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NEC RELEASE

**Palestinian Perceptions towards Politics, Peace, and the Conflict
in the Lebanon**

With an additional analysis of the perceptions of Christian Palestinians



Near East Consulting

A report prepared by
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Turning data to information, and knowledge into practice.



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Palestinian perceptions towards Politics, Peace, and the Conflict in the Lebanon

During the period 2-4 August, 2006, Near East Consulting (NEC) conducted a phone survey of over 1,200 randomly selected Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem of which 713 were successfully completed. The survey covered a number of issues that fit into NEC's monthly "Palestinian Political Pulse" and "Palestinian Peace Pulse" with the aim of monitoring Palestinian political perceptions over time. These include: factional trust and trust in political figures, Palestinians' feeling of security since the PLC elections, support for a peace agreement with Israel, support for a ceasefire, perceptions on whether or not there is a peace partner in Israel, perceptions on whether or not there is a Palestinian peace partner and opinions on whether or not Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel.

It is worth noting that the margin of error is +/- 3.6% with a 95% confidence level.

Also given the recent special circumstances in the region and the reference that is often made regarding Islam and Israel, the NEC team conducted another survey of Christian Palestinians, using the same questionnaire, in an attempt to gauge if the views of this minority sector within Palestinian society differ from those of the majority of Palestinians, and also, of course, because it is estimated that about 40% of Lebanese society consists of Christians. Accordingly, 165 Palestinian Christians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (including Jerusalem) were successfully surveyed.

I. Main findings

LACK OF TRUST IN FACTIONS: HAMAS STABLE, FATEH DOWN: The percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction has never been as high and stands at 36%. Fateh has lost its previous lead on Hamas from 38% in June to 29% in August, while trust in Hamas remained unchanged at 30%. Trust in Fateh is stronger in the Gaza Strip, while trust in Hamas is stronger in the West Bank. Trust of the Christian Palestinians in factions is as follows: Fateh 29%, PFLP 17%, Hamas 7%, and 43% do not trust any faction.

HANIEH MORE TRUSTED THAN ABBAS. Prime Minister, Ismaiel Hanieh, is now more trusted by the Palestinians than President Mahmoud Abbas. However, Mahmoud Abbas is more trusted than Ismaiel Hanieh in the Gaza Strip, while the latter is more trusted than Abbas in the West Bank. Christian Palestinians have more trust in Mahmoud Abbas than in Ismaiel Hanieh.



PALESTINIANS ARE MORE DEFIANT. There is an improved feeling of security among the Palestinians despite the attacks on Gaza and in the Lebanon. The feeling of security is stronger among Hamas supporters and among West Bank residents than among Fateh supporters and Gaza Strip residents.

DROP IN SUPPORT FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE WEST BANK. There is a sharp decrease in the level of support for a peace settlement with Israel. While 76% in June declared their support for a peaceful settlement with Israel, the percentage after five weeks dropped by 25% to reach 51%. Support for peace is stronger among Fateh supporters (63%) than among Hamas supporters (32%) and is stronger in the Gaza Strip (63%) than in the West Bank (44%).

INCREASE IN SUPPORT FOR A CEASEFIRE. Despite the drop in support for a peace settlement with Israel, more Palestinians today (78%) support a ceasefire between the Palestinians and Israel than five weeks ago (70%).

PALESTINIANS BELIEVE THAT THE KIDNAPPED SOLDIER IN GAZA SHOULD NOT BE UNCONDITIONALLY RELEASED. About 91% of the Palestinian public do not believe that the Israeli soldier should be released unconditionally. **Palestinians do not believe that the unconditional release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier in Gaza will end the conflict there.** On the contrary, 23% said that the situation will worsen and only 7% believe that a release will end the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip. The great majority of the Palestinians, 70% believe that an unconditional release will not make any difference as far as the Israeli attacks are concerned. The views of the Christian Palestinians on this issue do not differ from the views of the general sample.

INCREASE IN SUPPORT FOR HAMAS POSITION VIS-À-VIS THE ELIMINATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL. For the first time, a majority of Palestinians (55%) agree that Hamas should not change its position regarding the elimination of the state of Israel. Even 29% of the Christian Palestinians share this view. The percentage of those holding this view among Fateh supporters now is 39%. This position is also more pronounced in the West Bank than it is in the Gaza Strip.

NO PEACE PARTNER IN ISRAEL, BUT PEACE PARTNER IN PALESTINE. About 75% of the Palestinians do not believe that there is a peace partner for the Palestinians in Israel, while 71% of the respondents believe that there is a peace partner for Israel in Palestine. Among Christian Palestinians, 63% also do not believe that the Palestinians have a peace partner in Israel, while 85% believe that there is a Palestinian peace partner.

INCREASE IN SUPPORT FOR HEZBOLLAH. An overwhelming majority of the Palestinians (97%) support Hezbollah's position towards Israel. This position is also held by 95% of the Christian Palestinians. There is a significant increase in support for Hezbollah in the aftermath of the incursions into the Lebanon by Israel. More than 56% of the Palestinians say that their support to Hezbollah has increased and 30% said that it remained the same. Only 14% said that the level of support to Hezbollah has diminished since the recent Israeli-Lebanese crisis. The increase in **support to Hezbollah among the Christian Palestinians is even higher as 66% said that their support to Hezbollah now is stronger than before.**



ISRAELI SOLDIERS KIDNAPPED BY HEZBOLLAH SHOULD NOT BE UNCONDITIONALLY RELEASED. About 93% of the Palestinian public, including 93% of the Christian Palestinians do not believe that the kidnapped Israeli soldiers in Lebanon should be unconditionally released.

ISRAEL IS HEGEMONIAL OVER THE USA. The majority of the Palestinians (54%) think that Israel controls the US, while 46% who think that Israel is controlled by the USA. The majority of the Palestinians also believe that the current attacks in the Lebanon are conducted for the interest of Israel and the USA, combined.



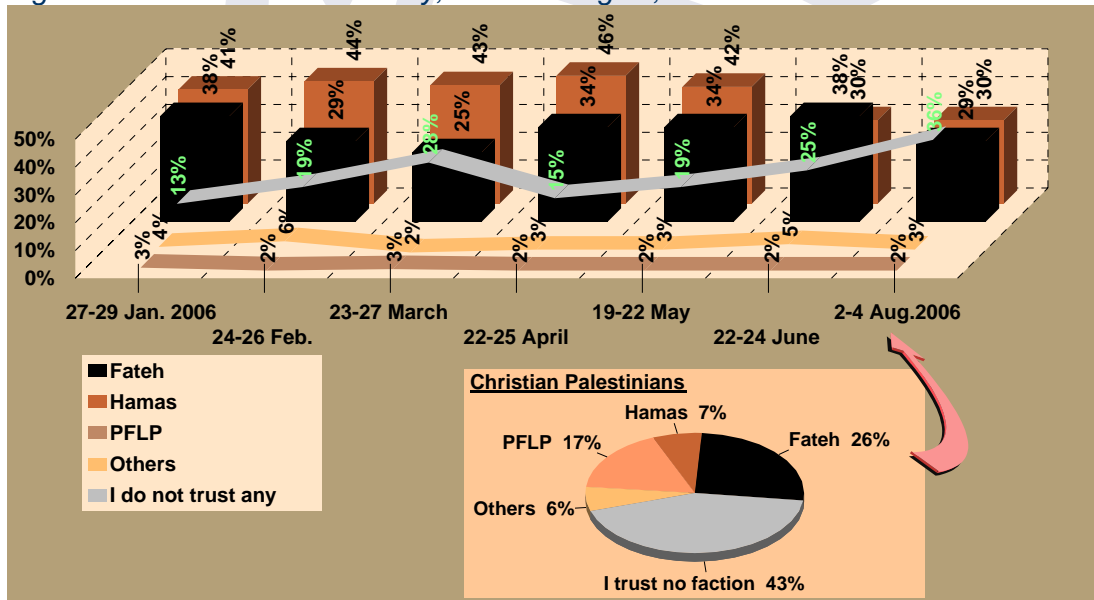


II. Factional trust and trust in personalities

Since NEC systematically began to publish its survey results on factional trust after the January 2006 PLC elections, trust in the two main political factions, Hamas and Fateh, has fluctuated on a nearly monthly basis, and seems to be heavily influenced by the circumstances and political events of the moment. This would suggest that trust in both Fateh and Hamas does not really consist of staunch supporters of these respective factions. Rather both factions do have their core group of strong supporters, but quite a proportion of supporters of these two factions float between these two main rival factions or are sufficiently disillusioned with those factions to increasingly affirm that they do not trust any of the existing Palestinian factions. This has resulted for the first time since the beginning of 2006 in a larger percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction (36%) than the percentage of those trusting either Hamas (30%) or Fateh (29%). In addition and as illustrated in the figure below, since the 24 June NEC survey, trust in Hamas has remained stable at 30%, while trust in Fateh has decreased by 9%, and the percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction has increased by 11%. In January 2006, immediately after the PLC elections a mere 13% of Palestinians did not trust any existing Palestinian faction. Despite fluctuations, this percentage since NEC's April survey has steadily grown into an unprecedented level of 36%.

