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## Measuring Public Opinion Regarding Peaceful Solution of Palestine Issue: An Experimental Study of University Students in Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates

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There is a brief debate on One-State Solution, Two-States Solution, Three-States Solution and the status of Jerusalem. The plan of forming union among the territories of Israel and Palestine, single currency and Rail-Road plan for secular transportation from one region to another is also discussed in this study. During comparing such public opinion with other previous international proposals for resolving this issue, recommendations from the author are presented in the last.

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# Measuring Public Opinion Regarding Peaceful Solution of Palestine Issue: An Experimental Study of University Students in Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates

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- *Hypothesis*

Israel is a reality and formed under the light of UN resolution. Anti-Israel sentiments within the territories of Palestine or in the Muslim world are becoming a cause of Palestinian as well as neighboring countries' destruction. And, only a peaceful solution can restore the Palestinians as a nation and a strong economy.

- *Research Methodology*

This study is based on theoretically and historically descriptive, analytical, comparative and qualitative methods. The data is collected from books, research journals, newspapers, internet, interviews, results of different dissertations, and personal visit of universities in Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates. A questionnaire was also designed for measuring public opinion that was analyzed through statistical formulas.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The basic aim of this study was to measure public opinion in Muslim society regarding finding peaceful solution of Palestine issue. For this

purpose, three countries were selected in which Pakistan and Iran has theocratic culture while United Arab Emirates has liberal Muslim society (Coughlin, 2006, PP.89-159). Madrid Conference of 1991, Oslo Peace Accords 1993, Camp David Summit 2000 and different other proposals regarding resolving Palestine-Israel conflict became the reason of investigating public opinion in Muslim society on this issue. This was a pilot study conducted on a small sample of 180 students of Pakistan, 41 students of United Arab Emirates and the 55 students of Iran. This study was much more exploratory in kind to understand some core assumptions and to see whether the findings could lead to the development of some better theoretical framework in order to do some large scale work in the future.

To measure public opinion, firstly we have to highlight historical background of the Palestine-Israel Conflict.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Conflict among Israel and Palestine started from the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Arab countries considered it a threat for them and began Arab-Israel war of 1948 (Wolfman, 2007, PP.110-112). In result, Israel captured more areas than the areas allocated in the declaration of its establishment. While, Jordan captured West bank and Egypt captured Gaza Strip where Palestine Government was declared by Arab league in September 22, 1948. But, these areas were captured by Israeli forces during Six Day War 1967 and Palestine Government firstly shifted in Jordan then Lebanon. In 1993, through Oslo Accords, Palestine Liberation Organization of Yasser Arafat allowed to establish its control over Gaza Strip and West Bank. So, Palestine National Authority was established (Ross, 2004, PP.06-10). This was the time of emerging new conflict within Palestine where Hamas and Fatah had different point of views. Hamas was strongly anti-Israel while Fatah was controlling Palestine National Authority. Conflict among both groups raised in 2005 when Hamas won the elections of Palestine National Authority. This victory became the reason of division among Palestine Government. Hamas is now

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governing in Gaza Strip while Fatah's Palestinian National Authority is governing over West Bank (Schanzer, 2008, PP.50-53). Palestinian Authority tried to gain UN membership in 2011 as a sovereign state but failed. But, in 2012, United Nations declared it a non-member observer state. This time, State of Palestine is recognized by 134 countries (Boyl, 2013, PP.189-190).

In 2011, Hebrew University conducted a survey of measuring public opinion regarding two-state solution among Israelis and Palestinians. This plan was supported by 58% Israelis and 50% Palestinians. Similarly, 70% Israelis and 63% Palestinians supported an end of violence (The Jerusalem Post, August 25, 2013). This was one aspect but there are since several other plans like One-State Solution and Three-States Solution for resolving this issue. So, there was a plan to judge public opinion in other Muslim countries about this issue that what their educated population considers best. So, we choose students of different higher education institutions in Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates. The basic purpose of choosing students of higher education institutions was to avoid uncivilized and immature answers.

### III. SAMPLE

The sample of the study (N= 276) consisted of Bachelor and Master Degree programs from two universities, one postgraduate college and one degree college in Pakistan, two universities in United Arab Emirates and two universities in Iran. Most of the study was mainly belonged to the disciplines of Political Science, History, Islamic Studies, Project Management, Business Administration, Education, Chinese Studies and Persian Studies. In Pakistan, there were 65 (23.5%) students from Government Boys Degree College Lodhran, 25 (09%) Students from National University of Modern Language Islamabad, 50 (18%) students from Sargodha University Bhakkar Campus and 40 (14.5%)

students from Government Postgraduate College Asghar Mall Rawalpindi. Similarly, in Iran, there were 44 (15.9%) students from Al-Mustafa International University Qom and 11 (04%) students from Research Center for Islamic Culture and Civilization Qom. At the same time in United Arab Emirates, there were 32 (11.6%) students from British University in Dubai and 9 (03%) students from Michigan State University Dubai Campus. Total number of Pakistani students was 180 while there were 55 Iranians and 41 Emirati students

