

**PRESS RELEASE: LEBANON OPINION POLL
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A new public opinion poll in Lebanon released by the International Peace Institute shows broad support for the United Nations and its peacekeeping and diplomatic activity in Lebanon, high confidence in the Lebanese Army and a pronounced concern over the role of armed militias and Hezbollah.

The survey, made public in New York Monday, shows that the United Nations is viewed favorably by 74% of those canvassed (46% very favorably) and that UNIFIL, the peacekeeping force that monitors the ceasefire with Israel and aids the Lebanese Army in re-establishing its authority in Southern Lebanon, is viewed favorably by 80 % (48 % very favorably.)

According to the poll, even people who believe that Hezbollah's arms deter war with Israel, who have a negative view of the United Nations (56 % unfavorable) are mildly favorable to UNIFIL (57 % favorable.)

There is even broader social consensus (between 81 and 85 % favorable) in support of all the major Security Council resolutions on Lebanon.

Those measures seek the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the disbanding of Lebanese and Palestinian militias, the delineating of the border with Syria and establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries, a ban on arms shipments to militias and the creation of an international tribunal to try suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Almost all Lebanese citizens (93%) are confident in the Lebanese Army's capacity to provide security and stability in their areas. Almost two-thirds (65%) think the Lebanese government can provide security while only one third (34%) believe Hezbollah could.

A majority of Lebanese are concerned that Hezbollah's arms pose a risk of war for the country, with 55 % saying its arms make war with Israel more likely and 41 % asserting that Hezbollah's arms will deter war with Israel.

More than three-fourths of the citizenry (76%) supports the view that only the Lebanese Army, and not armed militias, should bear arms.. Even among Lebanese who think that Hezbollah's arms deter war, almost half (46 %) also would favor making the national army the only armed formation.

Almost all of the people (96 %) who favor Prime Minister Fouad Siniora support disarming the militias and leaving the Army the lone force with arms.

Hezbollah appears to have paid a political price for its armed actions in May, 2008 when it took over territories of rival parties in violent clashes. The conflict erupted when the government tried to eliminate Hezbollah's phone network, its airport cameras, and the airport security chief, and Hezbollah responded with takeovers of its rivals' neighborhoods.

The survey shows that 58% felt that Hezbollah's actions were unjustified and 59 % felt that Hezbollah had been weakened politically as a result.

A two-to-one majority supports the ongoing peace talks between Syria and Israel being conducted under Turkish auspices, despite the Lebanese public's hostility to Israel.

Some 80 % also support a deal between Lebanon and Israel that resolves outstanding grievances, including an exchange of prisoners, the return of the Shabaa Farms and the provision of minefield maps by Israel, and the disarmament of all Lebanese militias.

Eyeing the region, 79 % said that Qatar, site of the Doha political accord, is Lebanon's best-liked neighbor, followed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt (both at 60%) while only 38% have favorable sentiments towards Syria and 36 % towards Iran.

There is near total hostility to Israel, with only 3 % expressing favorable views.

The plan for new political institutions outlined in the 1989 Taif accord, which ended the civil war, enjoys the support of 71% of Lebanese. This plan called for replacing the existing parliament, where seats are reserved for members of specific religious confessions, with a non-confessional National Assembly and a confessional Senate which could block laws threatening key sectarian interests.

Michel Suleiman, President of the Republic, enjoys 75 % approval, followed by Fouad Siniora, the Prime Minister, at 54% and Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Parliament, at 42 %.

The poll was conducted for the International Peace Institute, a New York think tank dedicated to the prevention and settlement of armed conflicts between or within states, by Charney Research. The nationally-representative survey of Lebanese citizens 18 and older involved 1,800 interviews between July 1 and 18, 2008 among all confessional groups in all regions of the country, with an error margin of plus or minus 2 % for national results.