



After Iran, Canadians see Israel as biggest threat to peace, poll finds

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CanWest News Service; Ottawa Citizen

Saturday, July 29, 2006

OTTAWA -- Iran is the biggest threat to world peace, followed by Israel and North Korea, according to a poll released Friday.

The online poll, sponsored by the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, a think tank, and conducted by the Innovative Research Group, was answered by 2,393 respondents between Wednesday and Friday. The results are accurate to within two percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The poll, released exclusively to the Ottawa Citizen, presented respondents with six options: Iran, Israel, North Korea, Hezbollah, Syria and Lebanon. About 26 per cent of respondents said Iran presented the greatest danger while 20 per cent picked Israel, placing the Jewish state ahead of North Korea with 19 per cent.

Another 15 per cent said Hezbollah, while only one per cent pointed to either Syria or Lebanon. About 18 per cent said they didn't know.

Respondents in every province west of Ontario all put North Korea ahead of Israel. In Quebec, 27 per cent said Israel was the greatest threat, with Iran at 26 per cent.

Greg Lyle, managing director of the Innovative Research Group, said the pollsters wanted to see if North Korea has been pushed into the background because of recent events in the Middle East. "But it's still in the mix," he said.

David Bercuson, director of programming at the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, said Israel's placement as the second-greatest threat was influenced by Quebec responses.

"I have no doubt that the result was clearly influenced by a large number of people in Quebec who think Israel is the devil incarnate."

Respondents were also asked whether Hezbollah's attacks on Israel justified Israel's

actions. The pollsters asked the following question: "The fighting in the Middle East started after Hezbollah's sudden attack on Israeli soil, killing eight and capturing two. Given this information, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?"

About 42 per cent said Israel's attacks are not justified, while 37 per cent said they were justified. Another 21 per cent didn't know.

Meanwhile, about 58 per cent support establishing a NATO peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, 20 per cent oppose it and 12 per cent said they neither supported or opposed it. The remainder didn't know.

More than half supported deploying Canadian troops in Lebanon, even though the federal government has said it cannot send troops unless it scales back commitments elsewhere. About 40 per cent of those polled said Canada should send troops, but not back away from commitments; 17 per cent said Canada should send peacekeepers and reduce other commitments and 31 per cent said Canada should not send peacekeepers at all. The remainder did not know.

Lyle said the results show that Canadians are aware of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan and still support it.

It also shows Canadians are aware the Conservative government's new direction in foreign policy has broken the "benign neutrality" of Liberal policy, said Bercuson.

"Canadians are clearly comfortable with that right now."

Ottawa Citizen

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