The factional preferences among the Christian Palestinians in the oPt are somewhat different from those of the general sample. A lower percentage of Christian Palestinians trust Hamas (7%), and to a lesser extent this is also the case for Fateh (26%), while a considerably higher percentage than in the general sample trust PFLP (17%). It is also clear, that an even higher percentage of Palestinian Christian respondents than other respondents do not trust any of the existing Palestinian factions (43%).

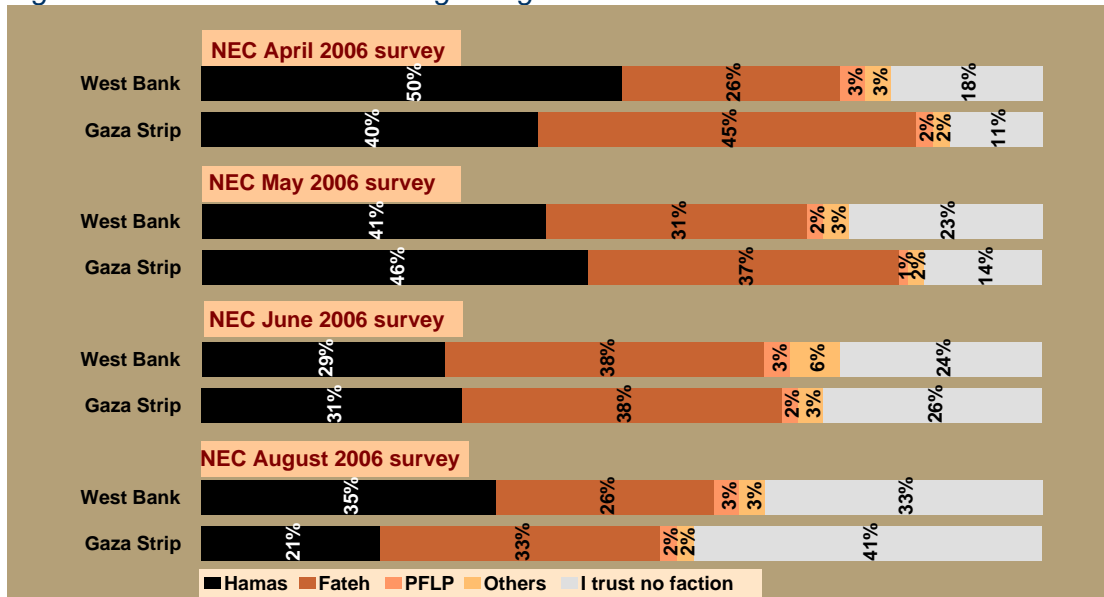
Figure 1: Factional trust: January, 2006 till August, 2006





Factional trust also fluctuates considerably over time between the two different regions of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). Overall, however, since the NEC April survey trust in Hamas has been stronger in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. Within the same time-frame trust in Fateh has been stronger in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. As for the sector of Palestinians not trusting any faction, up to the May NEC survey, this percentage had been larger in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. However, since then disillusion or distrust of the existing Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip has increased at a higher rate than in the West Bank, bringing the percentage of those not trusting any faction to 41% in the Gaza Strip and 33% in the West Bank.

Figure 3: Factional trust according to region

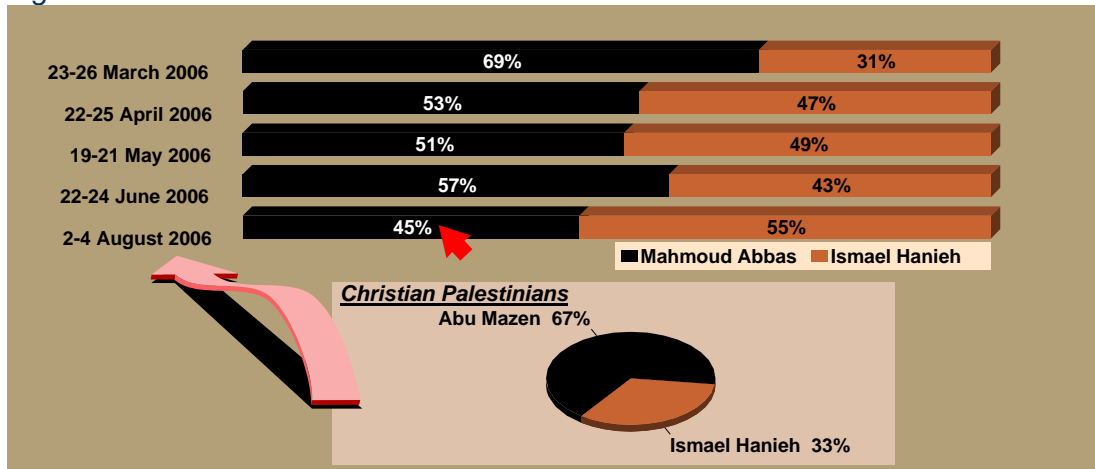


For the fifth month in a row, Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were asked whether they most trust President Mahmoud Abbas or Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh. As overviewed in the figure below, over time and until May 2006, trust in Mahmoud Abbas declined to the benefit of Ismael Hanieh. However, in the June NEC survey, Mahmoud Abbas seemed to have regained some popular trust, which could probably be attributed to his higher visibility and the firm stance he took during the period of the National Dialogue and the possibility of a referendum on the Prisoner Agreement. However, since then an Israeli soldier was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip, which provoked the still on-going military response of Israel in the Gaza Strip. As such, the process of National Dialogue seems like a far memory, and the popularity of Abu Mazen has been tumbling down since. As overviewed in the figure below, in the past five weeks Abu Mazen's popularity has dropped by 12% to the benefit of Ismael Hanieh. It is also the first time since NEC began to ask this question in its surveys that, overall, Ismael Hanieh (55%) enjoys greater trust than Abbas (45%) among the population in the oPt.

Mahmoud Abbas continues to be more trusted than Ismael Hanieh among Palestinian Christians. More specifically, 33% of the Palestinian Christians trust Ismael Hanieh, while 67% trust Mahmoud Abbas.



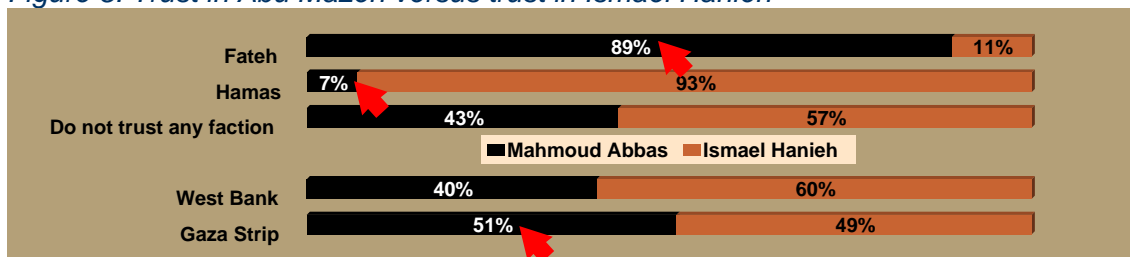
Figure 4: Trust in Abu Mazen versus trust in Ismael Hanieh



According to factional trust, a large majority of 89% of Fateh supporters continue to most trust Mahmoud Abbas, while this is the case for the first time in the past five months for less than half of those who do not trust any faction (43%) and for only 7% of the Hamas supporters. It is worth pointing out that whereas the drops in trust in Mahmoud Abbas until NEC's June survey could mainly be attributed to a decreasing percentage of Hamas supporters who specified that they most trusted the PA president. (From 46% of Hamas supporters who most trusted Mahmoud Abbas in NEC's March survey, this percentage dropped to 20% in April, to 11% in May, to 7% in June and now.) However, the further declining trust in the PA President in NEC August survey, comes from a drop in trust in Mahmoud Abbas among Palestinians who do not trust any faction (-13%) and a drop in trust in their leader among Fateh supporters (-7%).

