

Working Paper

Research Division
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German Institute for
International and Security Affairs



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Lebanese Perceptions of German Middle East Policies and the German Participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

Results of a quantitative study

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Following the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, Germany decided to support the upgraded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission by deploying troops to a newly established naval component and to take over the lead of the Maritime Task Force (MTF). The MTF was tasked with supporting the Lebanese navy in controlling the seaways and implementing the arms embargo. This constituted Germany's largest naval troop deployment since the end of World War II and it was the first time that Germany deployed troops to the Middle East. In February 2008, Germany handed over its lead role. The mandate has since been extended until mid-December 2009. At the same time, Germany reduced its presence to some 230 marines on two vessels and one tender and its maximum troop deployment to 1.200.

In addition, numerous German development, religious and cultural organisations have been active in Lebanon for decades. After the 2006 war Germany increased its development aid to Lebanon to support post-war reconstruction as well as efforts at state and institution building. Germany has also been active in the field of Israeli-Hezbollah prisoner exchanges for a number of years, most notably in the exchanges of 1986, 2004 and 2008.

But how do Lebanese view Germany's engagement? This discussion paper presents the most eminent results of a survey of Lebanese public opinion regarding German Middle East policies and in particular the German participation in UNIFIL. The survey was conducted by the author in March and April 2008 in cooperation with the Lebanese Emigration Research Center at Notre Dame University Louaize. A questionnaire covering topics such as knowledge of Germany, perceptions on Germany's Middle East policy, UNIFIL and the German participation in UNIFIL as well as migration was developed. 1,000 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in Arabic according to a regionally representative sample to residents in Lebanon aged between 18 and 65 in all regions of the country.¹

¹ I would like to extend my gratitude for the financial support to the project by the local offices of the Goethe Institute and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. This paper focuses on German Middle East policy and UNIFIL. Results of the survey on the other topics as well as on the methodology are available with the author. The paper was written in the context of an internship with the SWP's Middle East and Africa Research Division.

The overall outcome of the poll reveals that Germany is well regarded by the majority of respondents regardless of their regional or religious background. Amongst other indicators, support for a larger German troop deployment can be seen as an expression of this trust. Even though a large majority of interviewees have either a neutral or a (very) positive attitude towards Germany, a minority holds strong reservations against any increased German involvement in their country. The group most adverse to intensified German involvement consists largely of Shiite Muslims from the South of Lebanon. Their reservations should be taken into account and better understood in future German policy-design.

Perceptions of Germany and Germany's Role in the Middle East

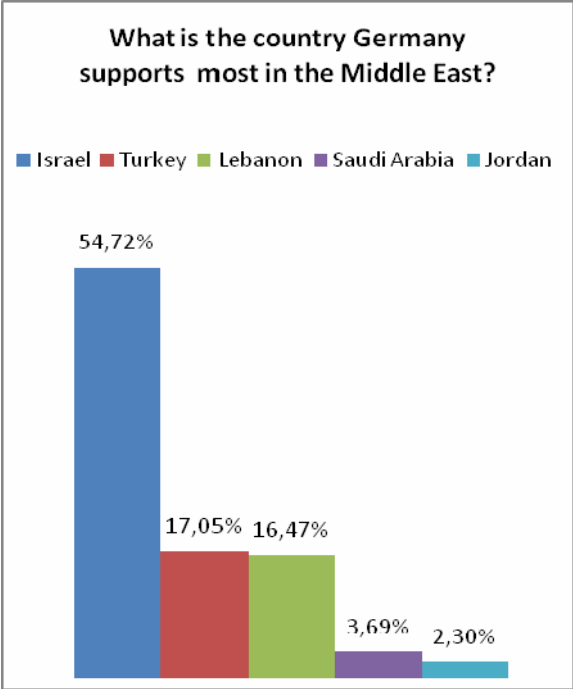
The first part of the survey aimed at probing public opinion on Germany as a political actor in the Middle East and in Lebanon more specifically. The first two questions *Please name the current political leader of the following countries* and *Please name the current ambassadors to Lebanon of the following countries* were designed to evaluate the level of awareness of the German political leadership as well as its highest representative in Lebanon, the ambassador, in comparison to other politically influential regional actors. The names of current political leaders of key actors in Lebanon and the Middle East such as Syria, Iran, France and the USA were widely known with correct responses ranging between 82% (France) and 94% (Syria). Germany and the United Kingdom lagged far behind with an outcome of only 35% for the UK and 52% for Germany.

