

AUSTRALIA POLICY ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE PEACE PROCESS: INFLUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with Australia's current political response towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. Based on original empirical analysis including analysis of the Australian government's policy statements, voting record at the United Nations, Australia's media coverage, and public opinion on the conflict, this paper will highlight Australia's political response towards the Israel-Palestine peace process, and shed light on the impact of governments' foreign policy approaches toward achieving a just peace between Israel and Palestine. A study of Australia's foreign policy approach towards one of the most salient conflicts in international relations is important in identifying the challenges and opportunities in establishing Australia's relationship with the Middle East and neighbouring countries. Therefore, this study will look at the discourse within the domestic landscape such as the media and public opinion that surrounds the Israel-Palestine peace process, and demonstrate the extent to which the media and public opinion have in shaping Australia's policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. From this, this paper hopes to highlight the implications of the change in national commitment for the Labor party and what it will broadly mean for Australia should the current policy be maintained in relation to Australian values, identity and commitment to issues of human rights and upholding international law.

Australia's UN Voting Record on the 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' Resolution

A study of Australia's foreign policy approach towards one of the most salient conflicts in international relations is important in identifying the challenges and opportunities in establishing Australia's relationship with the Middle East and neighbouring countries. Australia has generally a "self-interested preference for the peaceful resolution of conflict [and] acceptance of international law" (Evans and Grant 1995, 344). However, regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, Australia aligns its foreign policy approach uncritically with Israel which is hardly representative of international law that to which it usually subscribes. Voting in the UN on the main 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' resolutions, Australia has gone from an 'abstain' in 2001 and 2003, a 'yes' in 2002, to a consistent 'no' since 2004.

The 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' resolution states that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to self-determination, that the inalienable rights of Palestinians should be adhered to with the formation of an independent Palestinian state, and that the construction of the Wall in Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel's settlement expansion programmes violate international law.

Australia's consistent 'no' vote since 2004 in the UN regarding the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine supports "principles of behaviour that buttress the post-war international environment... [as this] resolution is at the heart of the international efforts to bring a peaceful resolution to the region's problems, the central vehicle for expressing international support for the

'road map' and international efforts to bring peace to both Israel and Palestine" (Burns 2007, 3). Ross Burns, who was a previous Australian Ambassador to Israel, argues that Australia should employ "a more even-handed approach... [as] Australia is missing the real warning signs of the 'war on terror' by tolerating a situation of perpetual confrontation over Palestine" (Burns 2007, 11). It is necessary therefore, to understand the factors that influence Australia's foreign policy approach towards the Israel-Palestine conflict, and its implications for Australia.

Australia has long maintained that it has a balanced and even-handed approach towards the conflict, and that its general dealings with the Middle East derive from a position of strict neutrality (Knight and Patz 1976, 11; Burns 2007). However, Australia's strong alignment with the United States (U.S.) on matters regarding Israel questions this neutrality. Mansouri argues that Australia's relationship with the Middle East has "tended to be ideologically filtered through its external relationships... [accompanied by] a somewhat tenuous sense of identity" (2006, 2).

Arguably, Australia's approach towards the Israel-Palestine peace process is the most important issue to deal with when establishing relations with the Middle East. The study of Australia's political response towards the peace process is important in two ways: first, Australia played a major role in the creation of the State of Israel and headed the committee that was dealing with the Israel-Palestine issue. It was also the "the first government to give *de jure*, that is, full recognition, and not just *de facto* recognition to the new state of Israel" (Adelman 1992, 355). Second, very few studies have focused on the role of middle powers, like Australia, and the extent to which their foreign policies have the potential to exacerbate the intractability of the conflict because of their approach towards the peace process.

Australian Labor Party's Position on the Israel-Palestine Peace Process

Labor's 2004 National Platform reflected urgency in achieving a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. Not only was Labor's approach towards the Middle East peace process in 2004 detailed and comprehensive, it was premised on international law and is committed to achieving a just and lasting peace for both Israel and Palestine. Its' political response towards the conflict in 2004 mentioned the importance for negotiations between Israel and Palestine to be based on UN resolutions and the peace process, and condemns actions from both Israelis and Palestinians that hinder the peace process. However, not only was Labor's 2007 statement on the Middle East peace process brief (consisting of only one paragraph as compared to 2004 where close to eleven paragraphs mentioned Labour's commitment to the peace process), it made no reference to international law, nor was there mention of achieving a "just peace", nor a clear definition of what a two-state solution meant.

