

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Are Future Party members currently at risk of harm by Hezbollah? If so, to what extent?**
- 2. Is Danbo an area of particular safety/risk for such people?**
- 3. Might active Future Party members be refused protection by the authorities from harm because of their political allegiances?**

RESPONSE

Executive Summary

Reports of clashes between supporters of Hezbollah (party of God; also Hizbollah, Hizbullah, etc) and supporters of the Future Party (*Tayyar Al Mustaqbal*; generally referred to as the Future Movement and also as the Future Current) have appeared regularly during 2008 with major outbreaks of violence reportedly occurring in January 2008 and May 2008 in Beirut. The recent May 2008 clashes in Beirut ended as a victory for Hezbollah and its pro Syrian opposition allies Amal (a sometime rival Shiite party) and the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP). Hezbollah and its allies reportedly occupied Future Movement strongholds in west-Beirut and destroyed certain Future Movement offices before withdrawing (though it should be noted that, according to the International Crisis Group, “there were differences between the more provocative Amal militants and more disciplined Hizbollah fighters who, in some cases, went so far as to protect Sunni religious sites”). The Lebanese army reportedly remained neutral during the conflict for fear of splitting along confessional lines. The predominantly Christian supporters of Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), nominally aligned with Hezbollah, are also reported to have sat on the sidelines of the conflict (for an overview of the May 2008 violence, see: International Crisis Group 2008,

Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward, Middle East Briefing no. 23, 15 May – Attachment 1; for background on the various political groupings, see: 'Q&A: Political crisis in Lebanon' 2008, *Al Jazeera*, 11 July <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/05/200861517149518972.html> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 24; Political Parties in Lebanon' (undated), Arab Media Watch website <http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw/CountryBackgrounds/Lebanon/PoliticalPartiesinLebanon/tabid/171/Default.aspx> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 25; and: Yadav, S. 2008, 'Lebanon's Post-Doha Political Theater', *Middle East Report Online*, 23 July <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072308.html> – Accessed 29 August 2008 – Attachment 26; for the January 2008 violence in Beirut, see: Ghaddar, H. 2008, 'Drawing a political map', *NOW Lebanon*, 29 January <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=28798> – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 38).

Sources vary on the number of persons killed during this period and information specifying casualties in Beirut with regard to the political affiliations of those hurt or killed proved difficult to find. On 12 May 2008 *The Daily Star* reported that, according to a "security source", "42 people [had] been killed and 164 wounded across the country". On 13 May 2008 an *Inter Press Service* report stated that: "At least 38 people were killed and 30 injured in the recent gun battles pitting opposition Shi'ite Amal and Hezbollah fighters against members of the Sunni Future Movement". A later *Daily Star* report, of 7 August 2008, reported that the May 2008 violence "left 67 people dead". On the treatment of captured Future Movement fighters Human Rights Watch reported that: "Opposition gunmen also detained suspected members of pro-government groups. In most cases, opposition forces transferred those they detained to the Lebanese army a few hours later, but a number of individuals were held for days in incommunicado detention". Many of the Future Movement fighters who took part in the conflict were reportedly bussed down from the region of Akkar. A *New York Times* report may be of interest insofar as it relates the claims of "Hussein al-Haj Obaid" who "was one of many Sunni men who drove to Beirut after hearing that Hezbollah was attacking the offices of his political patron". Mr Obaid reportedly ran into trouble at a checkpoint with Shia militia "– who recognized him as a Sunni from his northern accent – opened fire on the car, riddling it with bullets and killing Mr. Obaid's young nephew, Abdo". Mr Obaid is then said to have "endured two and a half days of torture". Later in the report it is related that Mr Obaid "speaks English with a strong Australian accent, a legacy of 13 years he spent in that country" (for estimates of the number of persons killed or wounded in the violence, see: Abdallah, H. 2008, 'Day 5 of Lebanese Fighting: Light Clashes Continue in Druze Areas', *Al-Jazeera*: Cross-Cultural Understanding website, source: *Daily Star*, 12 May <http://www.ccun.org/News/2008/May/12%20n/Day%205%20of%20Lebanese%20Fighting%20Light%20Clashes%20Continue%20in%20Druze%20Areas.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 3; Alami, M. 2008, 'Hezbollah's street fight just a first step', *Asia Times Online*, 13 May http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JE13Ak02.html – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 2; Alami, M. 2008, "'Lack of policy" could spell March 14 Force's demise', *Daily Star*, source: *Inter Press Service*, 7 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=94847 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 29; Human Rights Watch 2008, 'Lebanon: Political Talks in Qatar Should Address Abuses', 18 May <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/18/lebanol18865.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 5; for information on the location of Danbo see: 'Danbo' (undated), Linking Lebanon website <http://www.linkingLebanon.com/villagedetails.asp?id=248> – Accessed 21

August 2008 – Attachment 11; for the presence of Akkar men in the Beirut fighting, see: Idriss, S. interviewed by Christoff, S. 2008, 'Lebanon in crisis: an interview with editor Samah Idriss', Electronic Lebanon website, 10 May
<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9527.shtml> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 50; and: Fielder, L. 2008, 'No going back', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no.897, 15/21 May
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/897/re62.htm> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 52; Worth, R.F. & Bakri, N. 2008, 'Hezbollah Ignites a Sectarian Fuse in Lebanon', *New York Times*, 18 May
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/world/middleeast/18lebanon.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 55).

The Beirut violence is also said to have affected non-combatant Beirut residents. The aforementioned Human Rights Watch report states that: "Members of the opposition groups – Hezbollah, Amal, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) – used small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs, often referred to as B7s) in densely populated areas of Beirut." And that: "These attacks killed and wounded numerous civilians" (Human Rights Watch 2008, 'Lebanon: Political Talks in Qatar Should Address Abuses', 18 May
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/18/lebanon18865.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008– Attachment 5).

An outbreak of violence is also reported to have occurred in the Akkar capital of Halba during May 2008 with pro-government Future Movement supporters attacking the Hezbollah aligned Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP). This northern outbreak of violence may be of interest insofar as Danbo is located near Halba in the northern region known as Akkar. A number of sources have reported that Future Movement supporters attacked SSNP supporters in Halba in May 2008 with some sources reporting the attack as an atrocity perpetrated by the Future Movement. According to the *Ya Libnan* news service "3 members of the Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and 9 members of Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) were killed". A *New York Times* report listed the incident as a Future Movement revenge attack following Hezbollah's occupation of Beirut. According to the *New York Times* report: "an angry mob set fire to the offices of a militia allied with Hezbollah and killed 11 of its members" (for information on Danbo's proximity to Halba in Akkar, see: Calò, C., De Nardi, S., Faussone, L.G, Genisio, B. & Pallotto, P. 2008, 'Islamic Microfinance: Alternative Development in Northern Lebanon', *Associazione per lo Sviluppo di Strumenti Alternativi e di Innovazione Finanziaria*, 19 June
<http://www.moe.gov.lb/pdf/Land%20Degradation/National%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Combat%20Desertification/Chapter%20III.pdf> – Accessed 1 September 2008– Attachment 20; 'Saturday's live coverage of the war in Lebanon' 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 10 May
http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/_1415_governmen.php – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 54; Worth, R.F. & Bakri, N. 2008, 'Hezbollah Ignites a Sectarian Fuse in Lebanon', *New York Times*, 18 May
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/world/middleeast/18lebanon.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 55).

Two suburbs of the northern city of Tripoli have seen violence throughout 2008 with clashes between local Alawites (reported to be pro-Syrian and aligned with Hezbollah) and local Sunnis (reported to be anti-Syrian and aligned with Saad Hariri's Future Movement). A *Daily Star* report of June 2008 observes that "Fighting and grenade blasts are commonplace between the neighboring districts of Bab al-Tebbaneh – where most residents are Sunni supporters of Premier Fouad Siniora – and Jabal Mohsen, largely supporters of the

parliamentary opposition”. In August 2008 it was reported that: “Future Movement MPs are blaming Hizbollah, which heads the opposition, of fomenting the violence in Tripoli by providing arms and training to the Allawites of Jabal Mohsen”. A previous research response, *Research Response LBN33419*, provides background on the differing frames through which various news reports have presented this ongoing conflict; with some reports presenting the conflict as sectarian violence while others understand the confrontations to be driven by national political allegiances and/or local issues (sources vary on the question of whether Alawites see themselves, and/or are perceived by others, as Shia, and the response surveys the range of views available). May 2008 violence in Tripoli also saw “pro-government demonstrators [burn] the offices of the pro-Syrian Baath Party”. According to *BBC News* demonstrators “stamped on posters of Syrian President Bashar Assad and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah” and “could also be seen throwing furniture and files from the Baath offices and a local opposition politician’s office” (for Jabal Mohsen violence, see: ‘Army says deadly clashes in Tripoli broke out at checkpoint’ 2008, *Daily Star*, 19 July http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=94297 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 31; for the August report, see: Blanford, N. 2008, ‘Fighting rages on in Tripoli’, *The National*, 26 July <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080726/FOREIGN/989642518/0/BUSINESS> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 66; for extensive background, see: RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33419*, 27 June – Attachment 59; for Jabal Mohsen and the Syrian Baath Party attacks, see: ‘Lebanese army sends troops north’ 2008, *BBC News*, 11 May http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7394395.stm – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 83; ‘Troops patrol Beirut after Hezbollah pullout’ 2008, *The Age*, source: *Reuters*, 11 May <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/troops-patrol-beirut-after-hezbollah-pullout/2008/05/11/1210444233301.html> – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 84).