The results of the question *Please name the current ambassadors to Lebanon of the following countries* point in a similar direction. While, as expected, general knowledge about current ambassadors to Lebanon was lower than about heads of states or governments, approximately 40% of the interviewees knew the name of the then-US Chargé d'Affaires Michele Sisson and the fact that Syria has never sent an ambassador to Lebanon at all. Only 6.7% knew the name of the current German Ambassador Hansjörg Haber, which is less than half the percentage of correct answers for the ambassadors for France and Great Britain (16% respectively).

The following question *How do you assess Germany's decision not to take part in the 2003 Iraq war?* aimed at probing Lebanese public opinion on one of the Schröder government's well-known stances on the Middle East, i.e., the decision not to take part in the

2003 Iraq War. Whatever the motivation behind this decision actually was, the Lebanese regard it positively (80.8%). Only a tiny minority (1.6%) thinks that it was wrong, while a neutral stance is taken by less than one fifth of the respondents. Remarkably, the regional and religious cross-analyses do not display large variations from the overall result.

When the interviewees were asked to identify the country that Germany supports most in the region (*What is the country Germany supports most in the Middle East?*), Israel was named more often than all the remaining nine states together.² Apart from that, only Turkey and Lebanon obtained significant numbers of around 17% respectively. The majority's perception of the eminence of German-Israeli relations is not surprising given Germany's history. Indeed, the perception of strong German support for Turkey is the most unforeseen result. It might be founded in the historically important German-Turkish/Ottoman relations as well as the popular knowledge in Lebanon of the existence of a considerable Turkish immigrant community in Germany. The relatively high percentage that Lebanon received (17%) might be due to the fact that this survey focused on German-Lebanese relations and German activities and institutions in Lebanon. Hence the impression with some of the interviewees that Germany's main regional concern might be Lebanon.



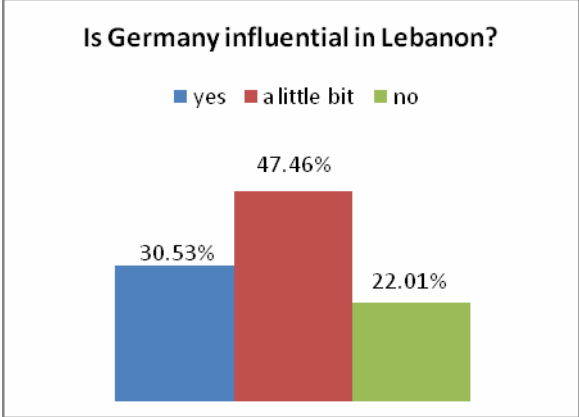
² In the chart underneath, only the answers that received significant support are shown. Syria, Iran, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt all scored below 1.5% respectively.

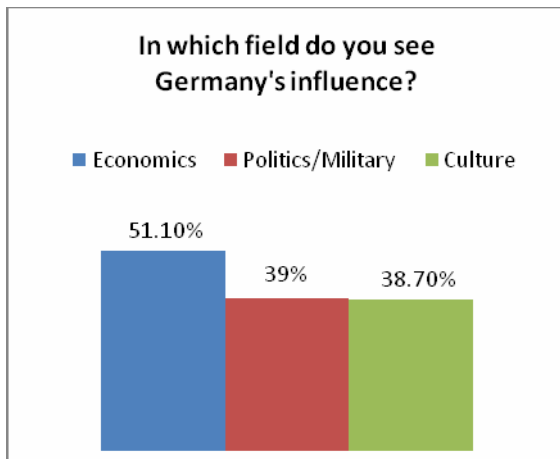
Interviewees were then asked about Germany's expected stance in case of a renewed outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon. A majority of almost 60% believed that Germany would not support either of the warring factions – a surprisingly high number compared to the result of the previous question, in which more than half of the respondents stated that Germany favoured Israel above all other states in the region (see above). Only one third of the interviewees expected to support Israel, whereas 10% anticipated Germany mainly to support Lebanon.

