

## CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

### Peacekeeping versus peacemaking role in the world

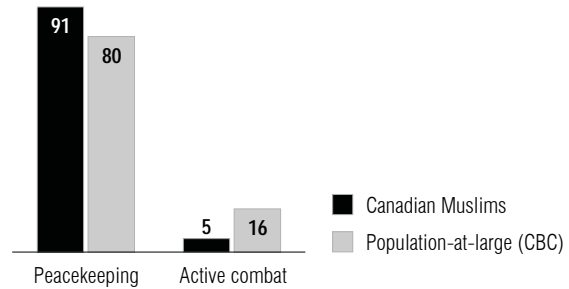
**Nine in ten Canadian Muslims think Canada’s role in the world should focus on peace-building rather than combat roles.**

Canada’s self-image with regard to its military activity changed over the latter half of the 20th century, from a middle power that “punched above its weight” when fighting alongside its Anglo-American allies, to a peacekeeper and “honest broker” whose campaigns were efforts of mediation more than might. In the first years of the 21st century, two changes have caused Canadians to reflect on their military anew. First, military watchers sounded the alarm about how ever diminishing funding was curtailing the Canadian Armed Forces’ ability to contribute meaningfully to peacekeeping efforts. Second, the post-9/11 climate has raised questions about both domestic security and international action.

As Canadian soldiers travel to Afghanistan on a mission that cannot be cleanly defined as either a war or a peacekeeping mission, Canadians reflect with increasing urgency on their country’s role in the world. Muslim-Canadians may have additional cause for reflection, as their adoptive country executes a mission in a predominantly Muslim country and negotiates its role in a U.S.-led “war on terror” which has raised ire in many quarters of the Islamic world.

While most Canadians overall (four in five) believe that Canada’s role in the world should be one centred on peace-building,<sup>18</sup> among Muslim-Canadians the majority supporting a focus on peace-building is even larger: nine in ten, as opposed to just five percent supporting active combat with allied countries.

Preferred role for Canadian military  
2006



Q.M33/CBC12

When it comes to Canada’s role in the world, some people say that Canada should focus on a peace-building role in the world. Others say that Canada should focus on active combat roles with our allied countries. Which view is closer to your own?

Support for a peace-building role is high across Muslim subgroups, with men and women, Muslims of different sects and regions of origin, and different tenures in Canada all overwhelmingly favouring this option.

It is Muslim-Canadians with the lowest levels of educational attainment, high school or less, who are least likely (79%) to support the idea of a Canadian international presence centred on peace-building. The remainder are split between those who support a more combat-oriented role (11%) and those unable to offer an opinion (8%).

<sup>18</sup> General population data from Environics’ CBC-sponsored poll, November 2006.

## Canada's mission in Afghanistan

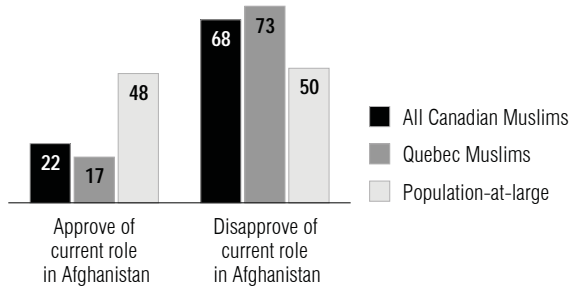
**Muslim-Canadians strongly oppose Canadian participation in military action in Afghanistan, in comparison to a more divided viewpoint among the population-at-large.**

Canada's participation in military action in Afghanistan is the most wrenching foreign policy issue facing the country. Those who favour the mission do so on various grounds, from the imperative for Canada to support its NATO allies to the imperative for Canada to pursue humanitarian goals in a devastated and vulnerable country. Among those who oppose the mission, some simply see the effort as futile, while others object to what they see as Canadian participation in a poorly planned U.S.-led war on terror.

There is a marked difference in opinion between Muslim-Canadians and the general public on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Less than a quarter of Muslim-Canadians approve of Canada's participation in the military action in Afghanistan, and a slim majority are strongly opposed. Among the general public, by contrast, opinion is evenly divided, with half approving the Afghan mission, and half expressing disapproval.<sup>19</sup>

Among Canadian Muslims, the groups who express the strongest support for the Afghan mission are those between the ages of 18 and 29 (27%), those with the highest incomes (31%) and men (27%).