Both Akkar and Tripoli are reported to be areas which have been dominated by the majority Sunni population. Future Movement aligned political groupings swept the area’s available seats in the recent 2005 national elections. Hezbollah is generally reported to have very little influence in these northern areas. Nonetheless, some reports have appeared in recent months which claim that Hezbollah is attempting to expand its influence in the north via cooperation with certain Sunni Salafist groups. The relationship between these groups and Hezbollah is, however, complex and reports vary on the extent to which certain northern Sunni Salafist groups may be in cooperation with Hezbollah while others may be cooperating with the Future Movement (for the Sunni Future Movement domination of Tripoli and Akkar, see: European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, pp.32-34 and 64 http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_observ/Lebanon/final_report.pdf – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 41; for the confessional demography of the north, see: ‘Mapping of Vulnerabilities in Lebanon (SE-1)’ 2008, Lebanon Support website, June [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/\\$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf) – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 19; and: Bluhm, M. 2008, ‘Hizbullah “botched” bid to win over Sunnis’, *Daily Star*, 21 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95242 – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 40; for reports that Hezbollah may be attempting to increase its influence in the north, see: ‘Sunni group gives “evidence” of Hezbollah security activities in north Lebanon’ 2008, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Al-Arabiya TV*, Dubai, in Arabic (19 August 2008), 21 August – Attachment 17; Phares, W. 2008,

‘Hezbollah’s network confirms terror goals’, *Middle East Times*, 20 May
http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/05/20/Hezbollahs_network_confirms_terror_goals/3372/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 15; Smith, W.T. 2008, ‘Hezbollah ‘Five-times’ Stronger Than It Was in Israeli War’, *Middle East Times*, 15 August
http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/08/15/Hezbollah_five-times_stronger_than_it_was_in_israeli_war/4107/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 16; and: Phares, W. 2008, ‘Special Report: Hezbollah Signs Pact with Salafis’, *Middle East Times*, 19 August
http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/08/19/special_report_Hezbollah_signs_pact_with_salafis/3955/ – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 46).

Also of interest may be the conflict which took place in 2007 between the Sunni Salafist group Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army in the vicinity of the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp which neighbours the Akkar township of Bebnin. Fatah al-Islam had based itself in the Nahr al-Bared camp and a number of soldiers from Bebnin died in the fighting. Neighbouring Akkar areas also suffered from Fatah al-Islam rocket attacks (for the Nahr al-Bared conflict see: Ghaddar, H. 2007, ‘Bebnin’s sacrifice’, *NOW Lebanon*, 29 August
<http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=11350> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 61; for the *Naharnet* rocket attack report, see: ‘War for Burrows at Nahr al-Bared Follows Fall of Fatah al-Islam’s HQ’ 2007, *Naharnet*, 19 July
<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/0/57680EBFB95F8745C225731D004E5386?OpenDocument> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 65).

Turning to the issue of state protection it may be of interest that Lebanon’s police force (known as the Internal Security Force or ISF; and also as the Interior Security Force; or *Forces de Sécurité Intérieure* or FSI) is generally reported to be dominated by Sunnis and sympathetic to the Future Movement. Prior to 2005 the police, or ISF, was reportedly divided along roughly equal confessional lines but in the years which followed the ISF has doubled in size taking in a vastly Sunni stream of recruits. The ISF is also said to have been transformed in recent years from a marginalized instrument of Syrian occupation into a better armed, better resourced, and better trained institution, with an anti-Syrian posture. This noted, several sources also relate that Hezbollah is beyond the control of the ISF to some extent, and it continues to be reported that Hezbollah is a law unto itself in the areas it controls (for the equal confessional mix of the army and the Sunnification of the police, see: Mooney, W.K. 2007, ‘Stabilizing Lebanon: Peacekeeping or Nation-Building’, *Parameters*, Autumn, pp.36-37 <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/07autumn/mooney.pdf> – Accessed 25 August 2008 – Attachment 73; for further information on police Sunnification and increased resources and manpower, see: Ryan, B. 2007, ‘Securing Internal Security’, *NOW Lebanon*, 12 November <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=19296> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 74; Stack, M.K. 2006, ‘Sunni forces in Lebanon swell’, *The Seattle Times*, 1 December
http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2003456196_Lebanon01.html – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 77; Mackinnon, M. 2006, ‘West helps Lebanon build militia to fight Hezbollah’, Lebanonwire website, source: *Globe & Mail*, 1 December
<http://www.Lebanonwire.com/0612MLN/06120128GNM.asp> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 76; for information on the ability of Hezbollah to operate beyond the law at some times and in some places, see: ‘Is Hezbollah untouchable?’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 2 May
http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/is_Hezbollah_un.php – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 72; and section 3.6 to 3.8 of: UK Home Office 2006, *Operational Guidance Note: Lebanon*, 20 September – Attachment 69; see also: DIMIA Country

Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No 362/02 – Treatment of former detainees by Hezbollah*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 3 December 2002), 5 December – Attachment 79).

1. Are Future Party members currently at risk of harm by Hezbollah? If so, to what extent?

Reports of clashes between Hezbollah (party of God; also Hizbollah, Hizbullah, etc) and Lebanon's Future Party (*Tayyar Al Mustaqbal*; generally referred to as the Future Movement and also as the Future Current) have appeared regularly during 2008 with major outbreaks of violence reportedly occurring in January 2008 and May 2008 in Beirut. Information on the nature and extent of the violence, along with background, follows below under the following subheadings:

- [Background to the Future Movement and politics in Lebanon](#)
- [The violence of May 2008](#)
- [Recent clashes: June to August 2008](#)
- [The violence of January 2008](#)

Background to the Future Movement and politics in Lebanon

A brief background note to the current political situation was published by *Al Jazeera* on 11 July 2008 and is supplied as Attachment 24. The *Al Jazeera* backgrounder covers the manner in which Saad al-Hariri's predominantly Sunni Future Movement has come to lead the government March 14 coalition (named after the date of the 2005 anti-Syrian demonstrations which followed the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, the father of Saad) while the predominantly Shiite Hezbollah, headed by Hassan Nasrallah, has come to lead the opposition March 8 movement (named after the date of the 2005 pro-Syrian demonstrations). "After a general election in June 2005, Saad al-Hariri had the option of becoming Lebanon's prime minister (a post reserved for a Sunni Muslim under Lebanon's political system). He instead appointed Fouad Siniora, a former finance minister". Some pertinent extracts follow:

What is the background to the power struggle in Lebanon?

The incident that arguably solidified the Lebanese into two opposing camps was the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, a former Lebanese prime minister, in February 2005.

During his second term as prime minister, al-Hairi allegedly made it clear to Syria that he wanted Lebanon to manage its own affairs.

At the time, Syrian security forces and intelligence agents were maintaining a physical presence in Lebanon, which had begun in 1978 during Lebanon's civil war.

Accusations surfaced after al-Hariri's assassination that Syria had a hand in the killing.

Thousands of people took to the streets of Riad al-Solh Square in downtown Beirut on March 8, 2005, to show their support for Syria, while making it clear that it was time for Damascus to re-assess its presence in Lebanon.

The demonstration was organised by Hezbollah, the Shia organisation and armed resistance movement linked to Iran and Syria.

Thousands of people filled Martyrs' Square in the capital less than a week later, accusing Syria of killing al-Hariri and calling for Damascus to pull its forces out of Lebanon.

This led to the creation of the March 14 movement, in almost direct opposition to that of March 8.

Syria pulled its troops out of Lebanon in April 2005 and Lebanon's political parties coalesced around the March 8 and March 14 movements.

Which parties are involved?

The March 14 Forces, the majority bloc in the Lebanese government, is ranged against the opposition March 8 and Free Patriotic Movement.

The main players in the majority are the Future Movement (al-Mustaqbal), the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the al-Kataeb (Phalange) party and the Lebanese Forces, although there are many others.

The Future Movement, led by Saad al-Hariri, the son of Rafiq, is the largest party within the majority.

After a general election in June 2005, Saad al-Hariri had the option of becoming Lebanon's prime minister (a post reserved for a Sunni Muslim under Lebanon's political system). He instead appointed Fouad Siniora, a former finance minister.