A regional breakdown shows that interviewees in districts most afflicted by the 2006 war and by the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon (1982-2000) predict a rather neutral German position (for example 73.4% in the South). This is clearly more a regional than a sectarian phenomenon as the break-down by confession shows almost no difference between the average numbers of Christians and Muslims.

Perceptions of German Policies in Lebanon

The next set of questions aimed at finding out as to how Germany's role in Lebanon is assessed and how German policies are perceived in Lebanon. The answers to the questions *Is Germany influential in Lebanon?* and *In which field do you see Germany's influence?* show that the respondents see Germany as a country of moderate influence in Lebanon. Although chiefly perceived as an economic power, it is also seen as influential in the fields of culture and the military, the latter supposedly also due to its UNIFIL engagement.



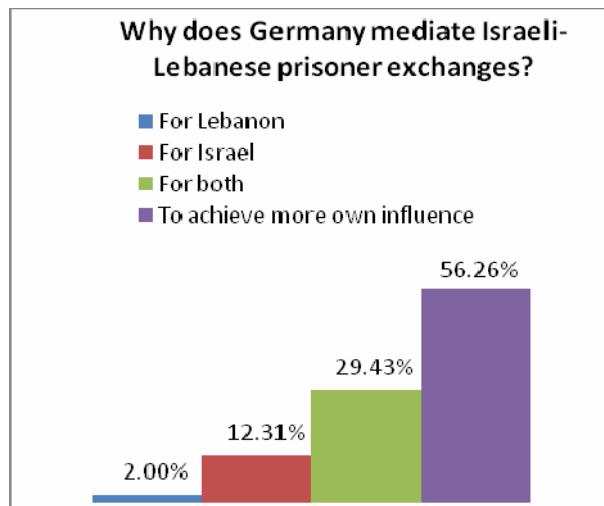


The following questions were designed to reveal the perception of Germany's policy interests and strategic alliances in the region and in Lebanon. Most respondents see Germany's interests and Middle East policy as largely defined by the European Union (ca. 51%), while almost one third of the interviewees (ca. 30%) perceive it to first and foremost pursue its own interests and policy goals. The third option, characterizing Germany's Middle East policies as a function of American and/or Israeli interests, was favoured by less than 20% of the interviewees.

This is again slightly surprising in light of Germany's well-known special relations with Israel.³ A closer look at the respondents' educational background reveals that Lebanese, who obtained a higher level of education, regard Germany's policies as being defined by the political agenda of the European Union (52% of the university or high school graduates as opposed to 39% of those with a primary school / no formal education background) whereas approximately one third of the lowest educational stratum perceives Germany's policies in the Middle East to be driven by an alliance with Israel and the United States. Thus, the identification of Germany with Israel / the USA is to a certain point a lower-class phenomenon. In addition, the regional distribution of the answers reveals that 47.7% of the respondents from Southern Lebanon predominantly identify German policy with that of the US and Israel. This figure is more than twice as high as in any other district. The confessional distribution of answers reveals the following results: One third of the

³ Chancellor Merkel is said to have stated in summer 2006 that German UNIFIL troops to Lebanon were deployed primarily to guarantee the security of the State of Israel. This statement caused a stir in the Arab and especially Lebanese public and media – even if its authenticity cannot be proven.

