

ZOÉ NAUTRÉ

Germany's popularity on rise in Arab world

BERLIN, Germany: According to a poll recently conducted by the University of Maryland and Zogby International, Germany's popularity is on the rise in the Arab world. The poll revealed that large segments of Arab society approve of Germany's potentially greater role in world politics. Twenty-three percent of Arabs interviewed across six Arab countries contend that if there were to be only one superpower it should be Germany (as opposed to the eight percent who said the United States or the 14 percent who responded China).

What makes Germany such a popular candidate for more leadership in world affairs? What can the US, and other Western nations learn from Germany's popularity to help guide their foreign policy?

One answer to the first question is the absence of a German colonial past in the Arab world, along with a 60-year history of non-involvement in other countries' affairs. These reinforce Germany's credibility today.

Germany's opposition to the Iraq War also boosted Arabs' confidence in Germany as a global player. In a region where most citizens feel like their politics are determined by foreign powers, credentials do matter.

Germany's foreign policy towards the Arab world in recent years has been marked by an emphasis on multilateralism and civilian means of foreign engagement, a method that could be a valuable model for other countries.

Germany pursues its foreign policy goals almost exclusively in multilateral frameworks such as the European Union, United Nations, NATO or G8. Use of its military in the region is mainly restricted to UN stabilisation missions, such as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) that comprises around 220 German soldiers. Germany also provides security and reconstruction assistance to Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza and the West Bank. In addition, the work of Germany's political foundations in the

region (such as the Friedrich-Ebert, Heinrich-Böll, Konrad-Adenauer and Friedrich-Naumann foundations), ranging from support for trade unions to training workshops for imams, is highly appreciated among a large spectrum of politically engaged Arabs.

Moreover, in the Middle East peace process, Arabs and Israelis alike recognise Germany as an honest broker. Due to its historical obligations to Israel, German foreign policy has generally supported Israeli interests. Still, a German public largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause as well as balanced foreign policies have allowed Germany to become a trustworthy partner for both sides. Germany's involvement in prisoner exchanges between Hizbullah and Israel in recent years is an illustration of Germany's mediation capacity.

But politics are not the only source of this positive impression.

German engineering, such as manufacturing equipment and cars, is widely praised and purchased in the Arab world, and in terms of education, Germany ranks second in the poll after France for destinations to study abroad. Academic exchange opportunities are fostered through various German scholarship programs and recent educational partnerships have resulted in courses that meet the specific needs of the region, such as a German/Arab Master's Degree in Integrated Water Resource Management at the University of Amman.

Germans are also respected for their interest in Islamic art and the history of the Middle East. German development assistance to the region often targets the restoration of ancient cities, from Aleppo, Syria to Shibam, Yemen, and the preservation of monuments, ranging from those of ancient Egypt to ones from the Islamic period, such as at the German Archaeological Museum in Cairo. These projects exemplify Germany's genuine respect for the history of the Middle East, adding to Arabs' positive perceptions as expressed in

the recent poll.

Germany seems to have little ambition to become a larger player in the region. As a result, Germany is uniquely positioned to remain a credible and likeable broker, investor, and friend to the Arab world.

Respect for the historical trajecto-

ries of the region, a focus on multilateralism in world affairs as well as stronger cultural, educational and economic ties serve as useful tools for statecraft. Germany should continue on this path while at the same time using its reputation to further the prospect of peace, economic growth and political reform

in the region.

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