In their 2009 National Platform, the Labor party stated its commitment to support an enduring and just two-state solution, and the latest peace initiatives for both Israelis and Palestinians to live peacefully within secure borders (Australian Labor 2009). For a government that aspires to play a role in preserving international peace and security, to have a policy that states its commitment in supporting a just two-state solution while voting against supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinians at the UN highlights the inconsistencies in Australia's professed values and the actions the government is willing to take to ensure the promotion of justice, human rights and international law. In the first instance, it is contradictory and counterproductive to support a two-state solution while not voting in support of Palestinian rights for them to form a viable state. Supporting the latest peace initiatives also suggests a lack of policy on the part of the Australian government and preparedness to accept the failed peace process of the United States in complete disregard of current realities.

MEDIA AND ITS DISCOURSE ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE PEACE PROCESS

In their study of the making of Australian foreign policy, Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley note that '[r]esponsibility for the content of foreign policy is almost invariably ascribed – by the public, by the media, by other states, and by historians – to members of the executive... [Ultimately, members] of the executive preside over the foreign policy machinery because they are ultimately accountable to the electors for the conduct of foreign policy' (2007, 84). Gyngell and Wesley (2007) note that in modern democracies like Australia, policy processes are increasingly influenced by popular opinion and that the media is a powerful influence on and conveyor of these attitudes. Therefore, in order to understand the factors that influence Australia's foreign policy approach towards the Israel-Palestine peace process, and its implications for Australia, it is important to understand both media and public discourse that surrounds the issue. The first part of this section will focus on the methods used and findings of the media's discourse on the Israel-Palestine peace process, followed by the presentation of the survey instrument used and results of the Australian public's opinion on this issue.

Methodology

This study examines the past 10 years of coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In total, 8596 articles were included in the study. In order to identify the relevant newspapers articles, the search terms 'Israel*' and 'Palestin*' were initially entered into the *Factiva* database within the date range 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2009. The asterisks were used so as to capture such key terms as 'Israel', 'Israeli', 'Palestinian' and 'Palestine'. A total of 8974 articles were initially retrieved from *Factiva*, however, only articles relevant to the conflict were included. For instance, articles concerning cultural or sporting events involving Israelis and Palestinians, and other events that mentioned Israel and Palestine in passing were omitted from the analysis.

Central Questions

This study examines three central questions concerning the Australian press coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict: the provision of historical context and competing narratives of the origins and causes of the conflict; alternative perspectives on a resolution of the conflict based on international law and human rights; and discourse concerning the final status issues, namely the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and the return of Palestinian refugees. Without placing the press coverage of the conflict in context, the motives and aspirations that underlie Israeli and Palestinian responses during negotiations in the ongoing peace process cannot be fully understood. Accepting that the media is a primary source of information about the Israel-Palestine conflict, the coverage of the conflict is a critical question in terms of public opinion.

General Findings of the Discourse in *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald*

In terms of the frequency of news coverage, coverage of the Israel-Palestine peace process has been extensive as there are two or more articles published in *The Australian* each day about the hostilities between Israel and Palestine, and almost one article per day in *Sydney Morning Herald*. From this, it can be said that these newspapers recognise a certain level of importance on the Israel-Palestine conflict and that it is an issue of which the public should be informed. In general, reporting from both newspapers are fair to the extent that motives and aspirations of both Israel and Palestine are covered. Neither newspapers exhibited open support for either party and even letters to the editor were carefully selected so as to provide an alternate voice for both Israel and Palestine. However, the terms used to describe Israelis and Palestinians could conjure certain images amongst readers. During times of hostility, Palestinians are usually referred to as 'terrorists' and 'militants' while

Israeli settlers are referred to as ‘right wingers’ or ‘extremists’. In addition to this, Israelis are often portrayed as the party who is making concessions to Palestinians which could imply that the Palestinians are the main obstacles to peace. Both newspapers had a tendency to focus on issues of violence and hostility rather than peace negotiations.