Shiites believe that American-Israeli policy dominates Germany's stance in the region, by far the highest turnout while, on an overall religious level, almost twice as many Muslims (22.8%) than Christians (12.6%) are of that opinion. 62.5% of the Druze believe Germany's policies are largely driven by the EU, closely followed by the Sunni population (60.6%).



The overall perception of Germany as a country with relatively neutral Middle Eastern policy goals was to be verified by the answers to the question *Why does Germany mediate Israeli-German prisoner exchanges?*. According to the majority of respondents (56%), Germany facilitates Lebanese-Israeli prisoner exchanges in an effort to increase its influence. Only one third of the population stated that Germany brokered those deals for the sake of both countries, followed by 12% who believe these efforts were exerted exclusively for Israel. It is noteworthy that only a tiny fraction of the interviewees (2%) believe that those deals are in fact chiefly negotiated for the sake of Lebanon.

Meanwhile, an educational breakdown of the numbers reveals that respondents with a higher level of education tend to adopt the opinion that German mainly mediates these exchanges for its own benefit (60% of the university graduates as opposed to 30% of those with only primary education). Amongst those respondents with primary education only, the most common opinion is that Germany is especially interested in both countries of the region (43.3%) while 24% of this group think that Germany primarily acts with Israel's interest in mind.

A religious breakdown shows that while Christians and Druze regard Germany as either pursuing its own agenda (64% vs. 73% respectively) or intending to help

both sides of the conflict (25% vs. 18%), the Shiite population is polarized in its opinion: While some of its members believe German policies to be driven by its own interests in the region (34.4%), an almost equally large segment of the group (28.3%) perceives the country as an agent of Israeli (and by association: American) politics, an idea fostering mistrust and reservations.

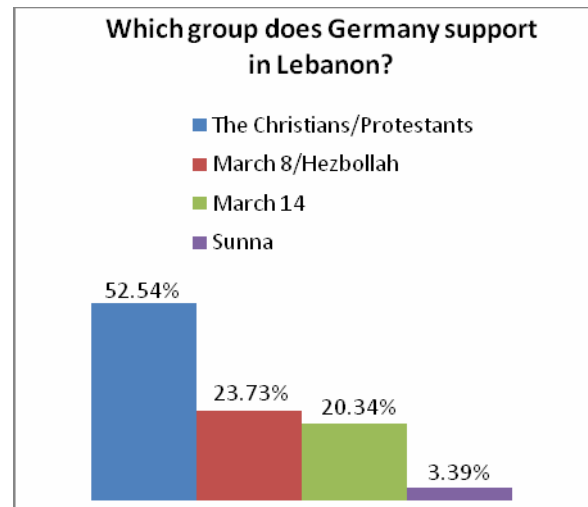
Does Germany favour specific Lebanese groups or confessions?

The questions of this section aimed at finding out about the interviewees' opinion on Germany as an actor within the complicated Lebanese political and confessional set-up, and more specifically as to whether German policies were perceived as being biased towards one political, religious or ethnic Lebanese group. Indeed, only 9.4% of the respondents affirmed that Germany supported their own community. Almost exactly the same percentage of interviewees stated that Germany supports or attempts to undermine a specific group of the Lebanese political spectrum. Germany's policies therefore appear to be perceived widely as not serving or undermining a particular sect or political group.

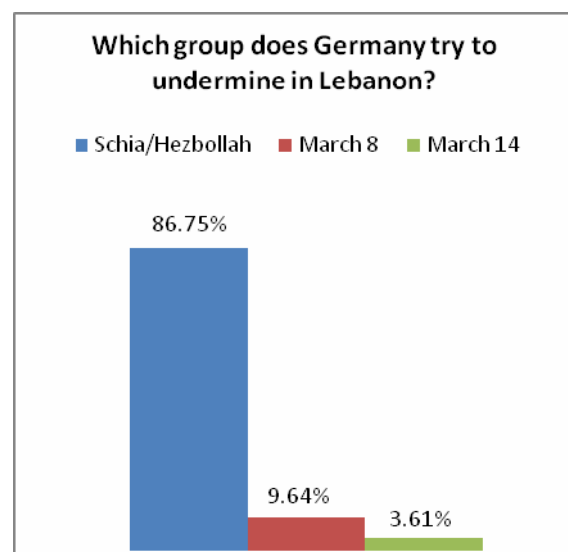
An examination of the religious and regional distribution shows the following pattern: Among the various confessional groups, the Maronites show the largest percentage of those feeling actively supported by Germany (15.9%). The overall Christian percentage of 12.4% feeling supported by Germany is still twice as high as the percentage of Muslims perceiving to be favoured (6.9%). Of all Lebanese sects, the Shiites feel least favoured (4.9%).