The level of trust in Mahmoud Abbas and Ismael Hanieh differs significantly between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Whereas 40% of Westbankers most trust Abu Mazen and 60% most trust Ismael Hanieh, 51% of Gazans most trust Abu Mazen, while 49% most trust Ismael Hanieh. It is worth pointing out that the picture of trust in Abu Mazen and Ismael Hanieh in the West Bank has reversed over the past five weeks. In NEC's June survey still 60% of Westbankers most trusted Abu Mazen and 40% most trusted Ismael Hanieh. On the other hand, the level of trust in respectively Abu Mazen and Ismael Hanieh in the Gaza Strip has remained stable over the past five weeks.

Figure 5: Trust in Abu Mazen versus trust in Ismael Hanieh



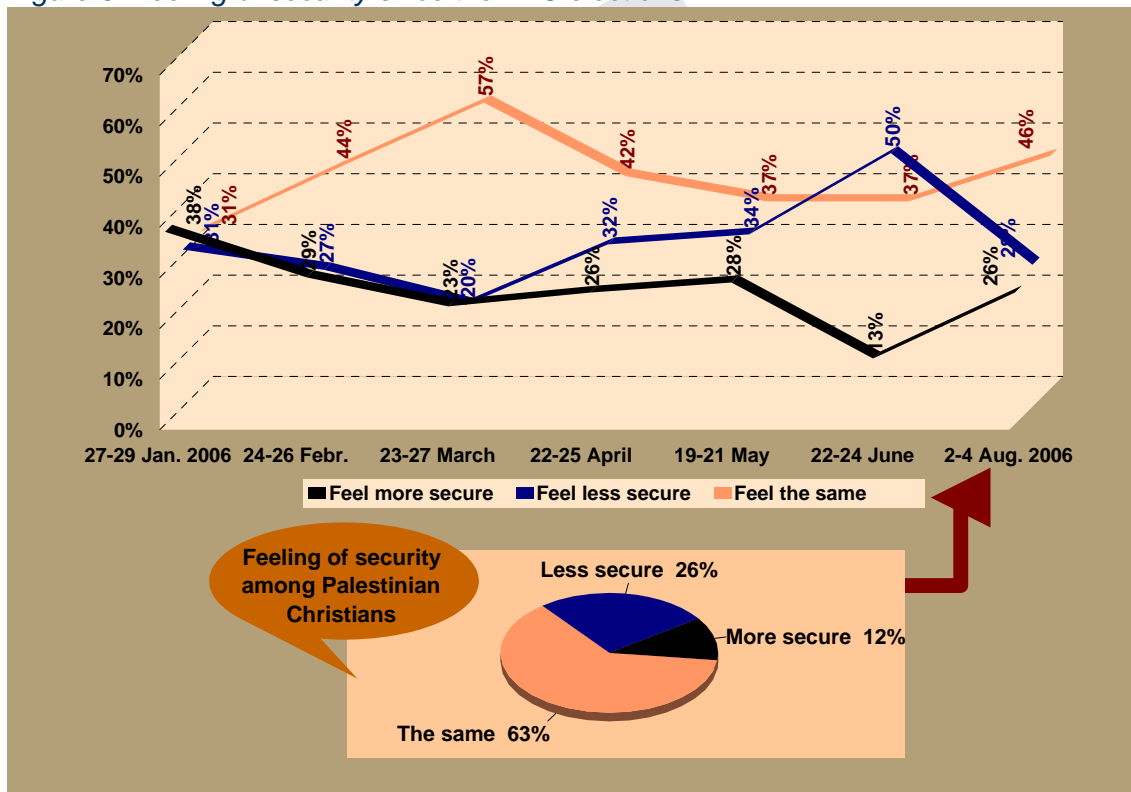
Perhaps ironically, given the currently highly volatile situation in the oPt, and especially in the Gaza Strip, this month's results reveal an improved feeling of security among the



Palestinians. Indeed, whereas by NEC's June survey, the tensions between Fateh and Hamas combined with the financial crisis of the Hamas-led PA government had caused a dramatic decrease in people's feeling of security, the results in this month's survey reveal more proportionate results. As overviewed below, the percentage of respondents who specified that they feel more secure has doubled from 13% in NEC's June survey to 26%. In addition, while in the June survey still 50% of the respondents said that they felt less secure since the January 2006 PLC elections, this percentage currently 'only' reaches 28%. Lastly, in five weeks time the percentage of respondents feeling the same since the PLC elections has increased by 9% and now reaches 46%.

As for the sample of Palestinian Christians, about the same percentage as the general sample feel less secure (26%) since the PLC elections, but a far lower percentage feels more secure (12%) and a notably higher percentage feel the same (63%) since the PLC elections.

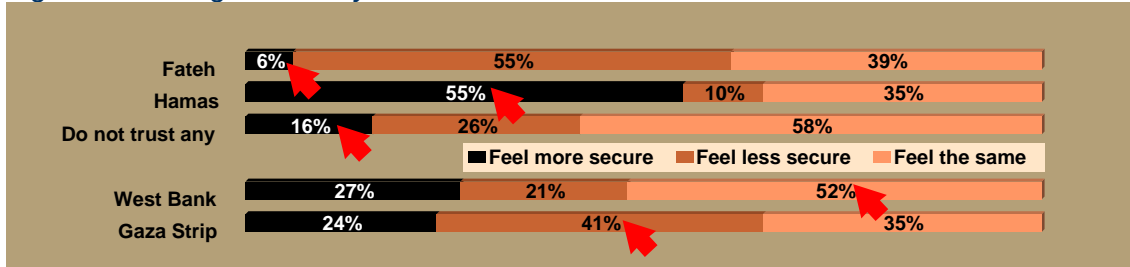
Figure 6: Feeling of security since the PLC elections



Palestinians' feeling of security varies considerably depending on which faction they trust most and the region they reside in. For example, whereas 55% of Fateh supporters and 26% of those who do not trust any political faction feel less secure since the PLC elections, this is the case for 10% of Hamas supporters. According to region, a significantly higher percentage of Gazans (41%) than Westbankers (21%) feel less secure since the PLC elections, while a considerably lower percentage of Gazans (35%) than Westbankers (52%) feel the same since those elections.



Figure 7: Feeling of security since the PLC elections

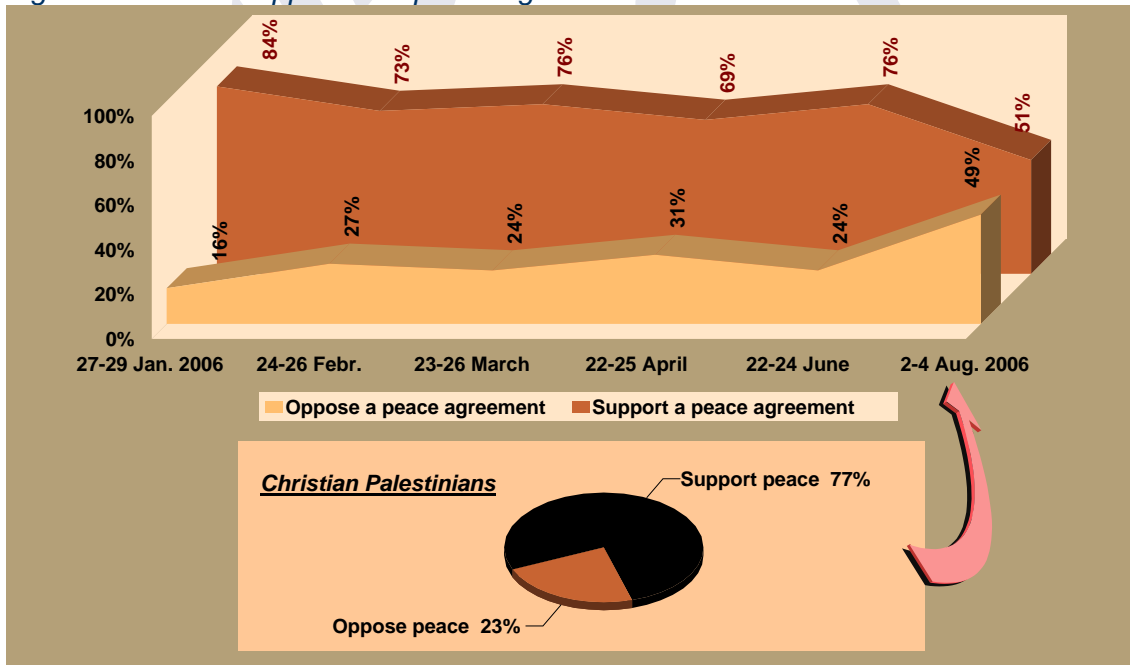


III. The Palestinian-Israeli crisis

The on-going Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip perhaps combined in the past three weeks with the opening of a second front of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in the Lebanon have had a dramatic impact on Palestinians' support for a peace settlement with Israel. Whereas in NEC's June survey 76% of respondents continued to support a peace settlement with Israel, this percentage has decreased by 25% to 51% over the course of the past five weeks. As such, barely half of the Palestinian population nowadays continues to support a peace settlement with Israel.