History, Origins and Causes of the Conflict

Looking into the extent to which both newspapers include the provision of historical context and competing narratives of the origins and causes of the conflict, this argues that the inclusion of the historical context is important as not only does it provide more depth and create a deeper understanding for the issues covered, it also aids in the understanding of the motives, aspirations and hostilities that are felt within and between the Israelis and Palestinians. The rise of political Zionism and post World War I events play a significant part in the origins of the conflict, however, this study argues that the most important period that lead to present hostilities started with the dispossession of Palestinians by Israeli forces from 1947-1948, leading to the establishment of Israel in 1948 and finally, Israeli’s annexation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. It is important therefore, for news coverage to place reporting of the conflict in context with the events of 1947, 1948 and 1967. On the whole, *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* take a similar approach when they do make reference to the years 1947, 1948 and 1967. A few articles referred to 1947 as the year Palestinians experienced dispossession from their homeland, however, 1947 was most commonly referred to in terms of the ‘UN partition plan of 1947’. Within the one percent of articles that mention 1947, very few detailed the events that led to the dispossession of Palestinians from their land, why they were dispossessed or the experiences of Palestinians and Israelis during the period from 1947 to 1948. The UN partition plan is also only briefly mentioned with hardly any explanation of its contents, why it was rejected by the Palestinians and its consequences for both parties. With respect to what both newspapers deem as the start of hostilities between Israel, Palestine and the Arab world, *The Australian* understand the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, rather than the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1947 to be the start of the conflict. Although historians have noted the continued dispossession of Palestinians from their homeland since 1947, the year 1948 is referred to in *The Australian* in terms of Israel’s founding year, war of independence, or the beginnings of Arab hostilities towards Israel. The events that led up to the creation of Israel and the consequences of its establishment, however, are rarely addressed. This portrayal also omits the historical experience of the Palestinians in whose narrative expresses the events of 1948 as the *al-Nakba* or ‘the catastrophe’. In terms of origins and historical context, both newspapers have published more than double the number of articles that refer to the events of 1967 than to 1947 and 1948 combined. In contrast to *The Australian*’s portrayal of the events of 1948 as the starting point of the conflict, the Arab-Israeli or Six Day War of 1967 is generally presented by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as the event that sparked current hostilities between Palestine, Israel and its Arab neighbours. This may explain the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s more extensive coverage of the Six Day War relative to *The Australian*. Compared to *The Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* provides a more in-depth coverage of the 1967 war with more frequent mention of the consequences of the war such as the annexation of East Jerusalem, West Bank and the Gaza Strip. *The Australian*, on the other hand, mainly reports the year ‘1967’ with reference to the Six Day War or Israel’s 1967 borders. Hardly any discussion details the consequences of the war or Israel’s internationally recognised 1967 borders, and what it means for Israel to retreat to its 1967 borders.

UN Resolutions and International Law

In order to identify the extent to which the Australian press presents an international law perspective on the issues involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the term ‘resolution’ was keyed into *Factiva* as a secondary search of the key terms ‘Israel*’ and ‘Palestin*’. The term ‘resolution’

was used to identify all articles that mention UN resolutions or resolution generally. However, analysis was restricted to articles that contained references to UN resolutions and international law and not those that used the term 'resolution' in a general sense. A search of the term 'resolution' retrieved a total of 809 articles, 532 from *The Australian* and 277 from the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Additionally, a search of the term 'international law' retrieved a total of 302 articles, 183 from *The Australian* and 119 from the *Sydney Morning Herald*. However, only 310 articles in total (188 from *The Australian* and 122 from the *Sydney Morning Herald*) were relevant to the decisions passed by the UN or international law specifically in terms of the conflict and its resolution. This finding shows that less than five percent of the articles about the Israel-Palestine conflict mention the resolutions of the UN or contain an international law perspective. As for those articles that do refer to the UN resolutions or international law, most mention UN resolutions in passing and very few articles identify the specific UN resolutions that pertain to the issues regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Rather, most of these articles refer generally to 'international resolutions' or instances whereby both Israel and Palestine are expected to adhere to international agreements. When UN resolutions are identified, however, UNSC resolutions 242 and 338 are the two most commonly mentioned. These resolutions are general in terms of their determination of international law and details of a resolution of the conflict. This reflects and reinforces one of the major shortcomings of the peace process as there are other more relevant and specific UN resolutions than 242 and 338 (Rane, 2009: 63-64). The absence of reference to UN resolutions that specifically concern the issues of Jerusalem, settlements and refugees detracts from the press' capacity to present an alternative perspective to the conventional approach which is devoid of an international law perspective and insists on what is increasingly regarded as a flawed and failed negotiated peace process. Moreover, the absence of an international law perspective detracts from the ability of the public to develop an informed opinion about the issues most central to the conflict and its resolution.