Answers to the respective follow-up questions as to which group of the Lebanese political spectrum Germany is thought to be supporting or undermining were rather diverse as these were open questions – respondents answered with regards to either political blocks or religious groups. When answering to the question Which group does Germany support in Lebanon?, 52.5% of respondents stated Germany supports “the Christians or the Protestants”, while only 3.3% answered that Germany actively supports the Sunni sect in Lebanon. It is interesting to note that no answer stated that the Shiite sect was actively supported by Germany – even though Germany's relations with the Shiite community are certainly not dismal, bearing in mind Germany's role as a mediator of prisoner exchanges as well as the presence of a

significant community of migrants with Shiite Lebanese background in Germany.



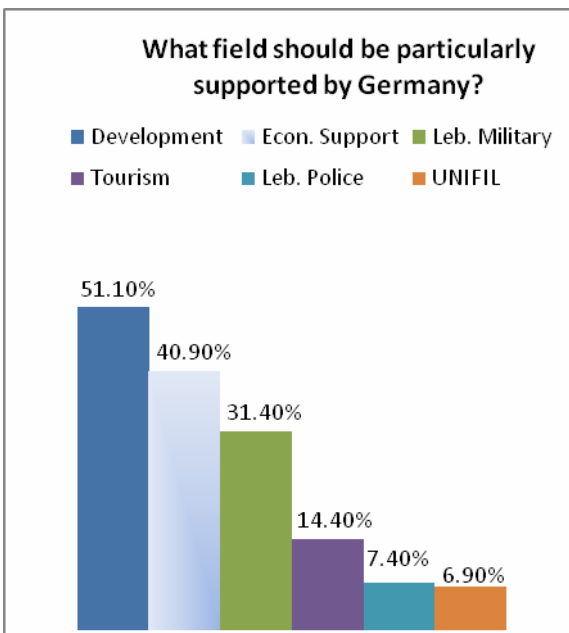
Also, when evaluating the answers to the question Which group does Germany try to undermine in Lebanon?, a large majority (86.8%) of the respondents who had expressed the feeling that Germany pursues its policies against a certain political group sees Germany as mainly seeking to undermine the Shiite/Hezbollah role in the country. As Hezbollah was at the time of the survey clearly located in the March 8 camp, more than 95% of the respondents who thought that Germany tried to undermine one sect or party believed that Germany's policies aimed at undermining the Shiites, Hezbollah and/or the March 8 movement. Only 3.6% were of the opposite opinion. In the end, this means that Germany is not perceived as an even-handed actor working in the interest of all groups and sects in Lebanon.



Should Germany intensify its activities?

Interviewees were also asked if Germany should generally increase its activities and, if so, in which field in particular. A great majority of the respondents (some 88%) called for more German activities in Lebanon, again bearing witness to how positive the German engagement in Lebanon is being regarded from all segments of society.

