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Goksel, Timur; Hauck, Hans Bastian; Makdisim Karim; Reigeluth, Stuart

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Germany's Contribution to Lebanese Sovereignty

The Maritime Task Force, Coastal Radar System and Border Pilot Project

Timur Goksel, Hans Bastian Hauck, Karim Makdisi and Stuart Reigeluth

Seit dem Ende des Israel-Libanon-Krieges im Sommer 2006 leistet Deutschland nicht nur als Führungsnation des maritimen Einsatzverbandes der UNIFIL-II-Schutztruppe der Vereinten Nationen einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Konsolidierung des Libanon. Im Rahmen der bilateralen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit baut die Bundesrepublik auch das Küstenradar der libanesischen Marine wieder auf, im Norden des Landes entlang der Grenze zu Syrien werden libanesische Soldaten, Polizisten, Zoll- und Grenzbeamte in einem Pilotprojekt an Verfahren des integrierten Grenzmanagements herangeführt und ausgebildet. Auch wenn – oder gerade weil – diese Aktivitäten weniger im öffentlichen Rampenlicht zu stehen scheinen, sind sie umso mehr geeignet, den Libanesen die Souveränität über ihr eigenes Land und dessen Grenzen zurückzugeben, und sollten daher in bewährter, zurückhaltender Weise fortgeführt werden. Die in Brüssel diskutierte Überführung erfolgreicher Pilotprojekte in eine EU-Mission könnte dagegen kontraproduktiv wirken.

Germany is playing a positive role in Lebanon. In the aftermath of the July 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, Germany replaced Italy as lead-nation of the UNIFIL-II Maritime Task Force. Besides being the first in UN history, the maritime deployment along the Lebanese coast effectively ended the Israeli naval siege, thus positively influencing an otherwise skeptical public perception in Lebanon of European engagement in the Middle East. After the end of hostilities, bilateral agreements between Germany and Lebanon also established the coastal radar organization to strengthen the Lebanese government's authority over its territorial waters, and a pilot project to monitor its northern border with Syria. Both of these low-profile projects aim to provide Lebanon with strengthened "ownership" of its national borders. The transfer of lead-nation status of the Maritime Task Force in February 2008 should not affect Germany's commitments to consolidate the coastal radar system and the pilot project. As part of the larger political framework to reach a settlement in Lebanon, these are all positive German initiatives,

which the EU could apply to the broader Middle East peace process after Annapolis.

The Maritime Task Force (MTF)

For the first time in the United Nations (UN) history, a Maritime Task Force (MTF) was deployed along with national ground troop contingents. Currently led by Germany, the MTF comprises four large vessels with an approximate total of 800 crew personnel. Operating off the Mediterranean coast of Lebanon, MTF navigates some 5,000 square nautical miles, compared to the 300 square miles monitored by UNIFIL ground troops. Despite early coordination difficulties and suspicions by the local population that its presence was to serve Israeli interests, MTF has ultimately succeeded in gaining Lebanese support by ending the Israeli sea embargo of Lebanon and projecting a sense of professionalism and impartiality. Moreover, MTF training activities for Lebanese Navy personnel and procurement of adequate equipment began in December 2006.

Due to the novelty of a UN naval force, MTF was confronted with a lack of pre-established UN maritime operation procedures. These procedures had to be created in close communication with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), as well as with the Israeli and Syrian Navies. Logistically operating out of Limassol, Cyprus, MTF has had no official contact with the Syrian Navy, which remains highly inactive. Since MTF began, the German contingent had open communication channels with the Israeli Navy, but has been confronted with consistent challenges from the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and experienced recurrent over-flight violations.

Ironically, Israeli violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (August 2006) helped establish early-warning procedures. The German contingent demonstrated a high degree of military vigilantism, and used standard international frequency to issue warning signals to the IAF. After five precarious incidents a five-mile code of contact was established with MTF, the IAF reduced its over-flights of the MTF area of operations, and now generally restricts aerial training to the international open air space. However, it still infringes upon Lebanon's sovereign airspace, often breaking the sound barrier in low-altitude passes, and by using drones for collecting intelligence. The Israeli Navy also maintains ships stationed inside a triangle prohibited to Lebanese or international vessels along the maritime border, which is delineated by buoys, and has opened fire on Lebanese fishing boats considered too close.