Hezbollah, a Shia Muslim organisation, is by far the largest group within the March 8 opposition, but Amal, its former rival, is a key partner.

The Free Patriotic Movement, a mixed organisation which advocates a secular future for Lebanon, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hezbollah in October 2005, although it is not part of the March 8 coalition.

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party is also sympathetic to Lebanon's political opposition ('Q&A: Political crisis in Lebanon' 2008, *Al Jazeera*, 11 July <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/05/200861517149518972.html> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 24).

The following sources provide information on other prominent member parties and leaders. For the Future Movement led March 14 government coalition information can be found on Walid Jumblatt's Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the Christian Qornet Shehwan gathering, and Samir Geagea's Christian Lebanese Forces. For the Hezbollah led March 8 opposition information is supplied on Nabih Berri's Shiite Amal Movement and the two nominally associated March 8 parties: Ali Kanso's Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and Michel Aoun's predominantly Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) (for an overview of each party, see: 'Political Parties in Lebanon' (undated), Arab Media Watch website <http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw/CountryBackgrounds/Lebanon/PoliticalPartiesinLebanon/tabid/171/Default.aspx> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 25; for an extensive update on inter-party relations, see: Yadav, S. 2008, 'Lebanon's Post-Doha Political Theater', *Middle East Report Online*, 23 July <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072308.html> – Accessed 29 August 2008 – Attachment 26; for further information on the SSNP see: 'Hariri Denies Having Militia; Facts Prove Opposite' 2008, Al Manar website, 14 May <http://www.almanar.com.lb/NewsSite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=43522&language=en> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 27).

The EU Election Observation Mission to Lebanon 2005 reported as follows of the 2005 elections noting the manner in which the Hariri-led group won a governing majority while Hezbollah emerged as the most prominent opposition group, even though “[t]he two main Shiite political forces, Amal and Hezbollah, ...had struck an electoral alliance with the Hariri-Jumblatt coalition during the electoral process”:

Parliamentary elections stretched out on four consecutive Sundays. They took place in Beirut on 29 May, in southern Lebanon on 5 June, in Mount Lebanon and the Bekaa on 12 June, in northern Lebanon on 19 June. A week ahead of the first day of elections, pre-electoral bargaining and manoeuvring confirmed a new configuration at national level. On the one hand, in Beirut, Mount- Lebanon and the North, the Hariri-Jumblatt front decided to enter an alliance with Christian political figures and groups close to Patriarch Sfeir, the Lebanese Forces and Qornet Shehwan. On the other hand, in Beirut, the South and the Bekaa, it decided to strike an alliance with the two main Shiite political groups Amal and Hezbollah.

...A new majority has emerged, comprising two large Parliamentary blocs led by Hariri (36 MPs) and Jumblatt (15 MPs), allied to Qornet Shehwan (6 MPs), the Lebanese Forces (6 MPs) and other small parties and coalitions. The FPM along with its allies (21 MPs) had at first declared itself to be the new Parliamentary opposition. The two main Shiite political forces, Amal and Hezbollah, who had struck an electoral alliance with the Hariri-Jumblatt coalition during the electoral process, have 15 and 14 MPs, respectively.

In these elections, older blocs were boosted (Hariri added ten MPs to his bloc, Hezbollah, two), while others shrunk or disappeared (Michel Murr’s bloc, the Baath, the SSNP or Sleiman Franjeh’s bloc), confirming the leverage Syria had in the past in supporting or limiting some political forces in Lebanon (European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, pp.32-34 and 64

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_observ/Lebanon/final_report.pdf – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 28).

The violence of May 2008

Clashes between members of Lebanon’s Future Movement and members of Hezbollah recently took place in Beirut during May 2008. A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) provides an overview of the manner in which Hizbollah occupied the Future Movement’s west Beirut strongholds. The occupation is said to have developed as a response to the Future Movement led government’s attempt to remove elements of Hizbollah’s security apparatus. The report concludes that: “the situation remains perilously fluid. Even if fighting appears to have receded, communal animosity has intensified, the craving for revenge is powerful, and there is good reason to fear a second round”.

Hizbollah’s takeover of much of West Beirut began as a cost-of-living strike on 7 May 2008. Yet the course of events, their speed and ultimately violent turn exposed the true stakes. For almost four years, Lebanon has been in a crisis alternatively revolving around the government’s composition, its program, the international tribunal investigating Rafiq al-Hariri’s assassination, the choice of a new president and the electoral law. All attempts at peaceful resolution having failed, it has reverted, more dangerously than ever, to its origins: an existential struggle over Hizbollah’s arms. The government’s 14 May decision to reverse the measures – removal of the airport security chief and questioning Hizbollah’s parallel telephone system, a key part of its military apparatus, precipitated the crisis – is welcome as is the Arab League-mediated solution. The onus is now on all Lebanese parties to agree a package deal that breaks the political logjam and restricts how Hizbollah can use its military strength without disarming it for now.

No party can truly win in this increasingly volatile lose-lose confrontation. Hizbollah clearly prevailed in the military showdown, demonstrating its ability to overrun any opponent. Politically, however, the balance sheet is far different. Outside its own constituency, it is seen more than ever as a Shiite militia brutally defending its parochial interests rather than those of a self-proclaimed national resistance. The blatantly confessional aspect of the struggle has deepened the sectarian divide, something the Shiite movement long sought to avoid. Hizbollah's principal Christian ally, General Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, appears deeply embarrassed. Although Lebanon's intense polarisation might enable him to retain most of his followers in the short term, over time his alliance with Hizbollah will become ever more difficult to justify. The government has remained in place and will be able to continue rallying domestic and international support.

But the principal Sunni party, Saad al-Hariri's Future Movement, has equal reason to worry. The March 14 coalition was forced to back down and revoke its controversial measures. The Sunni community is bewildered, stunned by its inability to resist Hizbollah's three-day takeover and angry at a leadership accused of letting it down. Pressure on the heads of the Future Movement to bolster its military capacity will grow; simultaneously, some militants will be drawn to more radical, possibly jihadi movements. Its other allies, notably Walid Jumblatt, the Druze leader, appear demoralised and defeated. The army, too, has been damaged, unable to restrain the opposition and harshly criticised by the ruling March 14 coalition as well as many ordinary Sunnis. The risks of an escalating sectarian conflict are real and dangerous.

...From the outset, the dispute revolved around...the government's 6 May 2008 decisions to reassign the pro-Hizbollah Beirut airport's security chief and investigate Hizbollah's independent telephone network. In response to this unprecedented challenge to its military apparatus, Hizbollah sought to intimidate the government and March 14 coalition and force their surrender through a show of strength, taking to the streets notwithstanding the violent outcome of previous such attempts. Originally, the opposition planned a massive demonstration which was to run through the heart of Beirut's volatile, confessionally-mixed neighbourhoods before ending up at Hamra, the stronghold of the Future Movement – the principal Sunni party and March 14 heavyweight.

...Together with Amal and several smaller pro-Syrian parties, Hizbollah hardened its stance. It organised a so-called civil disobedience movement, which led to the closure of Beirut's airport and major roadways. On 7 May, the capital witnessed increasing provocations and violence. Then, in the wake of a press conference by Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbollah's secretary general, the protest movement turned into a deliberate and well-planned operation to take over West Beirut. The fighting pitted Hizbollah's and Amal's Shiite militias against Sunnis. With far superior equipment, training and discipline, the former overwhelmed their rivals, taking control in less than twelve hours of West Beirut, the section of the capital that includes government headquarters, known as the Sérail, and the residences of many leading March 14 members (such as Saad al-Hariri and Walid Jumblatt) and that is home to the Future Movement's middle and upper-class constituency.

...Although the army protected several key sites (most notably the Sérail, as well as Hariri's and Jumblatt's domiciles), the Future Movement was forced to shut down its main media offices, which were looted or set ablaze. While the Shiite movements' objectives appeared primarily political, the behaviour of their rank and file struck a clear-cut sectarian chord: armed militants hurled abuse at key Sunni religious symbols.

...According to several witnesses, there were differences between the more provocative Amal militants and more disciplined Hizbollah fighters who, in some cases, went so far as to protect Sunni religious sites.

...In his press conference, Nasrallah made clear what had largely remained unspoken: at its core, the crisis pertained to the status of Hizbollah's weapons. For the first time since the onset of the long crisis, the government had taken aim at Hizbollah's military apparatus through two decisions:

- On 6 May, it reassigned the head of security at Beirut's airport, Wafiq Shuqayr, a general officer accused by March 14 forces of having failed in his duties and believed to be sharing information with Hizbollah. In particular, Shuqayr was faulted for allowing Hizbollah to operate a system of listening devices and cameras it had set up to monitor runway 17, from where officials fly out and where they land. This directly affected the movement's control over a strategic location that is vital to the flow of people and probably to various types of trafficking. Hizbollah's reaction to Shuqayr's removal suggests he played a central role in this regard.
- The council of ministers challenged the "legality and constitutionality" of Hizbollah's independent telephone system, described by the movement as an indispensable component of its military apparatus which ensures the secrecy of internal communications and the efficiency of its command and control. It is believed to have been a cornerstone of Hizbollah's military performance during the July 2006 war with Israel. For the government and March 14 forces, the problem was not only the network itself but also its recent expansion and the fear that it would be used – either by Hizbollah or Syria – for domestic surveillance.

