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## Syrians Support Helping End Iraq War

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Most Syrians favor working with the United States to seek an end to the Iraq war, yet also support financing Iraqi fighters and other Middle East groups the U.S. considers terrorists, according to a rare poll of Syrians released Wednesday.

The survey also found that an overwhelming number of Syrians consider trade and political relations with Western countries important, but they narrowly oppose closer ties to the U.S.

The poll was sponsored by Terror Free Tomorrow, a bipartisan organization that seeks to erode support for international terrorism. Its advisory board includes Sen. [John McCain](#), R-Ariz., the presidential candidate, and former House Speaker Thomas Foley, D-Wash.

Earlier this month, the group released a survey of Iranians that found most favored their country developing nuclear weapons.

Objective public opinion surveys are unusual in Syria, whose regime -- led by President Bashar Assad -- has imprisoned pro-democracy supporters.

The United States has largely sought to isolate Syria, which it considers a major destabilizing influence in the Middle East.

The U.S. has repeatedly accused Syria of allowing foreign fighters to cross its border into Iraq to join forces with al-Qaida and anti-U.S. insurgent groups, which Syria denies. Syria has also been accused of helping [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon, [Palestinian](#) radicals and other militant groups.

In the poll, 63 percent of Syrians said they favor their country working with the U.S. to resolve the war in Iraq. By a slight 44 percent to 39 percent margin, most said they oppose fighters crossing from Syria into Iraq.

Yet three-fourths said they support financial assistance for Iraqi fighters, the Palestinian groups  [Hamas](#) and [Islamic Jihad](#), and Hezbollah. The U.S. considers Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah terrorist organizations.

In addition, seven in 10 said Syria should refuse U.S. investments and trade "to create more jobs in Syria," with similar numbers opposing U.S. investments in energy refineries and U.S. humanitarian aid.

"Even though they don't support the U.S. -- in fact that's an understatement, they're very negative about the U.S. -- they still want to work with the U.S.," said Ken Ballen, president of Terror Free Tomorrow. "They still want the war resolved, and they're willing for their government to work with the U.S. to resolve it."

Fifty-one percent said they would favor a peace treaty with longtime nemesis Israel if it withdraws from the Golan and recognizes Syrian sovereignty there. Israelis strongly oppose leaving the Golan, the boundary area between the two countries that Israel annexed nearly three decades ago.

In addition, 88 percent said they favored Lebanon ruling itself without outside interference, including from Syria. Syria controlled Lebanon for years until its military was pressured to leave in 2005 following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The U.S. has accused Syria of seeking to weaken Lebanon's Western-backed leaders.

The telephone survey of 1,004 adult Syrians was conducted in Arabic for Terror Free Tomorrow by D3 Systems of Vienna, Va., from July 11 to 14. An estimated 75 percent to 80 percent of Syrian households have landline telephones.

The calls were made from a country near Syria that Terror Free Tomorrow did not identify, saying it wanted to protect the interviewers' confidentiality. Telephone interviews were used to speed the research process and because in-person questioners in Syria may face harassment, the group said.

The survey has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. The results were weighted, or adjusted, to ensure that responses reflected the actual number of Syrians living in rural areas, and those over age 55.

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On the Net:

Terror Free Tomorrow: <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org>