It is worth pointing out that support for a peace settlement with Israel is more pronounced among Palestinian Christians than it is among the Palestinian population as a whole in the oPt. Of the specific sample of Christian respondents, 77% support a peace settlement with Israel.

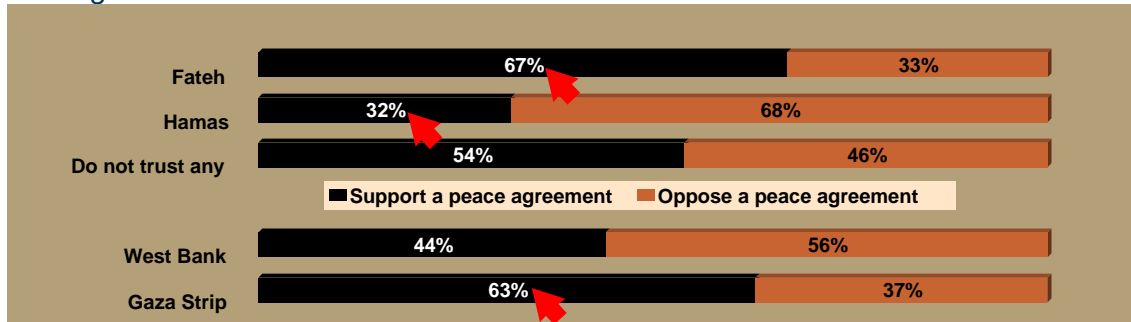
Figure 8: Level of support for a peace agreement with Israel





The support for a peace agreement with Israel remains significantly higher among those most trusting Fateh (67%) and those not trusting any faction (54%) than among those most trusting Hamas (32%). In addition, although in the past month the Gaza Strip has suffered far more than the West Bank from Israeli incursions and attacks, support for a peace settlement remains quite a lot stronger in the Gaza Strip (63%) than in the West Bank (44%).

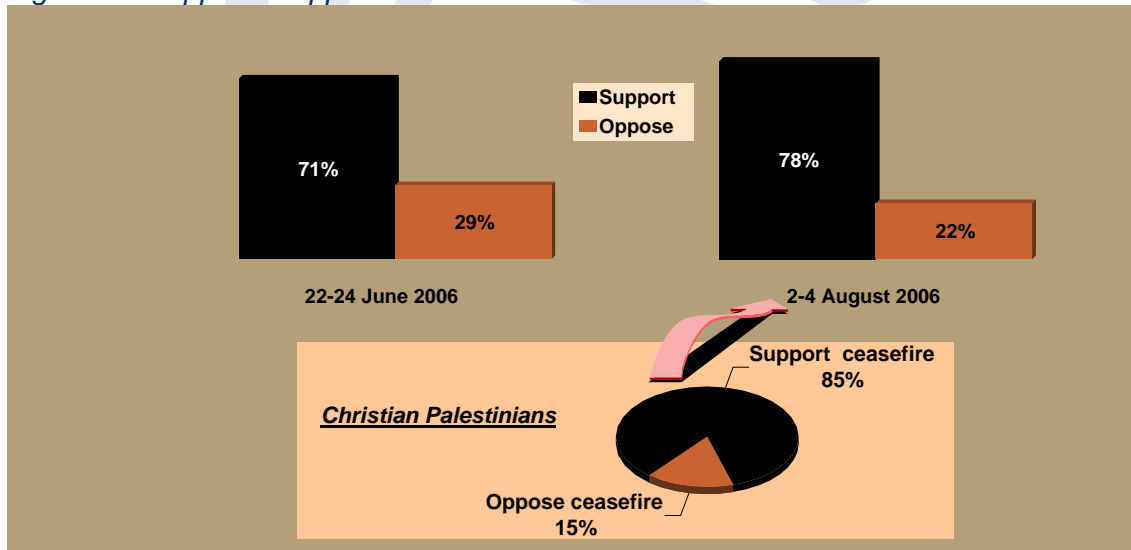
Figure 9: Level of support for a peace agreement with Israel according to factional trust and region



Although support for a peace settlement with Israel among Palestinians has been dealt a big blow in the past five weeks, support for a ceasefire with Israel has increased. Whereas in NEC's June survey 71% of the respondents supported a ceasefire, in the current survey 78% support it.

As was the case concerning support for a peace settlement with Israel, in comparison with the total oPt population, a larger percentage of Christian Palestinians support a ceasefire with Israel (85%).

Figure 10: Support or opposition to a ceasefire between the Palestinians and Israel

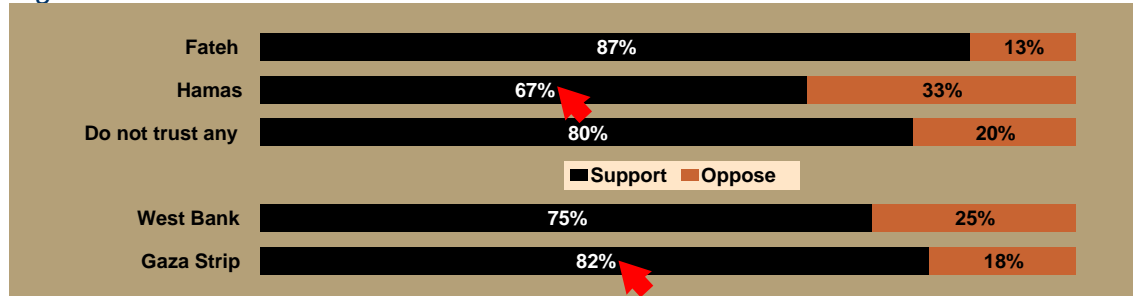


Once again, the level of support or opposition to a ceasefire differs notably according to respondents' factional preference and the region in which they reside. As overviewed



below, whereas 87% of those most trusting Fateh and 80% of those not trusting any faction support a ceasefire with Israel, this is the case among a significantly less, but still considerable 67% of those most trusting Hamas. According to region, a higher percentage of Gazans (82%) than Westbankers (75%) support a ceasefire with Israel.

Figure 11: Support or opposition to a ceasefire with Israel according to factional trust and region



The question on support or opposition to a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians is rather general and mainly aims to gauge support for ‘the principle’ of a ceasefire, and does not specify whether or not conditions should be met by either side of the conflict to obtain such a ceasefire. Therefore, some additional questions related to the release of the Israeli kidnapped soldier in the Gaza Strip, which could pave the way to a ceasefire were also included in the survey.

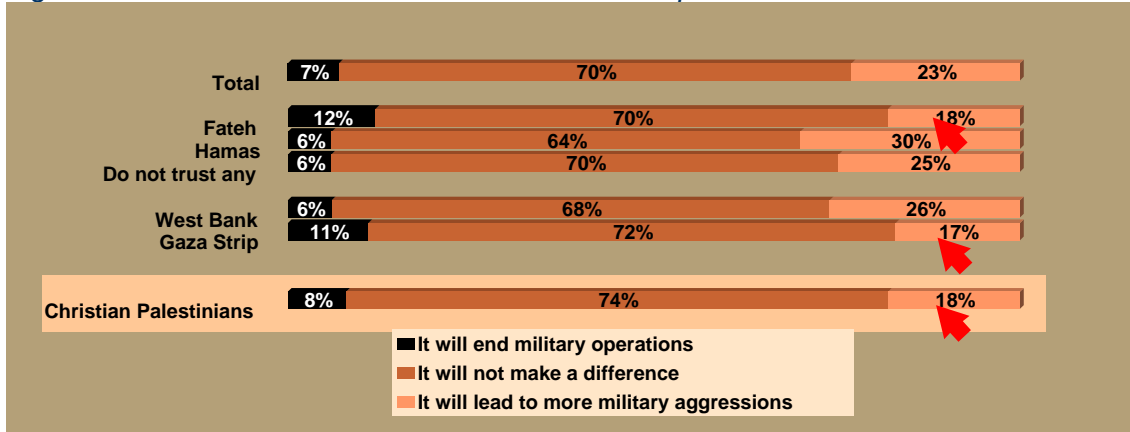
When respondents were asked what – in their opinion – will happen if the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip is released without conditions, the large majority of 70% said that it would not make a difference to the situation. An additional 23% of the respondents believed that such an unconditional release of the Israeli soldier would even lead to further Israeli military aggressions, while a mere 7% of the respondents said that it would make an end to Israel’s military operations.

