

Iranians Overwhelmingly Reject Bin Laden

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Both Iranians and Americans See Terrorism as a Threat to Their Countries

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Iranians and Americans are both very concerned about the danger of terrorism, reject attacks against civilians overwhelmingly and share strongly negative views of Osama bin Laden.

Although the U.S. government has accused Iran's government of sponsoring international terrorism, the Iranian people themselves are somewhat more likely than Americans to oppose attacks that deliberately target civilians.

While Iranians strongly reject terrorist attacks on civilians in general and in Iraq in particular, it is important to note that they make an exception in the case of Israel. When asked specifically about Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians, a slim majority believes they can "sometimes be justified." Iranians also tend to view Hamas and Hezbollah favorably.

These are some of the results of a wide-ranging bi-national poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org in partnership with the non-profit group, Search for Common Ground. The poll in Iran, which was fielded by an independent Iranian firm, included 134 questions, administered in face-to-face interviews from Oct. 31 - Dec. 6, 2006. The poll in the United States was conducted by Knowledge Networks during late November and early December. Both polls used probability-based national samples of 1,000 respondents or more.

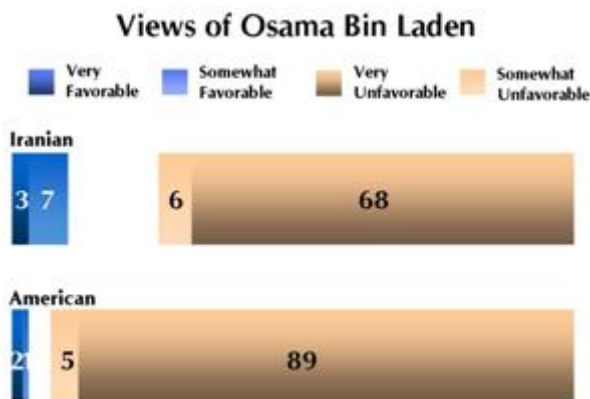
Joseph Cirincione, senior vice president for national security and international policy at the Center for American Progress, said the survey results on Iranian attitudes toward bin Laden and al Qaeda were especially important to "counter the tendency to conflate the threats" faced by the United States into "one great clash of civilizations."

At a forum on the survey results, held Jan. 24 at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Cirincione stressed that, with tensions rising between the U.S. and Iranian governments, it was important "American politicians understand that the overwhelming majority of the Iranian public have an unfavorable view of Osama bin Laden."

The Terrorist Threat

Seven in ten Iranians view international terrorism as an important threat to Iran's vital interests including 56 percent who see it as a critical threat. Only 12 percent call it "not important." Even more Iranians are concerned about terrorist attacks in their own country. Eighty-one percent call such attacks an important threat (66% critical).

American and Iranian concerns about the threat of terrorism are comparable in intensity. Ninety-five percent of Americans see terrorism as an important threat, including 68 percent who say it is a critical threat. Only 4 percent do not see terrorism as a threat. Ninety-five percent also view "terrorist attacks in our country" as an important threat.



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Both Iranians and Americans have strongly negative views of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Three in four Iranians (74%) and more than nine in ten Americans (94%) view bin Laden unfavorably, including large majorities (68% and 89%, respectively) who view him very unfavorably. Only 10 percent of Iranians look at the al Qaeda leader favorably (2% Americans). Nine in ten Americans have a very unfavorable opinion of bin Laden and ninety-two percent of Americans say al Qaeda poses an important threat to the United States, including 59 percent who say it poses a critical one.

Iranians, like Americans, perceive al Qaeda and Islamist militant groups as threats, though less strongly. More than half of Iranians (53%) call al Qaeda an important threat, including a third (33%) who say it is critical. Twenty percent say al Qaeda is not a threat (27 percent no answer). Similarly, 57 percent of Iranians view the threat from "Islamist sectarian militant groups" as important, including 36 percent who say is critical. Fifteen percent say it is not important at all.

Americans--not surprisingly given the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001--consider Islamic militants to be a greater threat than do Iranians. Nine in ten Americans (92%) say al Qaeda is an important threat, including six in ten (59%) who say the militant group represents a critical threat. Nine in ten Americans (92%) also call Islamic sectarian militant groups an important threat (47% critical).

In sharp contrast to their views of al Qaeda, Iranians tend to evaluate Hamas and Hezbollah favorably. Fifty-six percent see Hamas as a "mainly positive influence" in the world and only 8 percent see the Palestinian group as a negative influence. (Another 14 percent say "it depends" or "neither," while 23 percent decline to answer). They view Hezbollah even more favorably, with

three in four (75%) calling the Shiite militants a positive influence, and only 6 percent labeling them a negative influence.

Americans, in contrast, have very negative views of both Hamas and Hezbollah. Hamas is rated as a negative influence in the world by 77 percent of Americans and Hezbollah by 80 percent.

Attacks on Civilians

Both Iranians and Americans were asked a series of questions about attacks on civilians. Taking these questions together, it appears that Iranians reject attacks on civilians more overwhelmingly than do Americans.

At the most general level, respondents were asked: "Some people think that bombing and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians are sometimes justified while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that such attacks are often justified, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?"

A very large majority of Iranians (80%) take the strongest position that such attacks "are never justified," and another 5 percent say they are rarely justified. Only 11 percent call them sometimes (8%) or often (3%) justified.

Americans largely concur but at lower levels of intensity. Forty-six percent say that such attacks are never justified, while 27 percent say they are rarely justified. Twenty-four percent see them as sometimes (19%) or often (5%) justified.

Iranians were also asked specifically about attacks on American and Iraqi civilians, with "sometimes" or "never" justified the only options given. Nine in ten Iranians (88%) say that "attacks against Iraqi civilians in Iraq" are never justified. Nearly as many (76 percent) say "attacks against American civilians living in the United States" are never justified (15% sometimes justified).

Respondents were then asked to think "in the context of war and other forms of military conflict" and to consider whether certain types of civilians could be a legitimate target. Overwhelming majorities of Iranians reject as "never justified:" attacks on women and children (91%), the elderly (92%), and "wives and children of the military" (86%).

Americans largely agree, though larger percentages in each case said such attacks are rarely justified. This is true for attacks on women and children (72% never, 15% rarely), the elderly (71% never, 16% rarely), and wives and children of the military (74% never, 12% rarely).

Three more questions dealt with targeting civilians employed by the government. Here again, Iranians are more unequivocal than Americans in their rejection of such attacks, whether the targets are civilians employed by the government, policemen, or intelligence agents.

Attacks on Palestinian and Israeli Civilians

Please tell me if you personally feel that these are sometimes justified (■) or never justified (■):

Iranians



Americans



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When Iranians judge violence in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, a modest majority makes an exception for some Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians. Asked whether such attacks were either "sometimes justified" or "never justified," 53 percent of Iranians say they are sometimes justified, while 41 percent say "never." But nine in ten (90%) say attacks by Israelis against Palestinians are never justified while only 5 percent say they sometimes are.

Americans are more even-handed regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Four in five (80%) of Americans say "attacks by Palestinians against Israeli civilians" are never justified (13% sometimes), while nearly as many (71%) say attacks by Israelis against Palestinian civilians are never justified (21% sometimes). This is consistent with the many polls showing that Americans prefer the United States government not take sides in this dispute.