...Although many in the majority evoked a possible coup, that does not seem to have been Hizbollah's goal. Its attacks appear to have been undertaken for other objectives: to send the March 14 forces an unequivocal message not to touch its weapons and prove its military superiority and capacity to overthrow the government if need be.

...Operating at lightning speed, the Shiite movement quickly conquered most key sites; it subsequently handed over some neighbourhoods to the military, which studiously remained neutral throughout the fighting – largely out of fear that its multi-confessional army could splinter if forced to take sides. The Siniora government has not been toppled, a sure sign that Hizbollah understands the perils of such an enterprise as well as the enormous challenge of ruling either against or without Sunnis – and with virtually no international support or recognition.

Many Sunni fighters and ordinary citizens, shocked at their lack of equipment and weaponry, feel abandoned or even betrayed by Saad al-Hariri. According to a resident of Beirut's Tariq al-Jedida neighbourhood, there were only 1,500 fighters, armed solely with pistols; in reaction, residents of this neighbourhood, a Future Movement stronghold, are said to have torn down a pro-Hariri poster out of rage. The party's rank and file, furious at the army's performance, can be expected to press for their community's accelerated militarisation; its embarrassed leadership may have little choice but to oblige.

Alternatively, the Sunni community could turn to more radical Islamist movements. The three days that led to West Beirut's fall inescapably will leave deep scars and have long-term effects among Sunnis, with two likely consequences: on the one hand, the sectarian radicalisation of a rank and file shocked by its own weakness and its perception of a powerful Shiite threat; on the other hand, diminished control exercised over the Sunni base by the Future Movement, seen by many as responsible for the debacle.

...Among March 14's Christian and Druze elements, most notably Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces and Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party – which suffered a humiliating blow in its own stronghold – the push to rearm also is likely to intensify.

...According to a source close to the movement, [Hizbollah] believes that of March 14's three sources of power (government control, foreign support and the country's sectarian divide), only the third remains truly effective. In its view, the government no longer governs and the majority's Western as well as Arab allies proved unable to affect events on the ground. The growing confessional polarisation, however, represents a more direct and worrisome threat.

...Even as Beirut was ablaze, there were some signs of compromise. An agreement apparently was reached on 15 May, the day after an Arab League delegation headed by the Qatari prime minister, Sheikh Hamas bin Jassem, and Secretary General Amr Moussa met in Beirut with parties of the majority and opposition. First, the government revoked its controversial decisions, paving the way for a possible return to normalcy in the capital and elsewhere. Then, the Arab delegation announced a multi-point accord which, inter alia, provided for:

- a return to the situation that prevailed prior to 5 May 2008, including the opening of the airport, ports and other major roads and the withdrawal of armed elements;
- resumption of a national dialogue aimed at electing a new president (Michel Suleiman, the current commander in chief of the army), forming a national unity government and reforming the electoral law;
- initiation of a national dialogue on means to strengthen state institutions;
- a commitment to refrain from violence; and a de-escalation of the war of words and in particular a halt to sectarian-based attacks and accusations of betrayal.

This is a welcome development which lays the basis for a broader compromise. Still, the situation remains perilously fluid. Even if fighting appears to have receded, communal animosity has intensified, the craving for revenge is powerful, and there is good reason to fear a second round (International Crisis Group 2008, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, Middle East Briefing no.23, 15 May – Attachment 1).

The following *Inter Press Service* report on the violence and casualties which occurred during this time was carried on *The Asia Times Online*. According to this report: "At least 38 people were killed and 30 injured in the recent gun battles pitting opposition Shi'ite Amal and Hezbollah fighters against members of the Sunni Future Movement, which is part of the majority March 14 alliance in government".

At least 38 people were killed and 30 injured in the recent gun battles pitting opposition Shi'ite Amal and Hezbollah fighters against members of the Sunni Future Movement, which is part of the majority March 14 alliance in government.

...Since the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 – allegedly at the hands of the Syrians – and the subsequent resignation of Shi'ite ministers from government, conflict between the opposition and majority factions has been brewing. The government comprises the Sunni Future Movement (headed by Saad Hariri, son of slain premier Hariri), the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the Christian Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb party.

...Tensions culminated in violence last Wednesday when protests called against difficult living conditions and high inflation turned into massive riots, with opposition Shi'ite Hezbollah and Amal forces fighting Sunni Future Movement members. The clashes were politically dovetailed on Thursday by a speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah denouncing the removal of Brigadier Wafic Shoucair from his post as head of airport security,

and the government's investigation into Hezbollah's independent telecommunication network.

Hezbollah's leader ominously called the cabinet's decisions a "declaration of war", and the echoing gunfire in the capital's mazy streets and posh neighborhoods seemed to confirm the announcement.

The Future Movement, clearly ill-prepared and poorly trained for combat, retreated in the face of armed opposition factions that managed to take control of Beirut in less than 48 hours, and surround the residences of Saad Hariri, PSP leader Walid Joumblat and the government building, which remain cordoned off by a protective buffer of Lebanese armed forces.

As the opposition forces advanced in Beirut, they systematically vandalized the property of majority figures and party members. A woman who gave her name only as Maya, a resident in the predominantly PSP area of Karakol Druze, witnessed the trashing of her parking lot by gunmen before the intervention of her neighbor, a Hezbollah member, who also prevented the militia men from entering the building. "It was extremely frightening, they actually intended to storm the building," said the mother of two toddlers.

Odette Alameh, who lives in the vicinity of Saad Hariri's residence, said her building was targeted by gunmen posted on the rooftops of a nearby construction site. The Future TV news offices were burned down by the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, which erected flags on the blackened remains of the besieged building.

Ahmad, a resident of the mostly Sunni Ain Mreisseh area, said a neighboring building was stormed at 3:30 am by militia men, allegedly leading to the removal of a Future Movement party member. Inter Press Service was unable, however, to confirm the information. Future Movement member of parliament Ammar Houry's apartment in the affluent Tallet Khayat area was ransacked by opposition gunmen, who, according to neighbors, also searched the building for weapons (Alami, M. 2008, 'Hezbollah's street fight just a first step', *Asia Times Online*, 13 May http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JE13Ak02.html – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 2).

According to a "security source" who spoke to Lebanon's *The Daily Star*: "From the day the unrest started, 42 people have been killed and 164 wounded across the country". The report provides the following coverage of the violence noting incidents in which Future Movement supporters were, variously, victims or perpetrators of the violence.

Five days of violence across Lebanon between government and opposition supporters has left at least 42 people dead, a security official told AFP Sunday.

"From the day the unrest started, 42 people have been killed and 164 wounded across the country," the official said, adding that the toll might rise as a result of clashes in Druze areas southeast of the capital.

...In Beirut, militants could no longer be seen on the streets and there was a heavy presence of army troops. However, some barricades put up by the opposition remained and the road to Beirut international airport was shut for the fifth straight day, paralyzing air traffic.

The opposition announced on Saturday it was ending its takeover of large swathes of West Beirut and handing over the situation to the Lebanese Army. However, a shooting at a funeral of a Future Movement supporter in the Beirut area of Tariq al-Jdeideh broke the silence in the capital, leading to the death of six people and the injuring more than 30 mourners.

A Lebanese Army spokesman said the owner of a scrap-metal shop near the route of the funeral procession had been arrested in connection with the shooting. The spokesman said the suspect, who was identified as Hussein al-Sabbagh, had been handed over to military police. The opposition denied any relation to Sabbagh.

Heavy clashes also took place on Saturday in Tripoli, where government supporters in the Sunni-dominated Tebaneh district exchanged rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine-gun fire with the opposition followers in the Alawite-dominated Jabal Muhsin area, security officials said.

The clashes were over by morning, when the Lebanese Army deployed on the streets between the warring factions.

One woman was killed.

Also in the North, fierce clashes in the Akkar region killed 14 people, including civilians, when Future Movement supporters attacked an office of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). "The headquarters of the [SSNP] in Halba fell to the Future Movement forces."

Security sources told The Daily Star on Sunday that the 14 casualties were 11 SSNP members and three Future Movement supporters (Abdallah, H. 2008, 'Day 5 of Lebanese Fighting: Light Clashes Continue in Druze Areas', Al-Jazeera: Cross-Cultural Understanding website, source: *Daily Star*, 12 May <http://www.ccun.org/News/2008/May/12%20n/Day%205%20of%20Lebanese%20Fighting%20Light%20Clashes%20Continue%20in%20Druze%20Areas.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 3).