Opinions on the potential outcomes or consequences of an unconditional release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip vary according to the respondents factional preference and according to the region of the oPt in which they reside. As detailed in the figure below, the highest percentage of those believing that an unconditional release of the soldier would lead to further Israeli military aggressions can be found among Hamas supporters (30%) and Westbankers (26%). The belief that such an unconditional release would lead to an end in military operations is strongest among Fateh supporters (12%) and Gazans (11%).

The opinions of Christian Palestinians on what could happen if the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip is released unconditionally seem to lean closely to the opinions of Fateh supporters and Gaza Strip residents. More specifically, 18% of the Christian Palestinian respondents feel that the unconditional release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier will lead to further Israeli aggressions, 74% believe that such a release will not make a difference, while 8% believe that an unconditional release will end Israel’s military operations.



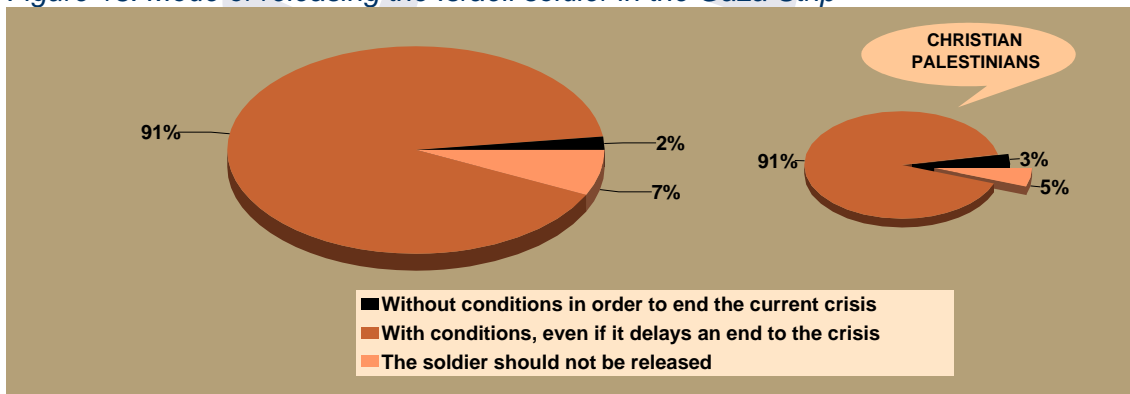
Figure 12: What if the Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip is released without conditions?



As for the manner in which the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip should be released, and overwhelming majority of the respondents (91%) feels that such a release should be conditional, even if this entails that it will take longer for the current crisis to end. A mere 2% believe that the kidnapped Israeli soldier should be released unconditionally, while 7% do not think that the Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip should be released at all.

It is important to point out that this position regarding the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier is rather widespread among Palestinians in the oPt as there are no differences in opinions on this issue according to the various explaining variables at hand for analysis. As indicated in the figure below, Christian Palestinians are also of the same opinion as their compatriots when it concerns the nearly total support among Palestinians for a conditional support of the kidnapped Israeli soldier, even if this means a delay in the end of the currently still on-going crisis.

Figure 13: Mode of releasing the Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip

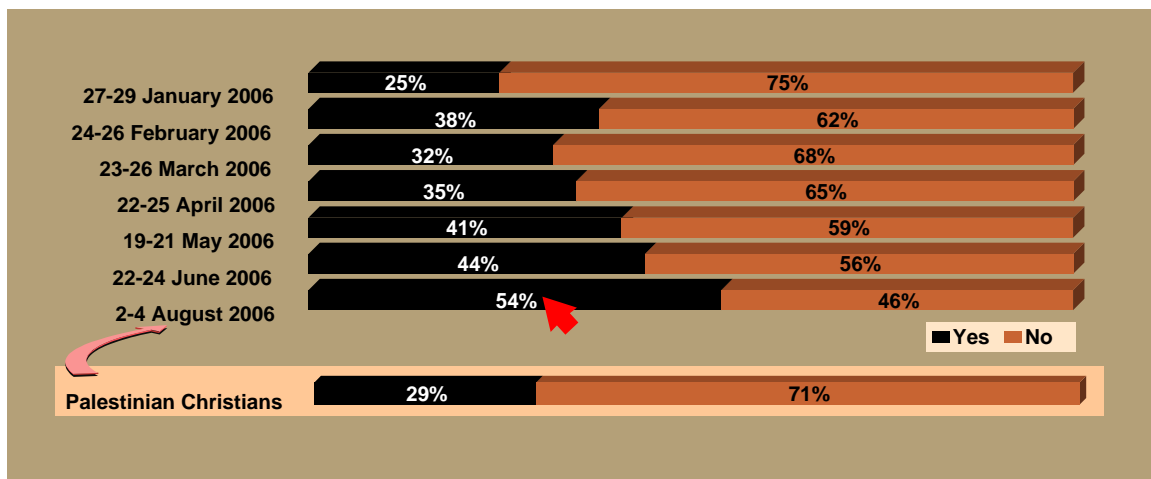


The dramatic decline in support for a peace settlement with Israel among Palestinians in such a short period of time, and their seemingly strong unwillingness to release the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip unconditionally, despite the increasingly heavy toll of Israeli attacks and incursions in the Gaza Strip also affects their views regarding Hamas’s refusal to recognize the state of Israel.



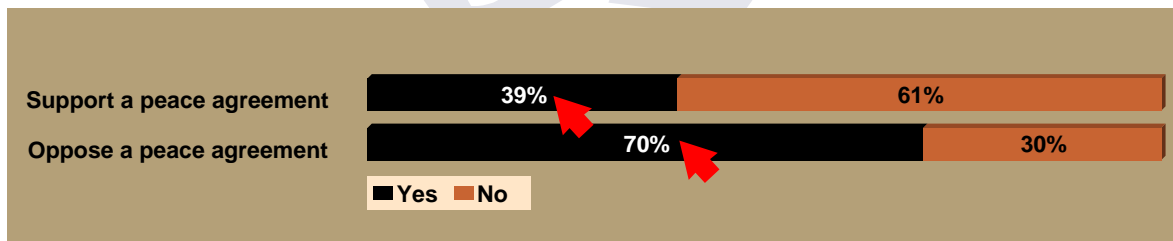
For the first time since January 2006, a majority of Palestinians (55%) believe that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel. It had already been clear over the past few months that as time passed, an increasing proportion of Palestinians seemed to be uncompromising on this issue. Still, in comparison to NEC's June survey results on this issue, an increasing 10% of Palestinians nowadays support the Hamas position on refusing to recognize the state of Israel. Christian Palestinians seem more willing than non-Christian Palestinians to compromise on this issue. However, a sizeable 29% of the Christian Palestinians still say that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel.

Figure 14: Should Hamas maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel?



As usual, a higher percentage of respondents who oppose a peace settlement with Israel (70%) than those who support a peace agreement with Israel (39%) believe that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel.

Figure 15: Should Hamas maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel? according to level of support for a peace agreement with Israel



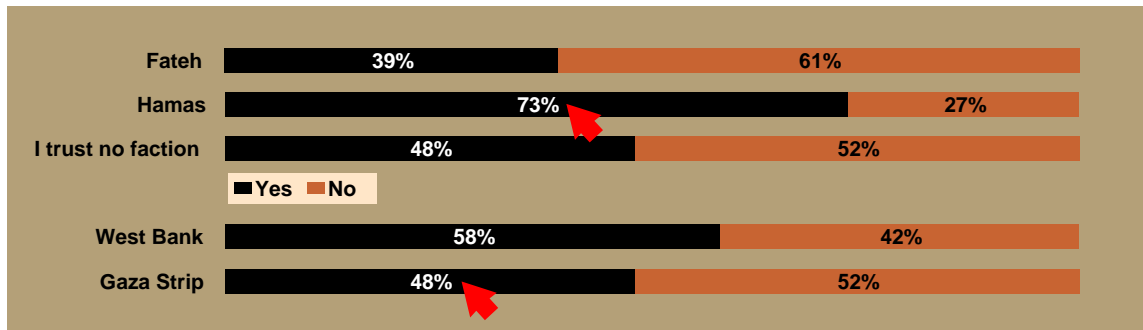
When examining Palestinians' opinions with regard to the Hamas position on the elimination of Israel according to the faction they trust most, it is blatant that a significantly higher percentage of Palestinians trusting Hamas (73%) than those trusting



Fateh (39%) or even those not trusting any faction (48%) are of the belief that Hamas should uphold its position concerning the state of Israel.

