comments, "While Americans show frustration with both sides of the conflict, many seem to see this as a moment of opportunity."

Americans show a readiness to put stronger pressure on Israel as well as the Palestinians to take steps called for in the road map plan. If Israel does not take steps called for, majorities favor the President telling Israel that the US will withhold military aid (65%), economic aid (63%), and military spare parts (60%), and that the US will no longer veto UN Security Council resolutions that criticize Israel (53%). Likewise, majorities favor putting pressure on the Palestinian leadership by threatening to withhold economic aid (74%), encouraging other countries to withhold aid (62%), and refusing to deal with the Palestinian leadership (53%).

Readiness to put pressure on both sides is derived from strong support for the US taking an evenhanded approach to the conflict, contrary to perceived US policy. Seventy-three percent said that the US should not take sides in the conflict, with small minorities saying that the US should take Israel's side (21%) or the Palestinians' side (2%). The majority (57%) believes, however, that the US does take Israel's side.

A majority (54%) said that they perceive President Bush as not showing strong leadership in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, if he would apply pressure on the parties to follow the road map plan, perceptions of him as a strong leader would go up, even if these efforts fail. If he does not put pressure on the parties, his leadership ratings would go down.

Kull notes, "It is striking, that a majority does not feel President Bush is showing strong leadership in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given that Bush is perceived as a strong leader in foreign policy overall. Apparently, the public is looking to him to put more pressure on the parties, including Israel, and are ready to give him credit if he does."

A majority (68%) expects that the president will put pressure on Israel to take its steps in the road map plan, dropping to 56% if he is discouraged from doing so by pro-Israel lobbies opposed to the road map plan. Likewise, 69% believes that Bush will put pressure on Arab states to do their part in the road map plan, dropping to 57% in the case of oil-producing Arab states such as Saudi Arabia.

While Americans show more sympathy for Israel than for the Palestinians, when asked which is "more to blame for the failure to reach peace in the Middle East," 65% said "both sides about equally." Two-thirds believe Israel's military actions against Palestinians have increased suicide bombings--the same proportion that believes Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians have decreased Israeli willingness to compromise. Only 17% said they view the conflict as part of the war on terrorism.

Other key findings:

- If Israel and the Palestinian Authority, at the end of the road map process, were to agree on a final settlement, 67% would support the US participating in a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force to monitor and enforce the agreement.
- If the Palestinians refrain from using violence, 79% said that the US should put more pressure on Israel to make compromises and 70% said the US should tell Israel to refrain from using forms of pressure not available to the Palestinians.
- A majority (55%) now perceives that more countries disapprove of US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than approve of it.
- If the Palestinians do come to a peace agreement with Israel, a majority (67%) favors equalizing the amount of aid that the US gives to each side.

Analysis of Politically-Relevant Populations

Among respondents who were more attentive to international issues, who were politically active, or whose votes were sensitive to a candidate's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in all cases, as compared to the general public:

- support for the road map plan is higher
- views of Israel are more favorable, though in all cases a plurality or majority take an even-handed approach
- support is higher for putting pressure on Israel, as well as the Palestinians, in a variety of ways

- more would view Bush as a stronger leader if he put pressure on the parties, whether or not he succeeds, and would view him as a weaker leader if he did not put such pressure.

The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,265 respondents May 14-18. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-3.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample or half the sample.

The poll was developed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

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