Another *Daily Star* overview of the May 2008 violence, which appeared on 7 August 2008, reports that the May 2008 violence "left 67 people dead" (Alami, M. 2008, "Lack of policy" could spell March 14 Force's demise', *Daily Star*, source: Inter Press Service, 7 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=94847 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 29)

Definitive information on the number of persons killed during this period proved difficult to locate with a range of figures being reported. Information on casualties in Beirut and the political affiliations of those hurt or killed proved particularly difficult to find. The following information, collected on the *Ya Libnan* news website, provides an overview of the kinds of figures which were reported:

...22:26 the number of people killed in clashes between the t Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) gunmen in Akkar to 14, mostly SSNP members

...21:00 the total number of people killed since Wednesday has risen to 40

...19:00 Special to Ya Libnan : Mr. Gharzedine , a prominent member of the municipality of Aley was critically wounded in the clashes that took place yesterday between the PSP and Hezbollah and is still at the hospital . The Mayor of Aley Wajdi Murad and another member Mr. Chehayeb were also wounded but were already treated and have left the hospital

The clash took place yesterday at the 888 hill in Aley after Hezbollah kidnapped 4 people from Aley who are members in the Aley municipality . The whereabouts of the kidnapped are still unknown, but Hezbollah has confessed to the kidnapping. The son (15 years old) of one

of those that were kidnapped (Mr. Ghannam) was shot during the kidnapping and he is in critical condition at a hospital in the Chouf region.

As soon as the news of the kidnapping was received by the Mayor of Aley he quickly assembled a group of PSP fighters and went up to the 888 hill accompanied also by other members of the municipality to investigate the incident. As they reached the hill they were attacked by Hezbollah gunmen who wounded many of the PSP and municipality members . This developed into an armed clash. Unconfirmed reports stated that the clash resulted in the killing of 7 Hezbollah gunmen.

18:10 LBC TV : 3 members of the Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and 9 members of Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) were killed in the clashes that occurred in Akkar

...18:10 LBC TV: 3 members of the Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and 9 members of Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) were killed in the clashes that occurred in Akkar

...13:44 The Lebanese Army is attempting to reach the Tareeq al Jadeedad to enhance security after 6 people were reported dead and 35 injured during a funeral procession

...13:36 Violent armed clashes in the town of Adeel – Akar

...13:20 LBC TV : Total number of people killed during the funeral procession at the Tariq el Jadeedah has risen to 6 and a the number of people wounded has risen to 35 , some of them in critical condition

...12:32 The total number of people killed since the clashes on Wednesday between the of pro-government supporters and the Hezbollah -led opposition militias is 27

12:52 UAE's Al Arabiyeh TV : Preliminary information indicates that the fire at the funeral procession at the Tariq el Jadeedah in which 4 were killed and 12 injured originated from the Amal Movement militia

...12:45: Update : Four dead and 12 injured during the shooting on the funeral procession on the Tareeq al Jadeedah road

12:36 UAE's Al Arabiyeh TV : : One killed, 3 wounded in shooting on the funeral procession on the Tareeq al Jadeedah road

...12:16 Five people killed in the clashes between the Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) gunmen in Akkar ('Saturday's live coverage of the war in Lebanon' 2008, Ya Libnan website, 10 May http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/1415_governmen.php – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 4).

A *New York Times* report may be of interest insofar as it relates the claims of a man who claims to have been attacked by Shia militia after being recognized by his northern accent (the report later notes that the man's speech is also affected by an Australia accent later). The article reports the claims of "Hussein al-Haj Obaid" who "was one of many Sunni men who drove to Beirut after hearing that Hezbollah was attacking the offices of his political patron". Mr Obaid reportedly ran into trouble at a checkpoint with Shia militia "– who recognized him as a Sunni from his northern accent – opened fire on the car, riddling it with bullets and killing Mr. Obaid's young nephew, Abdo". Mr Obaid is then said to have "endured two and a half days of torture". The report goes on to note that Mr Obaid "speaks English with a strong Australian accent, a legacy of 13 years he spent in that country". The report also notes

sources who express the view that renewed conflict is now more likely given the animosity that the May 2008 conflict has engendered. While noting that “[m]uch of this violence began along factional lines, with some Sunni opposition members fighting alongside Shiites in the opposition militias”, the report finds that “with Christians on both sides sitting out the violence, the battles took on an increasingly sectarian tone”. Extracts follow:

For two and a half days, Hussein al-Haj Obaid lay on the floor of a darkened warehouse in west Beirut, blindfolded and terrified. Militiamen loyal to Hezbollah had kidnapped him at a checkpoint after killing his nephew right in front of him.

Throughout those awful days, as his kidnappers kicked and punched him, applied electrical shocks to his genitals and insulted him with sectarian taunts, he could hear the chatter of gunfire and the crash of rocket-propelled grenades outside, where Hezbollah and its allies were taking control of the capital.

He returned to this northern village only after family members won his release just over a week ago by threatening the kidnappers with retaliation. By that time Mr. Obaid, a Sunni Muslim, had gained a whole new way of seeing his Shiite countrymen and his native land.

“We cannot go back to how we lived with them before,” he said as he sat with relatives and friends at home here. “The blood is boiling here. Every boy here, his blood is boiling. They push us, they push us, they push us.”

Those feelings are being echoed throughout Lebanon. After almost a week of street battles that left scores dead and threatened to push the country into open war, long-simmering Sunni-Shiite tensions here have sharply worsened, in an ominous echo of the civil conflict in Iraq.

Hezbollah’s brief takeover of Beirut led to brutal counterattacks in northern Lebanon, where Sunni Muslims deeply resented the Shiite militant group’s display of power. The violence energized radical Sunni factions, including some affiliated with Al Qaeda, and extremist Sunni Web sites across the Arab world have been buzzing with calls for a jihad to avenge the wounded pride of Lebanese Sunnis.

...many Lebanese agree that the hardening of Sunni-Shiite animosities – reminiscent of the Muslim-Christian fault line during the country’s 15-year civil war – is likely to make any future conflict here more violent.

“The Sunni-Shiite conflict is in the open now, it’s been triggered and operationalized,” said Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. “This is a deep wound, and it’s going to have serious repercussions if it’s not immediately and seriously addressed.”

Lebanese political leaders have tried hard to avoid stirring sectarian sentiment, emphasizing the religious diversity of both the governing coalition and the Hezbollah-led opposition movement. In a speech delivered the day before Hezbollah supporters seized the capital, the group’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, went out of his way to deny that Sunni-Shiite tensions were an issue.

...Mr. Obaid was one of many Sunni men who drove to Beirut after hearing that Hezbollah was attacking the offices of his political patron, Mr. Hariri. On arriving in the city, he stopped at a checkpoint, where militiamen asked him where he was from.

He barely had time to answer, he said, before the men – who recognized him as a Sunni from his northern accent – opened fire on the car, riddling it with bullets and killing Mr. Obaid’s young nephew, Abdo.

...“They gave me a hard, hard time, brother,” said Mr. Obaid, who speaks English with a strong Australian accent, a legacy of 13 years he spent in that country.

“They did not even ask for my ID card, they just hear my voice,” Mr. Obaid said. “They treated us like animals, like animals.”

Meanwhile, as the street fighting went on in west Beirut on May 8 Mr. Hariri’s Sunni militia had proved to be largely mythical: its fighters were quickly thrashed. Some were given orders not to fight, so as to avoid a massacre.

...After the extent of Hezbollah’s victory dawned on May 9, revenge attacks began taking place outside the capital. In the mountains east of Beirut, Druse militiamen kidnapped three Hezbollah members, and the bodies of two of them were soon found outside a hospital, shot and stabbed. In northern town of Halba, an angry mob set fire to the offices of a militia allied with Hezbollah and killed 11 of its members.

Much of this violence began along factional lines, with some Sunni opposition members fighting alongside Shiites in the opposition militias.

But with Christians on both sides sitting out the violence, the battles took on an increasingly sectarian tone. And when Hezbollah fighters drove up into the mountains, many of their Druse allies deserted them or even changed sides, preferring to fight alongside their fellow Druse against the Shiite invaders (Worth, R.F. & Bakri, N. 2008, ‘Hezbollah Ignites a Sectarian Fuse in Lebanon’, *New York Times*, 18 May http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/world/middleeast/18lebanon.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&agewanted=print – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 55).

The Beirut violence is also said to have affected non-combatant Beirut residents. The aforementioned Human Rights Watch report states that: “Members of the opposition groups – Hezbollah, Amal, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) – used small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs, often referred to as B7s) in densely populated areas of Beirut.” And that: “These attacks killed and wounded numerous civilians” (Human Rights Watch 2008, ‘Lebanon: Political Talks in Qatar Should Address Abuses’, 18 May <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/18/lebanon18865.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008– Attachment 5).