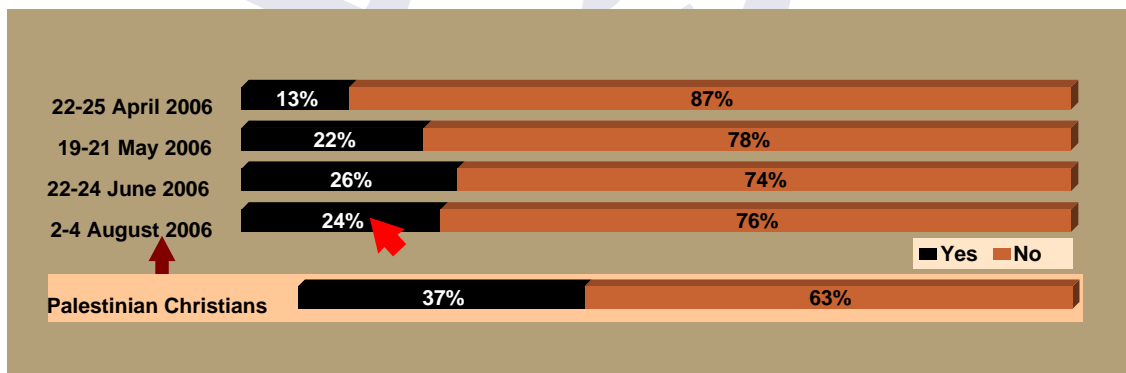
The belief that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel also varies considerably according to the region of residence of the respondents. As detailed in the figure below, the belief that Hamas should maintain its position towards Israel is 10% higher in the West Bank (58%) than in the Gaza Strip (48%).

Figure 16: Should Hamas maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel?



For the fourth month in a row, Palestinians were asked if they believe that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel. Although the percentage has slightly decreased (-2%) since the NEC June survey, it has remained quite stable considering the military operations of the past few weeks, and also in comparison with this belief in the NEC April 2006 survey. At that time a mere 13% of respondents felt that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel. In the most recent survey, this belief is shared by 24% of the respondents. As for the Christian Palestinian sample, 37% of the respondents believe that Palestinians do have a partner for peace in Israel.

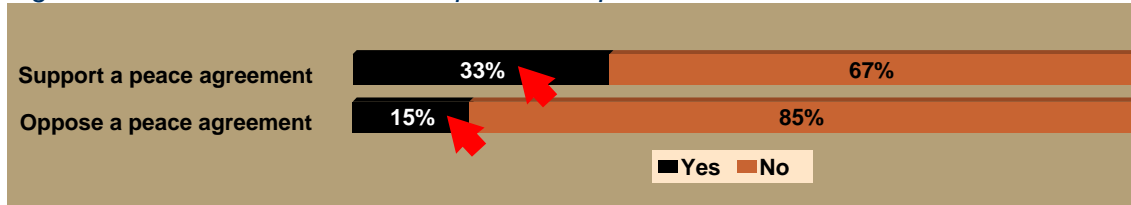
Figure 17: Do Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel?



The perception that Palestinians have no partner for peace in Israel is more pronounced among Palestinians who oppose a peace agreement with Israel (85%) than among those who support a peace agreement with Israel (67%). The results are overviewed in the figure below.

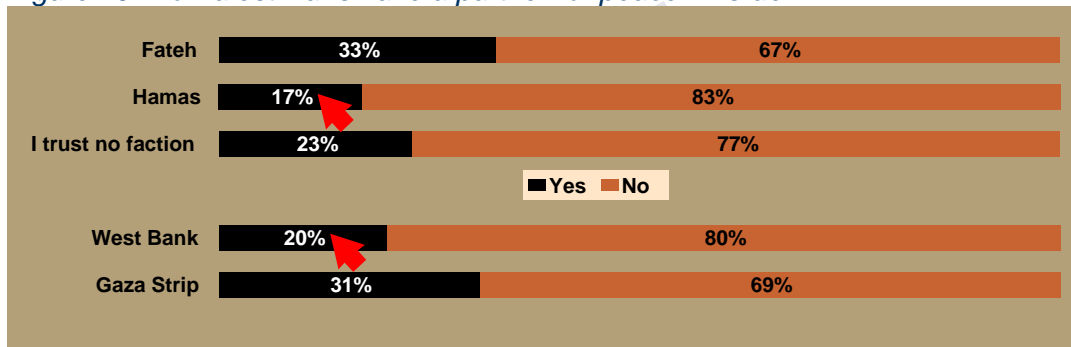


Figure 18: Do Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel?



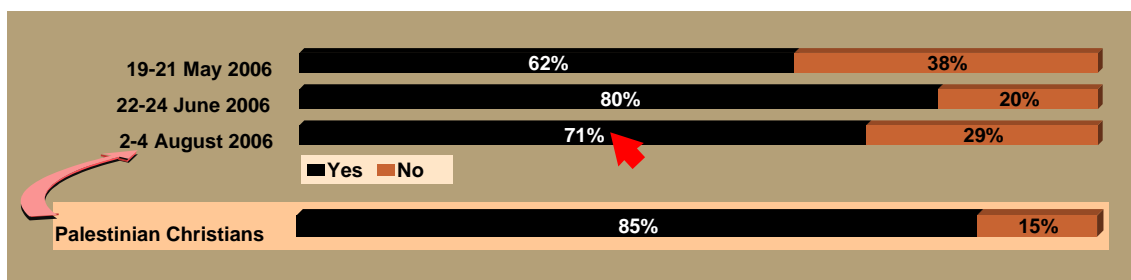
Once more, according to factional trust, a higher percentage of Fateh supporters (33%) than Hamas supporters (17%) and those who do not trust any existing Palestinian faction (23%) believe that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel. The belief that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel is also more widespread in the Gaza Strip (31%) than it is in the West Bank (20%).

Figure 19: Do Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel?



It is frequently argued, especially since Hamas won the January 2006 PLC elections, that there is no Palestinian peace partner. This view, however, is not shared by a notable majority of the Palestinian public. As detailed in the figure below, 71% of the respondents continue to believe that there is a Palestinian partner for peace. Although this constitutes a decrease of 9% in comparison with the results of the NEC June 2006, it is still an increase in comparison with the results of the NEC May 2006 survey. The Christian Palestinian respondents are even more convinced than the respondents in the general sample that there is a Palestinian partner for peace as a majority of 85% of those respondents specified that this was their belief.

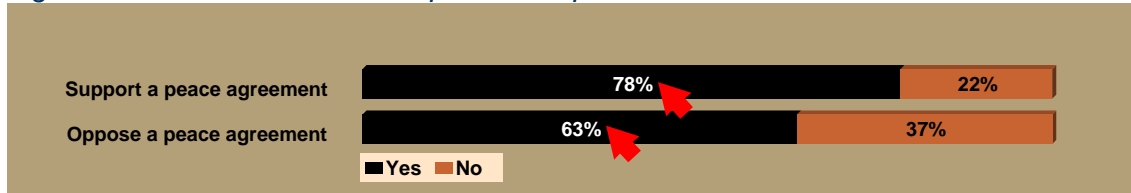
Figure 20: Is there Palestinian partner for peace?





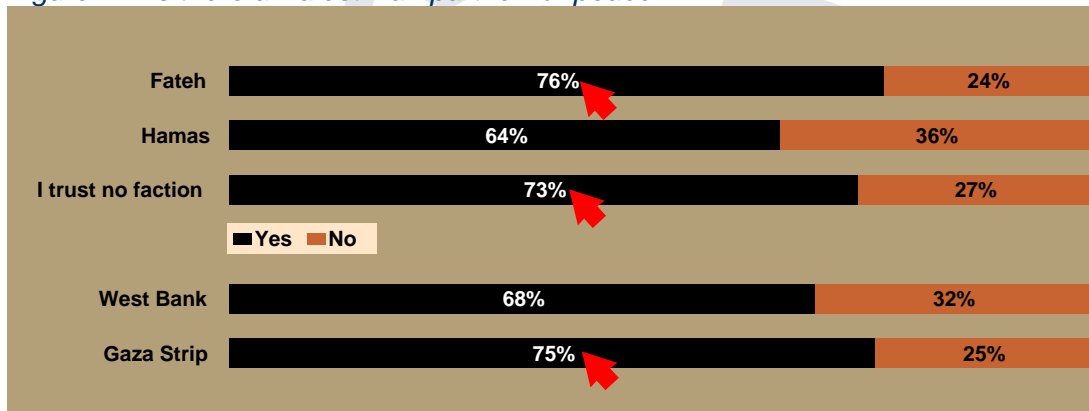
Again, the perception that there is no Palestinian partner for peace is more pronounced among those who oppose a peace settlement (37%) than among those who support a peace settlement with Israel (22%).