Jerusalem, Israeli Settlements and the Return of Palestinian Refugees

The three most central issues to the conflict and its resolution are the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and the return of Palestinian refugees. These are the issues that have been identified by the UN as the three main obstacles to achieving a resolution between Israel and Palestine. Both *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* recognise the significance of Jerusalem as a main obstacle to achieving peace. However, both newspapers seldom provide any context with respect to the status or significance of the city. Both newspapers mainly identify Jerusalem as an issue due to its nature as a religious site for both Jews and Muslims and only a handful of articles provide a discussion of the city's economic and cultural importance for both parties. On the whole, *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* display care in their coverage of Jerusalem through recognition of annexed East Jerusalem, claimed by Palestinians as the capital of their future state. Neither newspaper, however, substantially reflects the position of the UNSC on illegality of Israel's occupation of and attempt to change the status of Jerusalem. On the issue of Israeli settlements, both newspapers occasionally recognise the settlement issue as an obstacle to peace and regard them as illegal, which is consistent with the status of the settlements under international law. Most articles, however, merely state that Israel has been asked to freeze its settlement expansion without discussing the illegality of the settlements or why Israeli settlements are an obstacle to peace. On the whole, news coverage frequently mentions Palestinian disapproval of Israeli settlements and Israel's ongoing settlement expansion policy, however, the Palestinian opposition is seldom accompanied by an explanation of the basis of the illegality of the settlements and their impact on the peace process. Finally, on the issue of the right of return of Palestinian refugees, compared to *The Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* is more detailed in its reporting of the issue of Palestinian refugees. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the years 2000-2001 seem to be the most comprehensive in detailing the events that led to the creation of Palestinian refugees. After 2001, however, press coverage rarely includes in-depth discussions of these events, Palestinians' aspirations and the issue of the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland. In addition,

after 2001, articles that do mention Palestinian refugees mainly focus on reporting attacks in refugee camps and only briefly mention the conditions in the respective Palestinian refugee camps without addressing the historical context of their creation. This shift in reporting on Palestinian refugees post 2001 could be the result of the September 11 attacks in Washington and the world's focus on international terrorism, and that as mentioned before, Palestinians were often termed as 'terrorists'.

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE PEACE PROCESS

In the making of foreign policy, public opinion is playing an increasingly prominent role. Observers note that "public opinion sets the essential parameters of the political and policy processes between elections" (Gyngell and Wesley 2007: 163). Transnational advocates for a range of issues have successfully impacted on foreign policy making by imposing a political cost to governments that seek to ignore moral and ethical considerations. Although predicting which international issues will resonate with the public, spark arousal and become an influence on the policy process is difficult, those most likely to become salient include issues that arise from "a sense of morality, justice or responsibility" such as national liberation or struggles for self-determination (Gyngell and Wesley 2007, 162). The likelihood of political salience increases when the issue resonates with national values.

Methodology

This study is based on a national survey on the Australian public's understandings and opinions concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict. The survey looked to identify the public's understanding of the cause and nature of the conflict; perceptions of its global importance; prospects for its resolution; attitudes regarding Australian government involvement and policy preferences; opinions regarding settlements, refugees and Jerusalem; and sources of information. The survey consisted of 15 questions including 5 key demographic questions. The survey's 10 main questions used items that asked respondents to select between statements, binary questions, and Likert scales. The survey was fielded by Research Now, a leading international online fieldwork and panel specialist, to host and provide the sample for this survey during the week of 10 May 2010. The total number of respondents was 1021 Australian citizens and residents from each of Australia's states and territories in proportion to population census data. Invitations to complete the survey were sent by email to people on the Research Now data base of 220,000. The survey remained open until nationally representative numbers of respondents was achieved with respect to gender, age, state of residence, and level of education. The average completion time for each survey was five minutes. Surveys that were completed in less than two minutes were not accepted nor were surveys completed by respondents who selected responses according to a particular pattern such as all option 'a' or all option 'b'. This was done to increase the likelihood that the survey results reflect genuine, thoughtful and considered responses that are reliable and representative of the national population.