Human Rights Watch subsequently called for investigations to be conducted into claims of abuses committed by both the Future Movement and by Hezbollah and its pro-Syrian allies:

Members of the opposition groups – Hezbollah, Amal, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) – used small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs, often referred to as B7s) in densely populated areas of Beirut. These attacks killed and wounded numerous civilians. Amal Baydoun, 59, and her son Haytham Tabbarah, 35, died on May 8 while trying to flee their Ras al-Naba` neighborhood when opposition gunmen fired an RPG in the direction of their car. Tabbarah’s two brothers were injured later that day when opposition gunmen shot at their car while they were trying to join their family in the hospital.

Opposition gunmen also detained suspected members of pro-government groups. In most cases, opposition forces transferred those they detained to the Lebanese army a few hours later, but a number of individuals were held for days in incommunicado detention. In the town of Chouweifat, Hezbollah detained four individuals suspected of being members of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) for three days; in a subsequent television interview, those released indicated that they were treated well. However, two individuals detained in Beirut by opposition gunmen told Human Rights Watch that they were beaten and insulted: “I was

detained for two hours in one of Amal's offices in Beirut. We were approximately 18 in the room. I was beaten with the butt of a Kalashnikov. I saw others being beaten too."

Supporters of the pro-government groups – the Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party – also resorted to violence against civilians and offices associated with opposition groups in areas under their control in northern Lebanon, the Beka' and the Chouf. Many of these attacks violated international humanitarian law. Hezbollah reported that PSP fighters detained two of its followers and executed them. Human Rights Watch examined photos of the two Hezbollah members showing that at least one had been shot in the head at very close range while the other appears to have had part of the skin of his forearm removed. Videos posted on youtube.com of the fighting in the northern town of Halba between armed men supporting the government and members of the opposition SSNP show wounded men, apparently belonging to the SSNP, lying on the ground being beaten and ill-treated by gunmen.

"Accounts of abuses by the gunmen are spreading like wildfire and raising tensions," Stork said. "Unless the state acts quickly to hold the perpetrators accountable there are likely to be further reprisals."

International humanitarian law (the laws of war) is applicable in situations of armed conflict that rise above internal disturbances and tensions such as riots or sporadic acts of violence. Applicable law includes article 3 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law.

The Lebanese judicial authorities have begun investigating some attacks on civilians. A policeman involved in one of the investigations and relatives of victims expressed concern to Human Rights Watch that they had little faith in the judiciary's ability to succeed if Lebanese party and militia leaders shielded their supporters from justice (Human Rights Watch 2008, 'Lebanon: Political Talks in Qatar Should Address Abuses', 18 May <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/18/leban018865.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008– Attachment 5).

A May 2008 report published by the Risk Advisory Group warns as follows in the aftermath of the May 2008 violence:

Whatever Hezbollah's motivations for their near coup, there can be little doubt that the mutual hatred between the Sunnis and Shiites that back the Future Movement, Amal and Hezbollah in Beirut has now reached a dangerous intensity that may be hard to contain. Reprisals for the recent violence are practically inevitable at street level and will pose a perpetual flashpoint threat to any negotiated settlements ('Lebanon on the Brink' 2008, Risk Advisory Group website, *Janusian Thinking*, 16 May <http://www.riskadvisory.net/uploads/Janusian%20Thinking%20Lebanon%20May%2008.pdf> – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 30).

Recent clashes: June to August 2008

On 19 June 2008 reports appeared of further and ongoing violence in Tripoli's "neighboring districts of Bab al-Tebbaneh – where most residents are Sunni supporters of Premier Fouad Siniora – and Jabal Mohsen, largely supporters of the parliamentary opposition".

Fighting and grenade blasts are commonplace between the neighboring districts of Bab al-Tebbaneh – where most residents are Sunni supporters of Premier Fouad Siniora – and Jabal Mohsen, largely supporters of the parliamentary opposition.

Fourteen people have been killed and more than 100 wounded since June in clashes between the two neighborhoods. Calm had returned last week after the army moved deployed.

MP Ahmad Fatfat of the Future Movement said the violence in North Lebanon was “damaging to the whole country” (‘Army says deadly clashes in Tripoli broke out at checkpoint’ 2008, *Daily Star*, 19 July http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=94297 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 31).

On 26 June 2008 further reports appeared of clashes in these Tripoli suburbs between the Sunni residents aligned with the Future Movement and the Alawite residents whose Alawite Democratic Arab Party is aligned with Hezbollah:

The death toll from heavy clashes earlier this week between rival gunmen in the North Lebanese city of Tripoli has risen to nine, a security official told AFP on Wednesday.

He said the latest victim died of his wounds late Tuesday. The clashes on Sunday and Monday had pitted Sunni supporters of the ruling coalition against members of the Alawite sect loyal to the Hizbullah-led opposition in the Tripoli neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen.

The violence threatened to derail an agreement reached in Doha last month between rival politicians to end an 18-month political crisis in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, area residents belonging to the rival political camps tried to block roads in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen on Wednesday as others set a gas station on fire in protest of renewed unrest overnight, the state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported.

The NNA said Wednesday’s unrest followed tit-for-tat attacks that included burning down houses and shops in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen as well as in Tripoli’s Al-Bakkar quarter and Syria Street.

A meeting held in Tripoli Wednesday evening gathered the representatives of various factions in Tripoli, including the Future Movement and the Alawite Democratic Arab Party, in addition to representatives from the Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Army, as well as the mufti of Tripoli and the North, Sheikh Malek al-Shaar.

A security source told The Daily Star on Wednesday that the meeting stressed the need for the Lebanese Army “to assume its responsibilities and spread its authority.”

Commenting on the situation in Tripoli, a statement issued by the media office of parliamentary majority and Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri said the MP was “closely following up on the situation in Tripoli in the aftermath of the armed conflicts that took place in the city earlier this week.”

The statement on Wednesday added that Hariri gave instructions to the coordinator of the Future Movement in North Lebanon, Abdel-Ghani Kabbara, to compile a team of experts to inspect damage and start paying compensation.

Also on Wednesday, former Prime Minister Omar Karami said he received a call from Premier Fouad Siniora. The two discussed the recent clashes in Tripoli, and Siniora said the government was ready “to assume its duties,” according to Karami.

The two agreed to cooperate fully to set an end to the violence in Tripoli.

During a news conference with Sheikh Shaar on Wednesday, Karami urged the Lebanese Army “not to have mercy on anyone” in order to secure stability and peace in Tripoli and all of Lebanon.

Shaar said he was “in constant contact with the army leadership, Siniora and other political and security leaders.”

In a statement issued Wednesday, Public Works and Transportation Minister Mohammad Safadi said that despite the deployment of the army and security forces in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, “armed groups continued to deliberately burn the homes of innocent citizens and threaten civil peace.”

Safadi said he feared sectarian clashes would transfer to other areas in Lebanon.

“We ask officials and politicians of all parties to be aware of the gravity of the discord and prevent the [continuing slide] toward civil war,” he said. “This requires measures that promote the presence of the army in Tripoli and other hot spots.”

In separate security-related developments, representatives of Speaker Nabih Berri’s Amal Movement and MP Walid Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party convened on Wednesday to confirm their support for “all efforts of reconciliation and harmony” in all Lebanese regions and on all levels, both popular and political.

Amal and the PSP jointly expressed their support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, which continually did their best to “maintain security and protect ... all Lebanese” (‘Factions meeting in Tripoli stress need for army to take charge; 2008, *Daily Star*, 26 June http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=93524 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 33).

Ongoing tensions have been reported in southern Sunni populated areas where Hezbollah and the Future Movement have been competing for the loyalty and support of the local Sunni population:

Hizbullah is recruiting members for “resistance battalions” in the Southern Lebanese Sunni villages of Chebaa, Kfar Chouba and Hebbariye opposite the Shaba Farms (Mount Dov), a Beirut-based Western journalist has told The Jerusalem Post.

In recent years, support for the Shi’ite militant group has wavered in the South-eastern Arkoub region and the recruits are an attempt to gain ground in the ongoing battle for political dominance between Hizbullah and Sunni groups.

“There is a real tussle for control of this area between Hizbullah and the Future Movement, Lebanon’s main Sunni political party,” the journalist said.

“The Future Movement got the upper hand after the 2006 war, and Hizbullah is trying to make inroads again into the area. Part of the way they are doing that is by recruiting people in this very poor area of the country with the incentive of a monthly salary.”

Hizbullah has also recently donated cash to politicians in these Sunni villages in an effort to win them over.

The group gained significant ground in the Arkoub region between 2000 and 2006, by waging a grassroots “hearts and mind operation” that included donating ambulances and clearing snowy roads with bulldozers.

After the Second Lebanon War, the Future Movement responded by pouring money into the villages in an attempt to lure them away from Hizbullah, the journalist said.