### IV. INSTRUMENT

As Pakistan and Iran are theocratic societies while United Arab Emirates have liberal Islamic environment, firstly, it was decided to verbally ask the questions about status of Israel as an independent state individually to each student. This helped to differentiate among reactionary and rational opinion. At this stage, there was a questionnaire for those who accepted Israel as an independent state and considered that war is no solution of any conflict. Their opinion was considered as rational opinion for the solution of this issue in peaceful meanings. So, the designed questionnaire was filled by these students for measuring public opinion regarding One-State Solution, two-state solution or three-state solution.

### V. RESULTS

During interview, 103 students in Pakistan and all the 55 students in Iran showed anti-Israel sentiments and gave reactionary views against the status of the Israel as an independent state. On the other hand, there was no student in United Arab Emirates who found as an anti-Israel. Table given below is showing the percentage of students who had reactionary views out of total 180 Pakistani, 55 Iranian and 41 Emirati students.

REACTIONAL OPINION			
	Pakistan	Iran	United Arab Emirates
Israel is an illegal state. It should be eliminated through war.	63.1%	100%	0
Although Israel is an illegal state but if, it would return back to the position of 1967, we should accept it. Otherwise, it should be eliminated through war.	36.9%	0	0

Even these 103 Pakistani and 55 Iranian students directly or indirectly found war as a solution of this conflict but they could not reply of this question that which country will go for the war against Israel. There were ambiguity answers. Some says that all the Muslim world should united against Israel while some says that Israel-neighboring Arab countries should fight against Israel. They became again confused when a question

was asked that how Israel-neighboring Arab countries will go for a war against Israel when they are militarily weak than Israel and most of the Arab countries have accepted Israel as an independent state. This was the reason that we called such opinion as reactionary opinion.

The remaining 77 Pakistani and all the 41 Emirati students accepted Israel as an independent

state and considered that war is not a solution of any conflict. They argued that Israel is a reality and the problems of Palestinians are due to lack of unity and ideological differences among Hamas and Fatah. They also argue that we must find a solution of this conflict through mutual understanding of both the stake holders.

This is a reason that their opinion can be considered as rational opinion.

Data collected from these students was in favor of establishing one, two and three states within the territory of Israel and Palestine. The following table is showing percentage of their support.

RATIONAL OPINION		
	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
One-State Solution	32.5%	0
Two-States Solution	37.7%	100%
Three-States Solution	29.9%	0
Egyptian-Jordanian Solution	0%	0%
Allon Plan	0%	0%

Among 25 (32.5%) supports of One-State Solution, 16 (64%) Pakistani students gave the name "Israel-Palestine Union or I-P Union" to new state while 09 (36%) Pakistani students were called it "Federation of Israel and Palestine". They were in favor of three autonomous units of one state; Israel, Gaza Strip and West Bank. They said that there should be secular transportation with foreign relations, single currency and mutual defense with one army. Issues of governance, economy, trade, and domestic law and order situation should be separated for each unit. On the other hand,

supporters of Two-States Solution wanted two states; Palestine and Israel where Palestine would have two administrative units; called Eastern Palestine (West Bank) and Western Palestine (Gaza Strip).

There was the difference in opinion regarding administrating two units of Palestine. The following table is showing percentage of difference in opinion among 29 (37.7%) Pakistani and 41 (100%) Emirati students regarding political structure of these two units of Palestine.

OPINION OF THE SUPPORTERS OF TWO-STATES SOLUTION		
	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
There should be two provinces. Each province should be governed by the provincial government.	72.4%	68.3%
There should be unitary system and both units should be divided into districts. Each district should be governed by the district administration.	27.6%	31.7%

There were 23 (29.9%) Pakistani students who were in favor of Three-States Solution. Their opinion is judging through following table given below.

OPINION OF THE SUPPORTERS OF THREE-STATES SOLUTION	
	Pakistan
There should be three state; East Palestine (West Bank), West Palestine (Gaza Strip) and Israel.	100%
East Palestine (West Bank) should be a secular state due to Jewish, Muslim and Christian population	69.6%
East Palestine should also be a Muslim State. Muslim community will be happy with this decision.	39.1%

On question about status of Jerusalem to all the 77 Pakistani and 41 Emirati students who have rational opinion, we collected two different views.