Of the 1021 respondents, 49 percent were male and 51 percent were female. The survey sample consisted of respondents aged between 18 and 82 years. Ten percent were aged 18-24, 19 percent aged 25-34, 20 percent aged 35-44, 19 percent aged 45-54, 15 percent aged 55-64, and 18 percent aged 65 and over. One percent of respondents possessed a PhD or higher qualification, while 11 percent possessed a post-graduate degree, 21 percent a bachelor degree, and 34 percent had completed a TAFE or trade certificate or diploma. Thirty-two percent did not have any post-secondary school education with 31 percent having completed secondary and only one percent with primary school as their highest level of education. Consistent with Australia's population distribution, the largest plurality of respondents were from New South Wales (33%), followed by Victoria (25%), Queensland (20%), Western Australia (10%), South Australia (8%), Tasmania (2%),

the ACT (1%) and Northern Territory (1%). The largest plurality of respondents were supporters of the ALP (48%) followed by the Liberal-National coalition (37%), the Greens (7%) and Family First (2%).

Causes and Nature of the Conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict is subject to multiple narratives. Therefore, the extent to which Australians understand and the narratives of the conflict to which the public identifies with, gives an idea on what they think is the main factor that drives the continuation of the conflict. In order to identify the narrative with which the Australian public identifies, or accepts, this survey asked respondents what they think is ‘the main cause of the conflict’. Respondents were given four options: ‘Ancient hostility between Jews and Arabs’; ‘Dispossession of Palestinian people by Jews who migrated to Palestine last century’; ‘Hostility of certain Arab nations towards Israel since its creation in 1948’; and ‘Other’ for which respondents were requested to specify an alternative response. The largest plurality (37%) selected ‘Ancient hostility between Jews and Arabs’, which is the dominant narrative in popular culture including films and television programs but devoid of historical evidence. In reality, the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict are in the post-World War I years. Arabs and Jews co-existed in harmony and prosperity through the Middle East under Muslim rule for over a millennium. Slightly over 27 percent of respondents selected ‘Dispossession of Palestinian people by Jews who migrated to Palestine last century’ as the main cause, while slightly less than 27 percent selected ‘Hostility of certain Arab nations towards Israel since its creation in 1948’. This suggests that the Australian public is split in terms of their understanding of the main cause of the conflict, with equal proportions identifying with the dominant Palestinian and Israeli narratives, and the largest portion of the Australian public believing that the conflict between Israel and Palestine stems from an ancient hostility between Jews and Arabs.

To identify what the Australian public understands to be the nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict, respondents were asked ‘Which of the following do you think best describes the Israel-Palestine conflict’ and were given three main options: ‘Palestinians trying to end Israel’s occupation and form their own state’; ‘Israelis fighting for security against Palestinian terrorism’; and ‘Other’ for which respondents were requested to specify an alternative response. How Australians understand the nature of the conflict give an idea on what they think the ongoing conflict is about. Additionally, this could shed light on the extent to which they think achieving a resolution is important and what they think an appropriate basis for a resolution entails. The majority of Australians (55%) understand the Israel-Palestine conflict to be about ‘Palestinians trying to end Israel’s occupation and form their own state’, while a large plurality (32%) understand it to be about ‘Israelis fighting for security against Palestinian terrorism’. As a majority of respondents see the nature of the conflict as that of Palestinians trying to end Israel’s occupation, this might suggest that most Australians think that a just resolution of the conflict is important and will support a just resolution towards the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Importance and Basis of a Resolution of the Conflict

Consistent with polls conducted in other countries, when asked ‘How important is a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict for world peace’ over 90 percent of respondents stated that it is either ‘very important’ (57%) or ‘important’ (36%). Only 7 percent stated that it is ‘not very important’ (5%) or ‘not at all important’ (2%). This shows that a large majority of Australians recognise the importance of a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its significance for world peace. The results also suggest that Australians view conflicts of this nature as crucial for the stability of peace in the international community, and that a resolution of such conflicts should be based on justice in order for peace to be achieved. Respondents were asked ‘Do you think the solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict should be based more on’ option (a) ‘The resolutions passed by the United

Nations' or option (b) 'The ongoing negotiation process'. The majority (61%) selected option (b), while 28 percent selected option (a). A possible explanation for this finding could be that fewer Australians are familiar with the UN resolutions than the negotiation process. Discussions amongst politicians and the news media on the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict have dominantly focused on the ongoing negotiation process rather than resolutions passed by the United Nations.