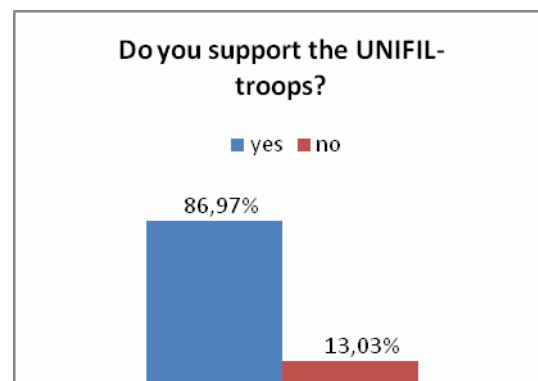
Although respondents in all areas of Lebanon overwhelmingly supported a stronger German engagement in all areas of Lebanon, the regional breakup indicates that Beirut's population least supports more German activities with 22.9% against an enhanced engagement, followed by Nabatieh (16.7%), the Beqaa (14.3%) and the South of Lebanon (12.8%). On the religious level, the Sunnis and the Christians show a high affirmative turnout (86.7 vs. 92.5% respectively) that is only topped by the 95% of Druze respondents that would welcome more German activities in Lebanon. The Shiite population in particular, has more reservations than any other group: 17.8% of the Shiites are against a stronger German engagement, which is, although no majority, certainly a number to bear in mind. On the regional level, it is obvious that most regions with a higher rejection of a stronger German commitment are also regions that identify Germany with an Israel-bias.



The answers to the question *What field should be particularly supported by Germany?* further specified the positive but rather vague vote for more German activities in Lebanon. (From the six fields of activities given, each interviewee was allowed to choose two. Thus, the overall percentage exceeds 100 per cent.) The results are striking: enhanced development cooperation, further training for the Lebanese military and increased financial support are the most important demands from Germany. Amongst the other items, only tourism had a turnout exceeding 10% (14.4%) – not surprisingly, as one of the main sources of Lebanese national income is the tourism industry.

Perceptions of UNIFIL troops and the German troop deployment

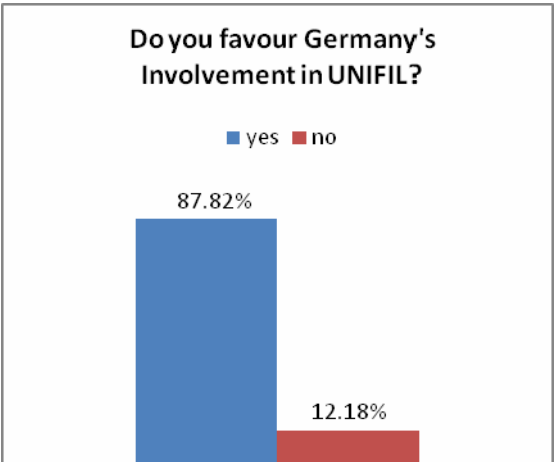
In another set of questions, interviewees were probed on their support for UNIFIL and Germany's participation in this mission.



In general, public acceptance of UNIFIL troops is high (ca. 87 %). No large disparity can be identified concerning troop support in relation to educational background. An analysis of the data by religious affiliation, however, shows a clear trend: Even though general acceptance is high amongst all groups (with a 93.7% peak score for the Druze), it is significant that some 50% more Muslim Lebanese are against UNIFIL (15.9%) than their fellow citizens of Christian faith (10.2%) are.

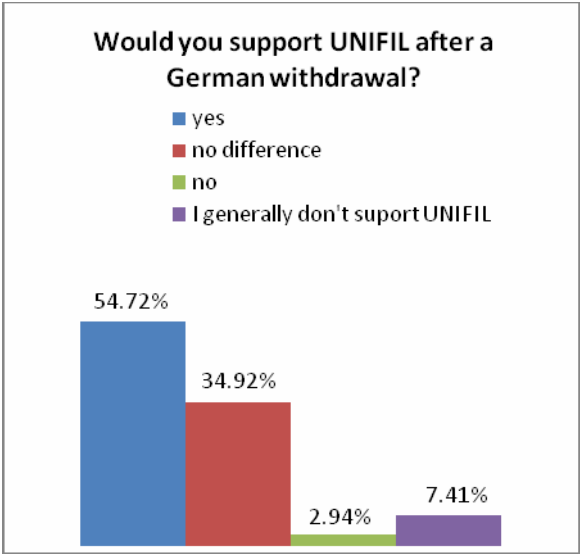
When asked more specifically about the German involvement in UNIFIL, a major deviation stands out in the South of Lebanon: While only 11% of the Southern interviewees stated that they do not support UNIFIL in general, almost twice as many (21.1%) expressed an adversity towards a German contribution in the force. This number is also matched by Shiite respondents as being the group with by far the highest turnout amongst all sects against a German participation (21.5% "no"). Interestingly, a Sunni-Shiite divide can be