STATUS OF JERUSALEM		
	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
It should be a neutral city state like Vatican City, having its own administration, political structure and security force.	84%	37%
It should be a part of West Bank or Eastern Palestine.	13%	0%
Eastern Jerusalem should be capital and part of Palestine while Western Jerusalem should be capital and part of Israel according to PLO's current position.	03%	63%



During discussion about political system in Palestine with the 29 (37.7%) Pakistani supporters of Two-States Solution, 21 (72%) argued that there should be two provinces, called Eastern Palestine and Western Palestine. On the other hand, 8 (28%) students said that there should be unitary system and both the wings of Palestine should be divided into districts. But, all the other 23 (29.9%) Pakistani supporters of Three-States Solution and 41 (100%) Emirati supporters of Two-States

Solution preferred unitary system in both the states; Eastern Palestine and Western Palestine.

In case of two or three states solution, RAIL-ROAD PLAN was discussed with the students. This plan was designed to generate harmony among both the stake holders. And, this plan would be a cause of secular transportation among both or all the three wings within the territory of Palestine and Israel. The table below is highlighting views of all the 77 Pakistani and 41 Emirati students on this plan that had rational opinion.

RAIL-ROAD PLAN		
	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
There should be secular transportation among all the regions within the territory of Palestine and Israel.	82%	100%
There should be separate transportation in each region to avoid any socio-political conflict.	18%	0%

An idea of union among the territories of Israel and Palestine welcomed by all the 77 Pakistani and 41 Emirati students who had rational opinion. The table

given below is showing their interest in this idea regarding betterment and welfare of the people within the territories of Israel and Palestine.

AN IDEA OF UNION AMONG THE TERRITORIES OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE LIKE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)		
	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
There should be a union of all the regions of Israel and Palestine like European Union (EU), either there will be two states, three states or three states and one city state.	91%	76%
Union of Israel and Palestine will eliminate Islamic, Arab and Palestinian ideology because Israel is socially and culturally strong country.	09%	24%
There should be single currency for all the regions of Israel and Palestine like Euro in European Union. It will facilitate to stabilize weak Palestinian economy and this region would become another emerging economy of the Middle East.	94%	100%
There should be separate currency for each region but the currency of one region should be accepted in the other regions of the Israel and Palestine.	06%	0%
There should be mutual defense and one army in case of foreign threats. But, each region should have its own police department.	78%	0%
There should not be a single army or mutual defense because religiously and ideologically, there is a huge difference among both the nations.	22%	100%

During data collecting from the students of Al-Mustafa International University Qom, rather than the 44 Iranian students, we interviewed the 20 students of Somalia and 07 students of Uganda who were enrolled here. Their opinion was not different from any Iranian and they also did not accept the status of Israel as a legal state. All these students said that Israel is an illegal state and it must be wiped out from the world map through war. But, they are silent and confused on the question that who will fight against Israel. So, we can include this opinion also in the category of reactionary opinion.

## VI. DISCUSSION

This study was done in the Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates mainly to investigate the public

opinion about peaceful solution of Palestine issue without any war or militancy. During data analyzing, we mainly focused upon the opinion of those students who had rational views and dislike war or militancy. Therefore, questionnaire was filled by just 77 Pakistani and 41 Emirati students out of 276 students of Pakistan, Iran and United Arab Emirates.

As Pakistan and Iran have theocratic environment, there are a lot of anti-Israel sentiments. Even educated population has a rich dogmatic and militant attitude. The study of Liaqat (2012) showed very high dogmatic religiosity in the Pakistani sample and 87% population is religiously conservative (Liaqat, 2012, P.147). Similarly, another study of Asim and Liaqat (2013) highlighted culturally conservatism and militant

attitude in the Pakistani society. This study showed that 83% population of Pakistan has militant attitude (Asim, 2013, PP.09-10). This is the reason that we got reactional views from the 103 Pakistani students.

Similarly, anti-Israel sentiments are supported by state level in Iran. During prayers or any other religious ceremonies, Imam or host always raised the slogans against United States of America, United Kingdom and Israel like (لئىقارسا رب گرم). So, the views against Israel were as usual from the 55 Iranian students. As environment and culture effects thinking and philosophy, we should not be afraid from the views of other 20 students of Somalia and 07 students of Uganda who were studying in Iran. Their anti-Israel sentiments were due to two reasons. Firstly, they had been inspired by Iranian culture and theocratic environment. Secondly, Uganda and Somalia are also suffering from militancy and having conservative environment (Kumar, 2006, PP.97-98).

On the other hand, United Arab Emirates is a gateway for West Asia and Africa. Its local population is just 1.4 million while there are 7.8 million foreigners. All the foreigners are usually here for business and trade but essentially associated with any Emirati citizen due to the law of United Arab Emirates. This is the reason that the "Badow" culture of the United Arab Emirates has converted into economic-oriented culture. This conversion also changed the thinking and attitude of the Emirati citizens (King, 2008, PP.135-139). Therefore, during collecting data, we found them religiously liberal and rational in their opinion.