Australia's Involvement

In order to understand the extent to which public opinion influence Australia's foreign policy, and specifically the development of Australia's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is important to know the type of policies the Australian public would like to see their government adopt regarding the Israel-Palestine peace process. It is also important to understand the public's main source of information regarding the conflict and the degree to which they gauge their level of understanding of the conflict as these factors play a part in the extent to which the public would be willing to pressure or support the government in playing a more important role in their political responses towards the conflict. Consistent with the responses of the public concerning Australia's involvement in other overseas conflicts, when asked 'Would you like the Australian government to be more involved in efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict', a slight majority (51%) were opposed and only 19 percent were in favour, while 30 percent were 'unsure'.

Information Source and Level of Understanding

Respondents were asked for their 'main source of information about the Israel-Palestine conflict'. Overwhelmingly, the main source is 'news media' (including 'television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and on-line news sources') with 82 percent selecting this option. Other sources were far less significant, including books (4%), religious/community organisations (4%), friends/relatives/colleagues/associates (5%), and school/university (2%). Also, when asked to rate their understanding of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the largest plurality (46%) stated it is 'moderate'. Just over one quarter of respondents rated their understanding as 'very good' (8%) or 'good' (18%), while slightly more (28%) rated their understanding as 'low' (18%) or 'very low' (10%).

Australian Policy

The final important area to look at in terms of understanding the Australian public's opinion on the Israel-Palestine conflict is to understand the type of policies that they would support the government in adopting regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is also important to understand the public's views on the three main obstacles to peace between Israel and Palestine, namely the issue of Israeli settlements, the right of return of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem, as identified by the United Nations

Although a slight majority of the public are opposed to the Australian government being more 'involved' in efforts to resolve the conflict, the overwhelming majority would like the government to adopt a policy calling for negotiations to be based on international law and human rights (80%). Respondents were asked 'To what extent would you support the Australian government adopting a policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict that calls for negotiations to be based on international law and human rights'. The majority (56%) stated that they 'support' such a policy, while 24 percent 'strongly support'. By contrast, 14 percent 'oppose' such a policy and 6 percent 'strongly oppose' it (Table 9).

This suggests that Australians respect and acknowledge the importance of international law and human rights to be the foundation of their government's policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict. Gyngell and Wesley (2007) note that Australians and their political leaders have long held the

ideals of “fair go” and “mateship”, which means an emphasis on shared obligations, communitarianism and freedom, as Australian values. The survey results therefore, demonstrate Australians’ desire for these values to be reflected in their government’s foreign policies and that Australia’s “preferences are for more humanitarian, cosmopolitan outcome as the goals of Australian diplomacy” (Gyngell and Wesley 2007, 279).

Israeli Settlements

Over three-quarters (78%) of the Australian public is opposed to Israel’s settlement policy. This survey asked respondents ‘To what extent do you agree that Israel should withdraw from the settlements it has constructed on Palestinian land’. The majority (54%) stated they ‘agree’ and 24 percent stated they ‘strongly agree’. Less than one-quarter are in favour of Israeli settlements with 18 percent who ‘disagree’ and 5 percent who ‘strongly disagree’.

The Right of Return of Palestinian Refugees

Another major issue in terms of a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict is the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. The overwhelmingly majority of Australians (92%) support the Palestinian refugees’ right of return. Respondents were asked, ‘To what extent do you agree that Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return to their homes and lands’. A majority (56%) stated they ‘agree’ and 36 percent stated they ‘strongly agree’. By contrast, only 6 percent stated they ‘disagree’ and 2 percent stated they ‘strongly disagree’.