Within the MTF Area of Maritime Operations (AMO), primary MTF activities consist of diverting and inspecting suspect ships. Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) further involve hailing and warning measures, which are carried out in tandem with familiarizing and training the Lebanese Navy officers during operation, in accordance with the motto "train as you operate." An important facet of these measures is that of the 10,000 vessels hailed for inspection, only around 40 were considered seriously suspect (though

none contained weapons), and MTF personnel did not board a single one. This means that the Lebanese Navy carries out all inspections, thus permitting the MTF to maintain a high degree of neutrality and by extension respected credibility from all parties.

Germany has contributed two vessels from the Bremen sea police to strengthen Lebanese naval capacity: Bremen 2 and Bremen 9, renamed "AMCHIT" and "NAQOURA" respectively. Due to their out-dated appearance in the Beirut port, it is more likely these vessels were tokens of short-term German support, rather than making a serious improvement to the Lebanese Navy in the long-term. The Bremen boats operate under Lebanese "ownership" and German guidance within the inner zone along the coast; the larger German frigates navigate in the outer zone.

The Coastal Radar Organization (CRO)

Like the MTF, the Coastal Radar Organization (CRO) aims to strengthen Lebanon's "ownership" of territorial waters. However, whereas MTF is part of the multilateral UNIFIL mission, the coastal radar system is based on a separate bilateral agreement between Germany and Lebanon. The aim of the CRO is to create and consolidate a chain of seven radar stations with the ability to cover the entire Mediterranean coast of Lebanon. Three of these stations are older and are being refurbished with new equipment and facilities; the four other are new installations, all of which were projected to be operational by November 2007. Due to the bilateral nature of the CRO, only Germany is training Lebanese officers: training is carried out in Germany and then implemented in Lebanon.

Completing the CRO would represent an important step to supporting maritime sovereignty, though of course it would do little to halt Israeli incursions into Lebanese territorial waters. A developed and advanced radar system will permit Lebanese authorities to detect vessels in their territorial waters, to coordinate posi-

tions, communicate information, and issue warning signals. This system of detection and possible inspection was buttressed by the contribution of 10 new rapid patrol boats by the United Arab Emirates to make rapid sorties from coast to sea for inspections and if need be detention, more of which will be necessary to consolidate an efficient land-sea coordination envisioned with the coastal radar system.

Similar to the low-profile German assistance to the northern Lebanese border management, the ultimate goal of German engagement is to provide initial training, follow-up exercises and transfer the principle of “command-and-control” to Lebanon.

The Northern Border Assistance Pilot Project

Like UNIFIL-II, the German Border Police Mission in northern Lebanon resulted from UN SC Resolution 1701, which includes clauses for securing borders and interdicting arms smuggling. However, like CRO, the “pilot project” emanates from a bilateral understanding between Lebanon and Germany. On August 25, 2006, Prime Minister of Lebanon, Fouad Siniora, requested support to enhance Lebanese border management in an official letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The Foreign Minister of Germany responded on September 7, 2006 by sending an initial team of ten federal police (5) and customs officers (5) to assess – via a field study – the seaports, airport and land crossing points.

The pilot project activities are restricted to a 24 by 44 km section of Lebanon north of Tripoli and thus differ geographically from UNIFIL-II, which operates in south Lebanon between the Litani River and the Blue Line with Israel. The pilot project aims to tighten Lebanon's official “green” border with Syria. Along the 100 km northern and north-eastern border with Syria, the pilot project is assisting in equipping and training around 800 Lebanese border police to operate four border crossings, from west to east: 1) Ar-Rida, 2) Abu

Diyeh, 3) Bukayyah, and 4) Qa'a, as well as to monitor the border from observation points. Mobile units comprising of two vehicles with four personnel each will also cover the northern hinterland of Lebanon.