The support of the three villages is of particular significance to Hizbullah, he continued, because it gives them a potential platform from which to launch attacks in the Israeli-controlled Shaba farms.

“It doesn’t mean necessarily that Hizbullah is going to start launching operations in the Shaba Farms again, though one can’t rule out the possibility, but it makes life easier for them if they know they are operating from a friendly environment,” he said.

The resistance battalions were first formed in 1997 after Israeli forces killed Hassan Nasrallah’s son in South Lebanon. Their goal was to offer anyone who sought it the chance to fight the Jewish state. They were folded, however, after Israel’s withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000.

Hizbullah re-established them following the Second Lebanon War and, according to the journalist, “has been very busy recruiting people into them.”

“This has raised tensions to quite a strong level in these (Arkoub) villages between those who support Hizbullah and those who support the Future Movement,” he said (Gazzar, B. 2008, ‘Hizbullah recruits S. Lebanese Sunnis’, *Jerusalem Post*, 25 July <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1215331094942&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 6).

On 1 August 2008 a *Daily Star* article provided the following analysis of the current situation:

What has caused the violence in Tripoli? The explanations are many, few of them entirely convincing. But they all fail to tell us anything about the dangerous consequences the fighting, if it resumes, as it is likely to, might have on the fortunes of the Future Movement, the cornerstone of the parliamentary majority.

Regardless of who was responsible for the recent skirmishing between the Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tebbaneh and the Alawite quarter of Jabal Mohsen, as most people observe what is going on, as they see the gunmen of Bab al-Tebbaneh firing guns in the midst of an urban area, they cannot help but wonder whether Saad Hariri approves of this. If he approves, he would be lending legitimacy to a militia phenomenon that he and his movement have always insisted they stand against; and if he disapproves, it would suggest that Hariri’s control over his own community is tentative at best, especially in a region where Sunni strength could help him compensate for the humiliation his followers suffered in Beirut last May. Either way, Hariri and the Future Movement don’t look the better for it.

That question appeared to be on the mind of the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt last Saturday, when he declared, “The wound suffered by Beirut cannot be treated through revenge elsewhere, because we would only be pouring oil onto the fire and, as a consequence, implementing the designs of states that are negotiating or that have their differences – states that in the end will arrive at settlements between themselves.”

Jumblatt has been unusually nervous about the events in northern Lebanon of late. That’s not surprising. If the situation were to go to pieces there, if Sunni-Shiite tension were again to break out into open conflict, the Druze leader would be a primary target of Hizbullah, which still seeks to control the high ground in Aley and the Chouf, as it tried to do last May. The party doesn’t like the fact that Jumblatt sits above their several supply lines to and from the South, and at their back when facing Israel. But Jumblatt is said to also fear something else: If

the Sunni Islamists become powerful in Tripoli and the Akkar, Syria would be handed an ideal justification to cross the border militarily to protect itself and its Alawite brethren from religious extremists in Lebanon.

Jumblatt's comments were sourly received by Saad Hariri's entourage, which interpreted them as criticism of the Future Movement. The Druze leader has changed his tone of late when it comes to his allies in the March 14 coalition, suggesting he is already maneuvering in anticipation of elections next year. However, when it comes to the fundamentals of Lebanese politics today, Jumblatt cannot and will not soon break with Saad Hariri. That's why Jumblatt's anxiety toward what is going on in Tripoli and the progress and arming of Islamist groups, particularly the Salafists, speaks to a broader problem that Hariri will soon have to address. Otherwise, it might create a much larger headache for him that could undermine his relationship with his political allies.

Following the debacle in Beirut last May, the Hariri camp failed to use its popular support in the North as leverage to regain the political initiative. Saad Hariri would have done well to immediately head to Tripoli and show Hizbullah that he still retained communal muscle – all the more so as his representatives in the city performed poorly during the crisis. It was important for Hariri to do several things: revive Sunni morale nationally, correct the problems in his own movement, and, most importantly, affirm that it was moderate Sunnis like him, not Islamists, who would shape upcoming developments in North Lebanon. Instead, it is the Islamists who are now taking advantage of the vacuum left there.

Islamist advances could hand Syria precisely what it failed to accomplish last year when it sponsored the Fatah al-Islam phenomenon at Nahr al-Bared. The more moderate Sunnis, with Hariri at their head, could be discredited, the Sunni community could be split, tensions could arise between the Future Movement and its Christian allies in March 14, there could be discord between Sunni and Christian inhabitants of the North, and Jumblatt's fears could be confirmed with Syria choosing to intervene – this time with outside approval since no one wants to see Salafists triumphing in Lebanon. The scenario may be an unlikely one, but for the moment nothing suggests the Hariri camp is offering an alternative.

There is still tremendous goodwill for Hariri in the North. His access to substantial sums of money, also the existence of a Sunni political class worried about the rise of extremism, means Hariri has the latitude to ensure it is not the Islamists who set the agenda. What this requires, however, is a more credible network of people on the ground and a bottom-up reorganization of the Future Movement and of its strategy in Tripoli, Dinniyeh, and the Akkar. The fighting between Bab al-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen is but a symptom of a larger problem: that of a Sunni community that has still not found its equilibrium after the assassination of Rafik Hariri. For better or worse the North should now be Hariri's momentary priority, not Beirut; it is his main source of men, vitality and political sway. He should spend more time there, learn its rhythms, and take in hand a political situation that, if it were to spin out of control, could spell the end for everything Saad Hariri has tried to build up (Young, M. 2008, 'The majority's Achilles heel in Tripoli', *Daily Star*, 1 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=94684# – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 32).

On 26 August 2008 the *Ya Liban* news service filed a bulletin referring to “security concerns following last night clashes between Future Movement and Amal supporters in Ras al-Nabaa in west Beirut” (‘Tuesday News Briefs’ 2008, *Ya Liban*, 26 August http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/08/tuesday_news_br_6.php – Accessed 29 August 2008 – Attachment 35).

27 August 2008 saw reports of clashes between Future Movement supporters and supporters of the Shia movement Amal in Beirut. The report also notes that Future Movement supporters had clashed with the army in the preceding week:

BEIRUT: Three people were wounded late on Monday in clashes between Amal Movement and Future Movement supporters in the Beirut neighborhood of Ras al-Nabaa.

Security sources told The Daily Star on Tuesday that the clashes broke out at 8:40 p.m. when Future supporters were erecting posters commemorating the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, while Amal partisans were in turn erecting posters of Imam Musa al-Sadr, the party's founder.

Amal will hold a ceremony on August 31 in the Southern town of Nabatiyeh commemorating the 30th anniversary of Sadr's mysterious disappearance while on a visit to Libya.

The security sources said that guns, rocks and sticks were used in the clashes before the army intervened and gradually restored order.

Some news reports on Tuesday said the clashes broke out when Future supporters were prevented from erecting posters in Mohammad al-Hout Street in Ras al-Nabaa.

However, other reports said that the clashes started when an Amal supporter was stabbed with a knife while he was erecting a poster of Sadr.

The tensions later extended to other neighborhoods of Beirut as angry protesters in the Sunni neighborhood of Tariq al-Jdideh burned tires and blocked roads in their area before army troops intervened and restored order.

The Tariq al-Jdideh events were followed by three separate incidents in the neighborhoods of Salim Salam and Corniche al-Mazraa.

Security sources told The Daily Star that three grenades were thrown in separate incidents in both neighborhoods.

Only one of the grenades exploded, damaging two cars.

The sources said the security and armed forces were expected to take serious measures in the coming days in an effort to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents.

Such measures would include a ban on erecting posters in all areas of Beirut, they added.

Monday's clashes were the worst of their kind in Beirut following the deadly violence that hit the capital in May.

Future supporters clashed with the army last week in protest against moves to crack down on the possession of illegal motorbikes in Tariq al-Jdideh.

Commenting on the incident, Future MP Ammar Hourri told The Daily Star Sunday that army troops had used excessive force to implement the law in Tariq al-Jdideh, while completely ignoring other areas, hinting at Beirut's southern suburbs (Abdallah, H. 2008, 'Clashes between Amal, Future supporters leave three wounded', *Daily Star*, 27 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95450 – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 34).

27 August 2008 also saw reports of clashes between Future Movement supporters and both Hizbollah and Amal, incidents later denied by the Future Movement leadership ('Tuesday New Briefs' 2008, *Ya Liban*, 27 May http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/tuesday_new_bri.php – Accessed 3 September 2008 – Attachment 36).

On 28 August 2008 it was reported that the Shia movement Amal suspected members of the Future Movement of having fired on a group of its members:

Four Amal Movement members were wounded in the Bekaa town of Taalbaya on Wednesday when unknown assailants opened fire at their car as they were erecting posters of Imam Musa al-Sadr.