During judging rational opinion of the Pakistani and Emirati students, we came to know that Two-States Solution was preferred by majority of Pakistani and Emirati students. Similarly, majority was in favor of Jerusalem as a city state like Vatican City. On the other hand, Rail-Road Plan for secular transportation among the territories of Israel and Palestine was also appreciated by the majority. At the same time, an idea about EU-type union among the territories of Israel and Palestine with having single currency also got high value.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

As this study is presenting several opinions regarding peaceful solution of Palestine conflict, we compared it with other peace proposals that have been presented before in different times. And, we concluded some recommendations as a solution of this conflict. These are as follows:

1. There are several plans like One-State Solution presented by Palestinian activist Edward Said in 1999, most popular Two-States Solution, Egyptian-Jordanian Solution 2009, Allon Plan presented by Yegal Allon after Six days war in June 1967 or Plan for establishing State of Judea (West Bank) in

January 1989. But, there is a huge criticism on each plan. Opponents of One-State Solution argue that this solution will follow the Jewish rule over the Palestinian Muslims. Similarly, Opponents of Two-States Solution called that the two wings of a country cannot be administrated when there is a strong enemy in the middle. They highlight the example of Pakistan which had two wings since its formation in 1947; East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Both the wings have the distance of 1000 miles approximately and the territory of India was in the middle of the wings. Indian supported insurgency in the East Pakistan could not be controlled by the Pakistani Government which was stationed in the west wing and Bangladesh was formed in 1971. At the same time, opponents of Egyptian-Jordanian Solution argue that if Gaza Strip will be under control of Egypt and West Bank will be under control of Jordan, it will eliminate the Palestinian identity. Allon Plan is also opposed by the majority of Muslims in the world because it will legitimize Israeli occupations in most of the Palestinian territories. The plan of establishing State of Judea is even from the Jewish community which is illegally settled in the West Bank but some scholars are accepting this as a secular state. To observe these plans and to judge public opinion during this study, we concluded that there should be three sovereign states within the territories of Israel and Palestine. Gaza Strip should be called West Palestine while West Bank should be called East Palestine. Both the states should have their own political systems, foreign relations and defense army. This will also facilitate Palestinian people to get rid off from the internal conflicts of Al-Fatah and Hamas which is further destroying their lives.

2. Status of Jerusalem should be an Open city or city state like Vatican City with having its own political system, transport, security force, economy, foreign relations and citizenship.
3. There should be a union all the territories of Israel and Palestine like European Union even there are three states of Gaza Strip (called West Palestine), Israel and West Bank (East Palestine) and one city state of Jerusalem. And, this union should be linked through rail and road infrastructure. Although, there are several roads to travel from one region to another but there is a need of re-functional Palestinian Railway which is non-functional since 1948 (Cotterell, 1984, PP.10-11). There are several talks among Israel and Palestinian authority in 2004 for reviving old railway line from Gaza Strip to Tulkarm (West Bank) and constructing new railway line from Gaza Strip to Tarkumia (West bank near Israeli city of Hebron). And, all this transportation will be operated through using territories of Israel. If, this

plan will be implemented, Palestinian territories can be linked through Israeli port of Ashdod. Similarly, there is another plan of reviving a branch line of Hejaz Railway from Afula (Israel) to Jenin (West Bank) (New Statesman, August 29, 2013). But, all this is useless until there will not be any agreement regarding secular transportation or formation of any union which also accept by the people of all the territories of Israel and Palestine. So, there is a solution of introducing single currency for all the territories of Israel and Palestine like EURO in the European Union. As single currency will facilitate economic development in the Palestinian territories, people of Palestinian territories will automatically be agreed for secular transportation from one region to another. Same impact will be generated on Israeli companies and they will prefer secular transportation for promoting their products and getting market access. Therefore, we can say that an agreement regarding union and single currency can generate harmony among the population of both the territories, And then, they can linked through rail-road infrastructure.

4. All the militant organizations should be banned in the territories of Palestine and Israel even there are Jewish organizations or Muslim Organizations.
5. There should be foreign investment in the territories of Palestine for stabilizing their economic conditions. A strong economy of any society always saves its population to adopting militant or aggressive attitude.

This was a pilot study that basic aim was to measuring public opinion regarding peaceful solution of Palestine conflict and we presented all the ideas which we collected with respect and care. Moreover, this is an essential duty of international community, especially United Nations to establish peace in the Palestinian territories and find out the peaceful solution of this conflict with sincerity. Because, this is not an issue of occupying territories. This is a problem of humanity and innocent lives are most important than occupying any territory or formation any state.

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