identified with regards to this question as the percentage of Sunnis who were against German UNIFIL troops was almost half that of the Shiites (11.3%).



Answers to the question *What kind of troops Germany has deployed to Lebanon?* reveal that public knowledge about the German contribution to the UNIFIL forces is widespread as approximately four fifths of the respondents stated the correct answer (naval troops). On the other hand, this means that the number of entirely or partially wrong answers is around one fifth of the total answers and thus not insignificant: 21.7% believed that Germany has deployed parts of its army on Lebanese soil and a surprising 5.5% were of the erroneous opinion that the German Air Force would be guarding Lebanese air space.

As illustrated underneath, Lebanese support for UNIFIL is largely unrelated to the German component in it. With some 55% stating they would continue supporting UNIFIL and another 35% stating that it does not make any difference to them whether Germany withdraws its troops or not, almost 90% of the Lebanese would keep supporting UNIFIL as a whole, approximately the same number as overall UNIFIL supporters. Only some three percent would not support the UNIFIL troops any longer should there be a complete German withdrawal from the force.

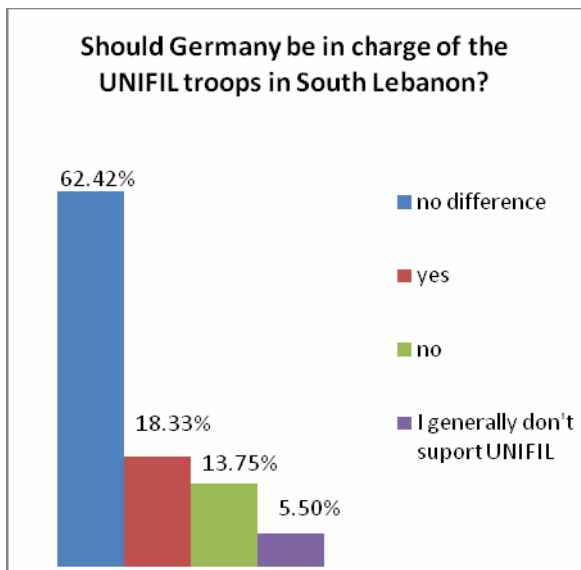


A greater military role for Germany in Lebanon?

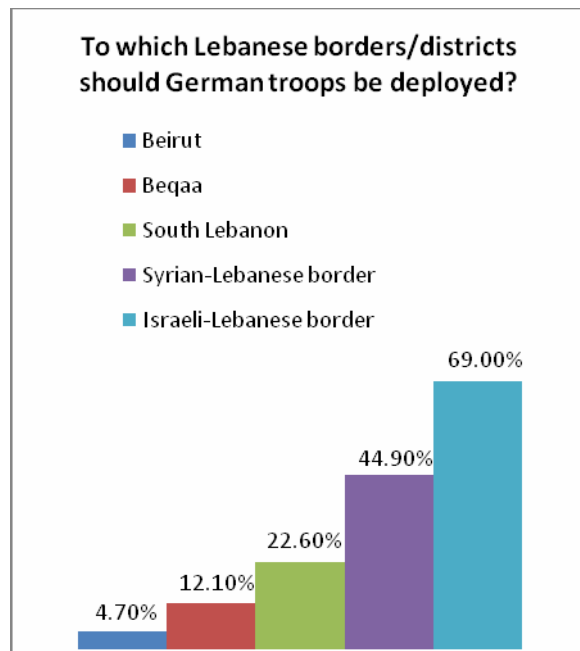
Finally yet importantly, a set of questions addressed specific policy-scenarios in order to reveal whether a majority of the Lebanese would regard certain activities as desirable.