Figure 21: Is there a Palestinian partner for peace?



A larger percentage of Fateh supporters (76%) and those who do not trust any faction (73%) than Hamas supporters (64%) perceive there to be a Palestinian partner for peace. Perhaps ironically as the Gaza Strip is the region in the oPt that received the brunt of Israeli military operations in the past few weeks, a higher percentage of Gazans (75%) than Westbankers (68%) believe there to be a Palestinian partner for peace.

Figure 22: Is there a Palestinian partner for peace?



IV. The Lebanese-Israeli crisis

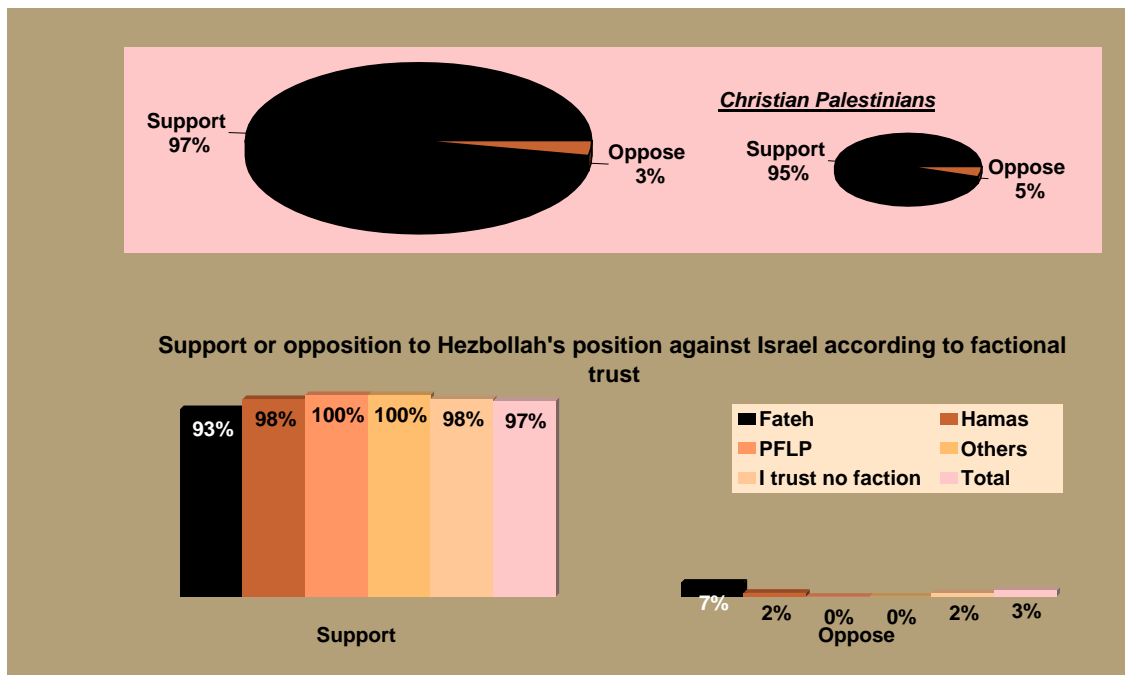
Besides the Palestinian-Israeli hostilities, a second front of conflict acutely emerged in the second week of July between Israel and Hezbollah after the latter kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. The NEC team added some questions related to this latest crisis to find out more about the opinions of the Palestinian street in general, and the Christian Palestinians in particular, on issues related to Hezbollah and its position, but also on Israel's response with its attacks on the Lebanon, and the relationship between Israel and the US in this regard.



A. Hezbollah

The overwhelming majority of Palestinians in the oPt (97%), also Christian Palestinians (95%), support Hezbollah’s position against Israel. These results show a tremendous support in all sectors of Palestinian society for Hezbollah’s position against Israel. Still, as illustrated in the figure below, this support slightly varies according to the respondents’ factional preference. For example, whereas support for Hezbollah’s position against Israel is absolute among PFLP supporters (100%), the support for this position among Hamas supporters is 98%, it is 97% among those who do not trust any Palestinian faction, and stands at 93% among Fateh supporters.

Figure 23: Support or opposition to Hezbollah's position against Israel



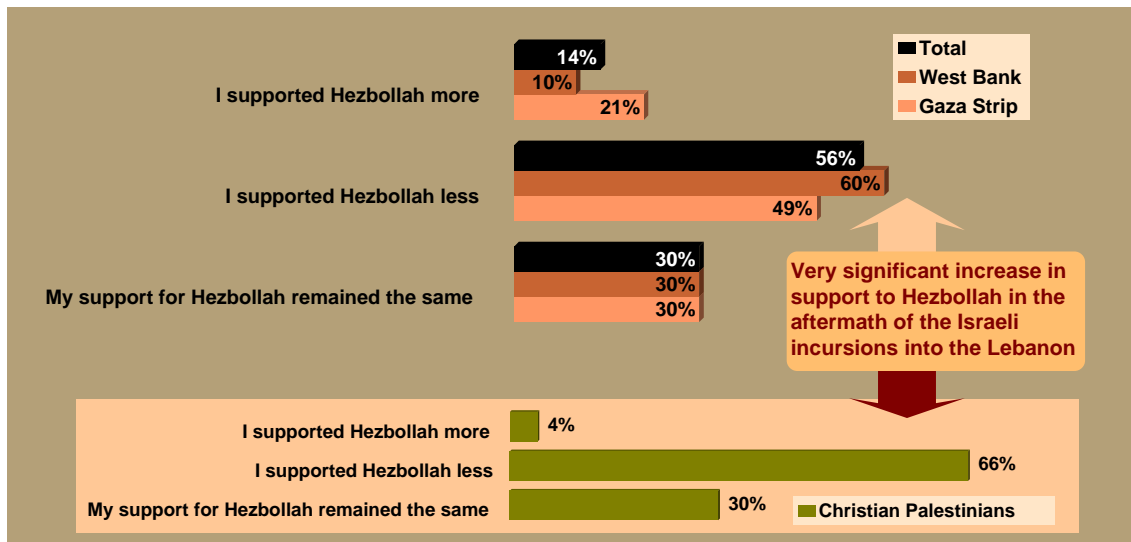
As support for Hezbollah among Palestinians is not exactly a “natural alliance” since Hezbollah is composed of Shiites, while the Palestinians in the oPt are either Sunni or Christian, interviewees were asked about their support for Hezbollah prior to the Israeli incursions and attacks on the Lebanon. As overviewed in the figure below, in general, 56% of the respondents said that they supported Hezbollah less before the outbreak of the conflict, 14% said that they supported Hezbollah more before the latest conflict, while 30% said that their support for Hezbollah has remained unchanged. As for the Christian respondents, the increase of support for Hezbollah in the past few weeks is even more significant as 66% of the respondents admit that they supported Hezbollah less before the Israeli incursions and attacks on the Lebanon.

There are also differences in the responses of West Bank and Gaza Strip respondents. For example, whereas 60% of Westbankers supported Hezbollah less before the current



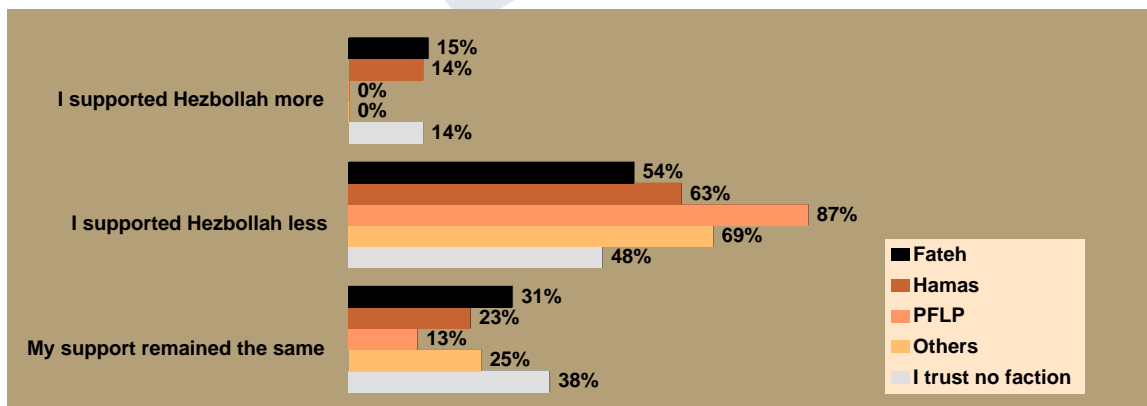
crisis, this is the case for 49% of the Gazans. Also, whereas 21% of Gazans supported Hezbollah more before the most recent conflict, this is so for 10% of the Westbankers.