Funded by Great Britain and assisted by a British expert, a Common Operation Centre has been created to build a common border force, including all four Lebanese security branches: the Internal Security Forces (ISF), which are to be the civil police and have received some 30 vehicles from Canada and 20 from Great Britain; the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), to patrol the “green” border; the General Security Forces, to monitor border immigration; and Customs, to inspect the entrance of goods. Denmark sent two police experts and pledged 700,000 € to refurbish Camp Aramar near Tripoli, where training of the Lebanese border police began in October 2007. And the United States acts as a “silent” partner in assisting with basic communication material, such as radios, as well as vehicles for the ISF within Beirut proper.

In accordance with the “integrated border management” concept, the pilot project thus aims to restructure and institutionalize a cohesive Lebanese civil police border force. To foster better coordination, cooperation and communication, the installation and operability of scanners, and training in IT networks and visa check devices at the Beirut airport and the border crossings went into effect. Though not part of the northern sector, Germany also provided and installed a container scanner at the main eastern Lebanese border with Syria, known as Masna'a crossing, which is meant to facilitate economic trade.

In the preparation and implementation phases of procuring equipment and training personnel, the German pilot project appears to be laying the groundwork for another European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) mission in the Middle East. This option, however, is not politically viable in the absence of internal Lebanese consensus and Syrian consent. As

such it should be reconsidered, particularly in light of the disastrous precedent set by EUBAM-Rafah in the Gaza Strip. The suspension of the ESDP monitoring mission seriously undermined EU legitimacy to act as a neutral third party: unable to keep the Rafah crossing open, the EU monitors essentially implemented Israel's closure policy, which has severely worsened the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. An ESDP mission along Lebanon's land border would irrevocably be perceived as implementing steps to pressure and isolate Hezbollah and Syria, with equally foreseeable negative results for EU impartiality.

Conclusions

As Germany plans to downsize and become a Troop Contributing Country (TCC) to the MTF, other countries such as Turkey and the Netherlands have been mentioned as candidates to take-over. The Turkish option would prove problematic politically due to the historical implications of Ottoman occupation, and logistically, as Limassol (Greek Cyprus) is the naval base for the MTF. Regardless of which nation relieves Germany, the transfer of the MTF lead-nation should not affect in principle the bilateral German assistance to the Lebanese coastal radar system or the pilot project, both of which have been effective due to their low-profile and perceived non-political nature. Converting the German pilot project into an ESDP border assistance or police reform mission may politicize the project with further complications for EU engagement. For both the CRO and pilot project, German preparation, training and monitoring should continue until Lebanon acquires effective "ownership" capacity.

As the lead country in MTF, Germany is now in a positive position to influence future maritime opera-

tions, under the UN or another supra-national banner. This experience acquired along the coast of Lebanon – including understanding the importance of clearly projecting impartiality and garnering the support of the local population – could possibly serve as a precedent for a similar maritime mission in other related regional scenarios, such as along the coast of the Gaza Strip. The political prospects of such an eventuality remain bleak due to the Israeli closure policy, but could be seriously explored and advanced by Germany or other leading EU Member States in UNIFIL-II, such as Spain, Italy or France. Such maritime engagement, however, should only be implemented as part of a serious comprehensive and just agreement between the conflicting parties that includes their explicit consent.

This DGAPstandpunkt is part of a forthcoming report for EuroMeSCo about the realities of UNIFIL-II as an example of emerging European engagement in the Middle East. It is based on research and a series of interviews in Berlin and Beirut carried out in Fall 2007, including an official visit aboard the BAYERN with Admiral Hans Christian Luther, Commander of the Maritime Task Force off the coast of Lebanon on 12 October 2007. The opinions expressed are those of the authors.

Timur Goksel served as spokesperson and senior advisor to UNIFIL I until 2003, and now teaches at the American University of Beirut.

Karim Makdisi is Assistant Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut.

Hans Bastian Hauck is Head of Program of DGAP's International Forum on Strategic Thinking.

Stuart Reigeluth is Projects Manager for the Africa and Middle East Program at the Toledo International Center for Peace (CITpax) in Madrid.