These results show that the vast majority of Australians support the dismantling of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Under international law, Israeli settlements are deemed illegal while refugees, under any circumstances, have the right to return to their homes and lands from which they were dispossessed. As mentioned before, Australians are more inclined towards supporting the negotiation process as the basis for achieving a solution towards the conflict. However, the fact that the majority of Australians are in support of the dismantling of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees which are both mentioned under international law suggests that should Australians become more aware of the ascribed international laws that target the illegality of Israel’s occupation, they could be more inclined to support a solution based on international law more so than the ongoing negotiation process.

The Status of Jerusalem

The question of Jerusalem has been a central obstacle to achieving a resolution of the conflict. Respondents were asked their preference for ‘the final status of the city if Jerusalem’ and given five options: ‘The capital of Israel’; ‘The capital of Palestine’; ‘The shared capital of both Israel and Palestine’; ‘Under the international trusteeship of the UN’; and ‘Other’ for which respondents were requested to specify an alternative response. Only 22 percent of respondents prefer Jerusalem to be the undivided capital of Israel and only 6 percent prefer it to be the undivided capital of Palestine. The largest plurality (39%) prefer Jerusalem to be ‘The shared capital of both Israel and Palestine’, while the next largest plurality (25%) expressed preference for Jerusalem to be ‘Under the international trusteeship of the UN’.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from both the discourse within the media and the Australian public brings to light the disparities in knowledge, beliefs and opinions within Australia on the Israel-Palestine peace process. As mentioned, Gyngell and Wesley (2007) notes the importance of the mass media as powerful

conveyors of information and influences of public opinion. In this instance, however, the extent to which *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald* influenced the Australian public is only reflected in the public's limited knowledge of the conflict and belief in the ongoing negotiation process rather than on UN resolutions as the basis for a solution. From the findings presented in this study, the majority of Australians depend on the media to get information on the Israel-Palestine peace process. Arguably, the newspapers' focus on violence and the ongoing negotiation process has led to Australians supporting the negotiation process rather than basing a solution of the conflict on UN resolutions. However, when Australians were asked on whether they support the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees which are prescribed by the UN as one of the main obstacles to peace, an overwhelming majority supported both the former and latter. This suggests that if the media had paid more attention to UN resolutions which state the importance of the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, Australians may be more aware of and support the relevant UN resolutions that directly apply to achieving a just resolution.

Additionally, the lack of news coverage of the historical context, nature and causes of the conflict in *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, coupled with news coverage focusing more on violence and hostilities rather than peace negotiations, could have led to most Australians acknowledging that they only have moderate, low or very low understanding of the issues of the conflict. News coverage in *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald* have therefore, created a gap in knowledge and understanding for its audience, as news coverage that focuses on violence and hostilities without accompanying it with relevant explanations of motives, aspirations and history of the conflict has the tendency to result in their readers not understanding why the conflict remains intractable. This is reflected in the survey's results above where 37 percent of respondents believe that the main cause of the conflict stems from an ancient hostility between Jews and Arabs, which is the dominant narrative in popular culture including films and television programs, with slightly more than 27 percent thinking that the dispossession of Palestinian people by Jews who migrated to Palestine last century is the main cause, and less than 27 percent thinking that the conflict stems from hostility of certain Arab nations towards Israel since its creation in 1948. As mentioned above, this suggests that Australians are split in terms of their understanding of the main cause of the conflict and this suggests that this could be the result of the gap in coverage provided by news reports.

This study's results can be compared to a study conducted by Greg Philo and Mike Berry of the Glasgow Media Group that sought to understand Britain's news coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its affect on public opinion. Philo and Berry found that journalists assumed a level of knowledge amongst their audience which resulted in news coverage mentioning "anything about the origins or history of the conflict or that one side is subjecting the other to military occupation, or international opinion on the legality of this" (2004, 189). The lack of representations of these perspectives and their links to motivation in the British press has therefore made it generally incomprehensible for its audiences on why the conflict remains intractable (Philo and Berry 2004). Philo and Berry (2004) have also noted that the level of understanding of the conflict also affects the audiences' interest in the conflict and this could possibly explain why the majority of the Australian public oppose their government getting involved in this conflict although as mentioned, most Australians do not generally support their country's participation in international conflicts.