Figure 24: Support for Hezbollah prior to the Israeli incursions and attacks on the Lebanon



Again, the evolution in support for Hezbollah since the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah varies significantly according to the factional preference of the respondents. More specifically, 87% of PFLP supporters compared to 63% of Hamas supporters, 54% of Fateh supporters, and 48% of those who do not trust any Palestinian faction admitted that they supported Hezbollah less before the Israeli incursions and attacks on the Lebanon. Interestingly, about the same percentage of Fateh supporters (15%), Hamas supporters (14%), and those who do not trust any Palestinian faction (14%) specified that they supported Hezbollah more before the still on-going hostilities.

Figure 25: Support for Hezbollah prior to the Israeli incursions and attacks on the Lebanon according to factional trust



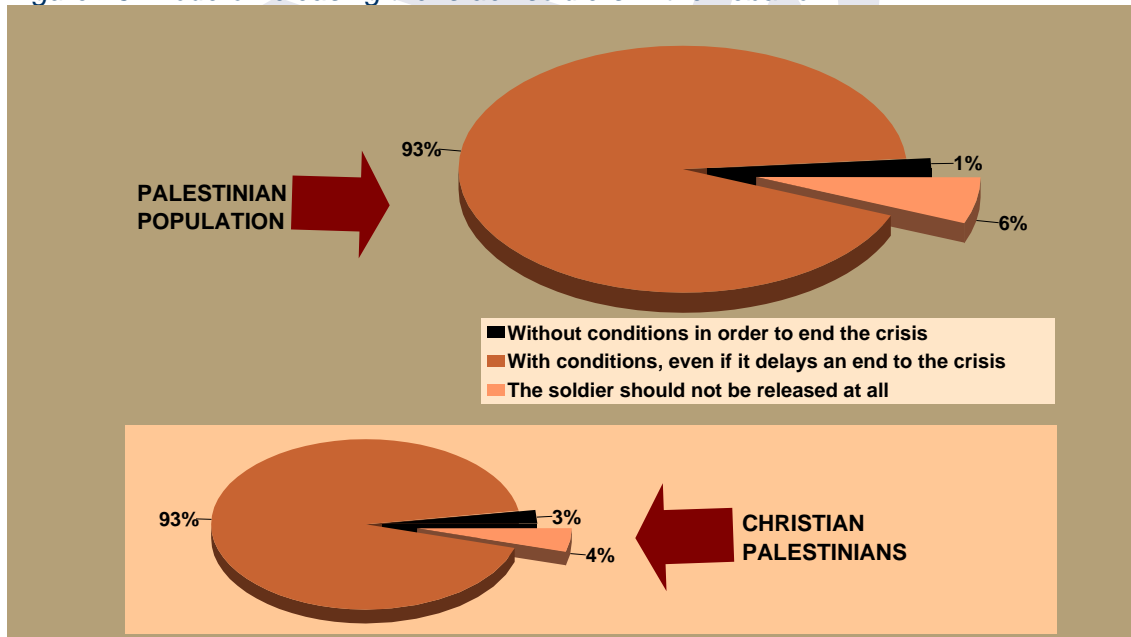


As was the case concerning the kidnapped Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip, interviewees were asked what the mode of releasing the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers in the Lebanon should be. Once more, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (93%) feels that the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers should be conditional, even if it entails that it will take longer for the current crisis to end. Only 1% of the respondents believe that the two kidnapped soldiers should be released unconditionally, and 6% do not want to see these two soldiers released at all.

The opinions of Christian Palestinians are very similar on the issue of the release of the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers as an equal 93% of the Christian respondents believe that these soldiers should not be released unconditionally, even if this means a delay in the end of the current crisis.

This widespread belief among Palestinians of all segments of Palestinian society that the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers should not be released unconditionally does not bode good hopes for the current diplomatic efforts of the international community to cease the violence between Israel and Hezbollah. The draft UN resolution as agreed upon by France and the US calls for an ‘unconditional release’ of the two soldiers, which is likely to be rejected by Hezbollah and which, apparently, does not enjoy any popular support in the Arab streets, whether among Muslims or Christians.

Figure 26: Mode of releasing the Israeli soldiers in the Lebanon



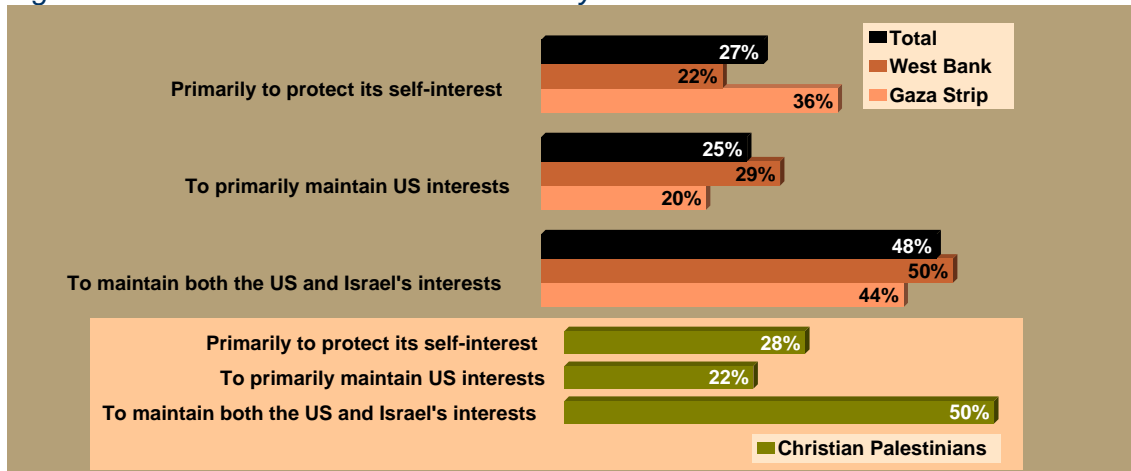
B. Israel and the US

Interviewees were also asked what, in their opinion, is the reason behind Israel’s military attacks on the Lebanon. As overviewed below, in general 27% believe that Israel’s attacks on Israel are primarily meant to protect its self-interest, 25% believe that these



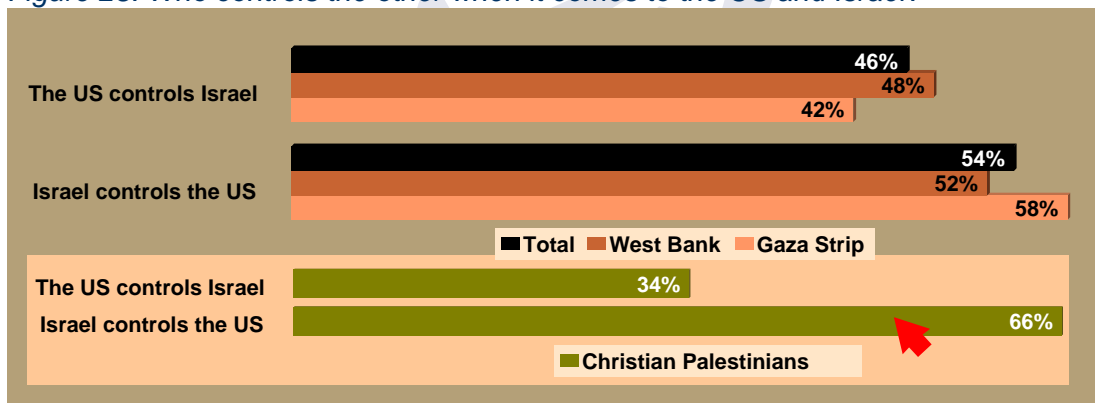
attacks primarily maintain US interests, while 48% think that these military attacks are primarily aimed at protecting both the US and Israel's interests. The views of Christian Palestinians barely differ from those of the general oPt population sample. There are, however, significant differences in opinions on this issue according to the region of residence of the respondents. More specifically, a higher percentage of Gazans (36%) than Westbankers (22%) believe that Israel primarily attacks Lebanon to protect its self-interest. Conversely, a higher percentage of Westbankers (29%) than Gazans (20%) think that Israel's military attacks on the Lebanon are primarily meant to serve US interests.

Figure 27: The reason behind Israel's military attacks on the Lebanon



Concerning these US-Israeli interests and relations, a small majority of 54% of the respondents believe that Israel controls the US, while the remaining 46% think that the US controls Israel. The perception that Israel controls the US is more pronounced in the Gaza Strip (58%) than it is in the West Bank (52%). However, this view seems to be most widely held among Christian Palestinians as 66% believe that Israel controls the US.

Figure 28: Who controls the other when it comes to the US and Israel?



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