As seen from the answers to the question *Should Germany be in charge of the UNIFIL troops in South Lebanon?*, for the largest group of Lebanese (62.4%), it would not make much of a difference if Germany were to deploy troops on Lebanese soil and were to become the lead nation of UNIFIL ground forces. Overall, a pattern of benevolent indifference towards Germany can be discerned.

A closer look at the regional breakdown of answers yields one key observation: Interviewees from the South of Lebanon express a strong adversity to the idea of a German troop deployment: 43.1% are against a German lead role, more than three times than in Northern Lebanon, the region with the second largest adversary group (13.2%). Deducing from the figures, the closer it gets to the South (with the clear exception of the South itself), the more desirable a German lead role becomes. In the South itself, however, a German lead is rather perceived as a threat.



The answers to the follow-up question *If you support a stronger German military commitment to Lebanon, to which governorate / borders should German troops be deployed?* are very unambiguous. The deployment of troops at Lebanon's borders is the most desirable option for the Lebanese population: 69% of respondents voted for a deployment of German troops along the Lebanese-Israeli border and almost 45% favoured a deployment along the Lebanese-Syrian border. The only two other areas mentioned in a significant way are South Lebanon (22.6%) and the Beqaa valley (12.1%). Thus, respondents chose as potential troop deployment arenas the areas in which the Lebanese state (and its army) are arguably the least present or, if present, the least powerful. The fact that quite a large number of respondents support the deployment of German troops to the Israeli-Lebanese border is, however, an unexpected outcome as it contradicts with the findings above, that Germany is perceived to be clearly biased towards Israel. Nonetheless, it seems as if a large proportion of Lebanese believe the deployment of a German contingent to the Southern district and the border would help ameliorate the situation. The apparent trust in the German army and the hope for increased security seem to outweigh the fear of a deployment of an army whose contacts and cooperation with Israel are by far more intense than with its Lebanese counterpart.



The cross-analysis for the answer "I support a German troop deployment to the Syrian-Lebanese border" shows a sectarian divide: a majority of Muslims (71.8%, and in particular the Shiites, with 88.7%) would oppose such a deployment while a small majority of Christians supports them (54.9%). The regional breakdown shows that Southerners have least interest in such a scenario (86.2% "no"), followed by the Baalbek and Nabatieh regions. Inhabitants of these regions have a great interest in having the Syrian-Lebanese border open for any kind of trade as they profit most from informal Syrian-Lebanese cross-border trade.

Conclusion

The survey illustrates that German involvement, military, financial and political support to Lebanon are highly welcome, with most respondents calling for an even stronger involvement – in spite of Germany's perceived close ties with Israel and its political stance that is interpreted as being rather pro-Christian and pro-March 14. In general, Germany is regarded mainly as an economic heavyweight with comparatively little or no hidden agendas. The kind of cooperation many interviewees expect most from Germany is in the field of development and financial support, although Germany's military role is also acknowledged and mostly well received.

For example, Germany's naval engagement is regarded positively. The survey reveals also that even a deployment of German ground troops would be wel-

comed by a large majority of respondents. A considerable number would even welcome a much larger troop deployment on Lebanese territory and particularly along the borders with Lebanon's two neighbouring states. Still, only a small fraction considered the German troops to be crucial to the UNIFIL mission.

An alarming result of the survey is that the UNIFIL has the lowest acceptance rate in the South where the troops are deployed. In general, Lebanese Shiites feel least favoured by German policies and are opposed to a greater German deployment to most areas. German decision-makers should pay heed to this when developing Lebanon-specific policies: Winning the favour of this part of the Shiite population will be key for guaranteeing the success of the UNIFIL mission, the security of German soldiers, and, in the long run, for successful German-Lebanese cooperation with a consolidated Lebanese state.