Approve Canada's current military action in Afghanistan  
2006



Q.M34/FC63-25

Do you approve or disapprove of Canada's participation in military action in Afghanistan? Would that be strongly or somewhat?

Meanwhile, opposition to the mission is strongest among Quebec Muslims, three-quarters of whom disapprove of the mission – 63 percent strongly so. Opposition is also higher among older Muslim-Canadians (72% among those aged 45 and over) and recent immigrants to Canada, 73 percent of whom oppose the Afghan mission.

<sup>19</sup> General population data from Environics' FOCUS CANADA 2006-3.

## Canada's policy in the Middle East

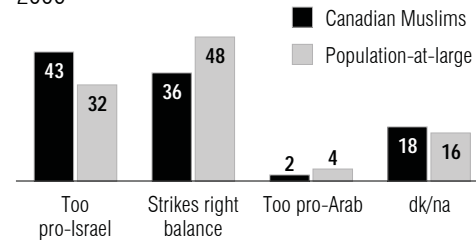
**There is no consensus among Muslims about the balance of Canada's policy in the Middle East but a plurality believe it is currently too pro-Israel.**

In the long struggle between Israel and the Palestinians over contested territory, charges of bias are ubiquitous: historians, media commentators, aid workers, and especially governments tend to face accusations of partiality. Historically, Canadian foreign policy regarding Middle East conflict has striven toward neutrality and an emphasis on human rights.

In early July of 2006, as conflict erupted between Israel and Hezbollah, with Lebanon as the primary battleground, the Harper government ended a period of relative silence on Middle East policy and emphatically defended Israel's bombing of Lebanon as a measured and appropriate response to Hezbollah rocket attacks and the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers. Some critics decried the Harper government's position, indicating that it marked a departure from Canada's traditional neutrality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The most recent measure of Canadian public opinion on the federal government's Middle East policy was fielded in FOCUS CANADA just after the outbreak of violence in summer 2006. About half of all Canadians (48%, down from 59% just prior to the July violence) saw the government as striking "the right balance" in Middle East policy. A third of Canadians (32%) saw Canada's position as being generally too pro-Israel, while four percent saw it as too pro-Arab. Nearly one in five (16%) Canadians declined to offer an opinion on this foreign policy matter.

Canada's foreign policy in Middle East 2006



Q.M35/FC63-29

Would you say that the Canadian government's foreign policy in the Middle East is too pro-Israel, too pro-Arab, or does it strike about the right balance?

Canadian Muslims are markedly less likely than the general public to see Canada's position as even-handed. About a third (36%) of Canadian Muslims believe Canada strikes the right balance with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while a plurality of just over four in ten (43%) see Canada's policies in the Middle East as too pro-Israel. Among Muslims as among the general population, a substantial proportion do not state an opinion on the issue (18%).

Perhaps surprisingly, Muslims who have lived in Canada the longest are the most likely to feel that Canadian Middle East policy is biased toward Israel. Among Muslims who have lived in Canada for 16 years or more, a majority (54%) see Canada's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as too pro-Israel while just three in ten (30%) believe Canada strikes the right balance. Those who are relatively new to Canada, having lived in the country for less than five years, are not much more likely to feel Canada strikes the right balance in Middle East policy; rather, they are significantly more likely to express no opinion (26%), likely as a result of unfamiliarity with Canadian policy vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Among the Muslim-Canadian subgroups most likely to see Canada's position as too pro-Israel are Muslims living in Quebec (53%), men (46%), those with the highest incomes (56%), those who attend religious services regularly (48%) and older Muslims (50%).

Those Canadian Muslims who are more likely to see Canadian policy as striking the right balance between Israel and the Arabs include those who attend religious services rarely or never (41%), younger Muslims (42%) and those with the lowest levels of education (46%).

No more than a handful of Muslims in any group see Canada's position on the Middle East as too pro-Arab.

Religious attendance is also a significant correlate of opinion on Canadian Middle East policy. Half (48%) of Canadian Muslims who attend religious services at least once a week believe that Canada is biased toward Israel, as compared to just a third (34%) of those who attend religious services rarely or never.

### Canada's foreign policy in Middle East

Canadian Muslims  
By years in Canada December 2006



Q.M35

Would you say that the Canadian government's foreign policy in the Middle East is too pro-Israel, too pro-Arab, or does it strike about the right balance?