The lack of public pressure and support for the Australian government to be more involved in the conflict could therefore suggest the lack of substance in the government's Middle East policy as mentioned in the introduction. The results could also explain the decline in urgency and substance in the Australian Labor Party's political response towards the conflict as described in their National Platform over the years. The decline in dedication and a comprehensive political approach towards one of the most salient conflicts in international politics could either be the result of a government

who is willing to go along with any peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine that are mainly brokered by the United States, or that the Australian public do not understand the conflict enough to support and pressure the government in getting more involved.

The findings of the media's discourse and public opinion on the Israel-Palestine peace process therefore, suggests no obvious relationship between the media, public opinion and the making of foreign policy in Australia. Gyngell and Wesley argues that "the media are not just conveyors of messages... [but] are powerful shapers and reinforcers of opinion as well" (2007, 156). In the case of news coverage of the Israel-Palestine peace process, however, the media not only assumes an independent stand from the government's political response, its capacity lies in shaping the type of news Australians are exposed to. The type of news coverage, however, does not seem to reflect and share Australians' wide support for a just resolution of the conflict, and for UN resolutions such as the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees to be adhered to. The disparity between public opinion and the Australian government's policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process is even greater. Over 90 percent of Australians recognise the importance of a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its significance for world peace. This too suggests that Australians view conflicts of this nature as crucial for the stability of peace in the international community, and that a resolution of such conflicts should be based on justice in order for peace to be achieved. Additionally, most Australians also support a just resolution of the conflict supporting the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. However, the government maintains a policy that does not reflect Australians' recognition of the importance of achieving a just resolution for world peace, and support for international law and human rights. This is reflected in the insubstantial and uncomprehensive Middle East policy that the Australian government holds, supporting ongoing negotiation process rather than UN resolutions as the basis of a solution and Australia's voting records at the UN that goes against supporting the inalienable rights of Palestinians.

CONCLUSION – IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA

The findings of this study suggest that there is no obvious relationship between the media, public opinion and Australia's foreign policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. In fact, this study brings to light the disparities and gaps between the various levels of the Australian society in its understanding of the conflict, and realising a collective approach towards what should be an appropriate policy response towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. More importantly, this questions the level of congruence between Australia's professed values and identity, and its position on a resolution of the Israel-Palestine peace process. As mentioned in the introduction, Australia maintaining a policy that states its commitment to support a just two-state solution while voting against supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinians at the UN highlights the inconsistencies in Australia's professed values and the actions the government is willing to take to ensure the promotion of justice, human rights and international law. It can be argued that there is "one important proviso [in government's policies], and that is that there is effective 'whole of government' policy coordination" (Miller 2002, 200). Therefore, it is important for the Australian government to ensure consistency in their policy initiatives as discrepancies can affect the government's credibility among its people and affect its overall international image.

Australia's professed values are further articulated in an official government document that states that:

Australian values include respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and secular government, freedom of association, support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, equality under the law, equality of men and women, equality of opportunity and peacefulness. They also include a spirit of

egalitarianism that embraces fair play, mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good (Commonwealth of Australia 2007: 1).

These professed Australian values, however, do not parallel the government's policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. These values articulate Australia's respect for equality and pursuit of the public good yet for the past few years, Australia's voting records at the UN rejects upholding the inalienable rights of Palestinians. The wider Australian public believes that a just resolution of the conflict is important for world peace, and supports the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Therefore, this questions the lack of a substantial policy approach towards the issue and highlights the gap between public sentiments and the making of foreign policy in Australia especially on an issue that has been deemed as one of the major dilemmas of relations between Islam and the West. More importantly, Australia's policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process questions the government's professed Australian values and whether these values of equality, fair play, compassion and pursuit of the public good actually translate into its foreign relations and approach towards international conflicts. As it stands, Hashem Yousseff, chief of cabinet for Arab League secretary-general Amr Moussa, informed *The Australian* that Canberra's uncritical support for Israel at the UN would be taken into consideration by the 22-member Arab League in deciding whether to support Australia's bid for a seat on the UNSC for the 2013-2014 term (Sheridan 2010). Therefore, as Australia looks to play a more prominent role in the UN, increase its trade relations with the Middle East and form closer ties with its Southeast Asian neighbours, its' professed values and how that translates into its international diplomacy will be considered, especially its policy towards the Israel-Palestine peace process which has been one of the crucial factors.

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