...A statement released by Amal later on Wednesday accused Future Movement partisans of being behind the attack and identified the assailants as Haydar Melhem al-Hoshaymi, Ahmad Qamara, Mahmoud Qamara and Wissam Muhiyidinne.

The Amal statement said that Hussein Abu Hamdan (Amal) was seriously wounded as a result of the attack.

The statement also accused Future supporters in the town of Taalbaya and nearby villages of pressuring people not to participate in the Sadr ceremony, scheduled for Sunday.

"Such actions by the Future Movement represent a coup against the Doha Agreement and an attempt to spread tension and chaos in the country," the statement said. The Doha Agreement, which was signed by feuding factions last May, put an end to an extended political crisis in Lebanon.

Security sources told the National News Agency on Wednesday that army troops deployed heavily in Taalbaya after the attack and arrested a number of suspects.

...The Bekaa towns of Taalbaya and Saadnayel were the scene of violent clashes between March 14 and opposition supporters earlier this year.

The recent tension in Bekaa between Amal and Future supporters came after clashes on Monday between the same groups in the Beirut neighborhood of Ras al-Nabaa.

Three people were wounded in the clashes (Abdallah, H. & Zaatari, M. 2008, 'Four Amal members wounded in Bekaa shooting incident', *Daily Star*, 28 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95491 – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 37).

The violence of January 2008

On 29 January 2008 *NOW Lebanon* provided the following coverage of political violence in Beirut with an accompanying map. The report provides an overview of which suburbs were seeing the bulk of the violence while also noting that others remained quiet.



On the evening of January 27, riots broke out near the southern suburbs of Beirut. Although the Lebanese army tried to prevent violence from sweeping to other areas, protestors were able to cut Mar Elias road, the airport main road, and other main roads in the South and Bekaa.

For many Lebanese, the unrest was eerily reminiscent of the events leading up to the outbreak of civil war in 1975. With the presidential crisis facing a dead-end and political and diplomatic efforts looking ever more bankrupt, some groups are making good on threats of destabilization and civil unrest, and exploiting young people in order to set the streets on fire.

Sunday's events, moreover, were only the latest – and most deadly – in a chain of recent outbreaks of street violence. The New Year in Lebanon literally started with a bang: **On January 2, clashes broke out between supporters of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement and young men from the Future Movement in the central-west Beirut neighborhood of Basta.** Witnesses reported that the dispute had begun one day earlier, when a group of unknown assailants tore down and burned a poster of the late Premier Rafik Hariri, the founder of the Future Movement. **The next day, supporters of Amal and Hezbollah set upon Future supporters** as they replaced the destroyed banner. A fight, in which seven people were wounded, ensued until the army was called in and broke up the fight.

Like many other places in Beirut, Basta is a mixed neighborhood inhabited by large numbers of both Sunni and Shia. Broadly speaking, Sunnis and Shia in Lebanon today are associated with opposite sides of the political conflict, with most Sunnis supporting the government and most Shia supporting opposition parties. While **there are, of course, some mixed areas, such as the wealthier Sunni-Shia mixed neighborhoods of Hamra, Verdun and Clemenceau, that rarely witness sectarian clashes, skirmishes over minor political issues, like the poster of the two Hariris, reportedly occur on a daily basis in many other mixed neighborhoods.**

...Residents of neighborhoods stretching from Tarik Jdideh to Basta Tahta told NOW Lebanon that minor clashes are now taking place on a daily basis. “These neighborhoods constitute three-quarters of the working-class neighborhoods of Beirut, and we have heard about fights every day since the end of July War,” said Sanaa al-Jacques, a journalist at Al-Sharq Al-Awsat who also lives in Barbour, one such mixed neighborhood.

Clashes appear to escalate with political developments, but often go unreported. According to Jacques, “Although these are mixed districts, the opposition controls most of the neighborhoods and main streets.” While most of the stretch between Tarik Jdideh and Basta Tahta is Future Movement turf, Amal and Hezbollah control Corniche al-Mazraa, Mar Elias, Khandak al-Ghamik, Barbour, Bourj Abu-Haidar, Ras al-Nabaa, Salim Slem, Basta Fawa and other smaller neighborhoods.

Most of these districts had predominantly Sunni populations until around 1983, when many Shia took refuge there after fleeing fighting in South Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut. According to lawyer and human rights activist Nabil Halabi, who is also a resident of a mixed neighborhood in Beirut, the Amal Movement was able to mobilize a large number of these Shia on behalf of the party, especially after the Amal militia forced the Lebanese army out of western Beirut in early 1984. Halabi added that, after the July War in 2006, Shia were once again forced to flee the South, and many bought houses in Beirut neighborhoods.

According to Halabi, clashes take place every day in these neighborhoods and most begin with disputes about posters of political leaders. “It’s a matter of demonstrating power and forcing [a political] existence,” said Khadijah, a Basta resident. Salim Slem, Corniche al-Mazra, Moulla, and Basta Tahta are the main areas where the clashes occur; however, Khadijah said, “most clashes take place at contact points like main streets, not inside neighborhoods.”

...Although protests and political posters may provide the trigger for conflict, the real fight is a battle for control over these neighborhoods. “The clashes have nothing to do with the people residing in these neighborhoods,” said Khadijah. “The divisions are about drawing a political rather than a sociological map.”

The power of local political factions to dominate and wield control over particular areas, at times usurping the authority of the state and its security forces, is also reminiscent of the war years (Ghaddar, H. 2008, ‘Drawing a political map’, *NOW Lebanon*, 29 January <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=28798> – Accessed 4 September 2008– Attachment 38).

On 28 January 2008 *NOW Lebanon* reported that: “Minor clashes in Beirut of late, for example, have taken place mostly between Amal and Future Movement youths, not between armed militia groups” (Long, T. 2008, ‘January’s déjà vu’, *Now Lebanon*, 28 January <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=28577> – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 39).

Previous Research Responses

The issue of attacks on the Future Movement was last addressed in *Research Response LBN32100* of 30 July 2007 which and this information is supplied as Attachment 7 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN32100*, 30 July – Attachment 7).

2. Is Danbo an area of particular safety/risk for such people?

Information addressing this issue is presented below under the following subheadings:

- [Danbo and the Akkar region: location, demography and other background](#)
- [Hezbollah's lack of presence in the North](#)
- [Hezbollah, the Future Movement and Islamist and/or Salafist Sunni groups in the North](#)
- [Akkar men in Beirut fighting](#)
- [Future Movement conflict with Hezbollah aligned SSNP in Akkar District](#)
- [Other conflict outbreaks in the North: Hezbollah aligned Allawites and Future Movement aligned Sunnis near Tripoli](#)
- [Other conflict outbreaks in the North: the Nahr al-Bared conflict](#)

Danbo and the Akkar region: location, demography and other background

Very little information is available on the Danbo area. The little information that is available locates Danbo in the area of Akkar. According to the Linking Lebanon website Danbo is located 113km from Beirut. A June 2008 report on Islamic micro-finance in Northern Lebanon locates Danbo in the vicinity of Akkar's capital of Halba, referring to Akkar as a district. Akkar is referred to variously as a district and as a governorate in different sources. This may be due to a recent reclassification of Akkar as an administrative unit. According to a January 2008 report published on the Lebanon Support website Akkar is presently a governorate in its own right whereas prior to 2004 it was the most northern district of the Governorate of North Lebanon (a map showing the location of the Akkar governorate is to be found on page 3 of the report in Figure 1 along with a map of the major towns of Akkar in Figure 2, the location of Danbo itself is not noted) ('Danbo' (undated), Linking Lebanon website <http://www.linkingLebanon.com/villagedetails.asp?id=248> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 11; Calò, C., De Nardi, S., Faussone, L.G, Genisio, B. & Pallotto, P. 2008, 'Islamic Microfinance: Alternative Development in Northern Lebanon', *Associazione per lo Sviluppo di Strumenti Alternativi e di Innovazione Finanziaria*, 19 June <http://www.moe.gov.lb/pdf/Land%20Degradation/National%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Combat%20Desertification/Chapter%20III.pdf> – Accessed 1 September 2008– Attachment 20; Mouchref, A. 2008, 'Forgotten Akkar: Socio-Economic Reality of the Akkar Region', Lebanon Support website, January. http://Lebanon-support.org/resources/MADA_Forgotten_Akkar_SocioEconomicReality_Jan08.pdf?PHPSESSID=72832cdeadc1fb02cdb142d9fb4292e7 – Accessed 29 August 2008 – Attachment 18; the following websites list Danbo as a town in the Akkar District of the North Lebanon Governorate: 'List of Cities And Villages in Lebanon' (undated), The Website of Lebanon website <http://www.Lebanon.cd/Lebanese-cities.htm> – Accessed 20 August 2008 – Attachment 8; 'Cities of Lebanon' (undated), RootsWeb.com website <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lbnwgv/cities.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 9).

The Linking Lebanon website provides the following information on Danbo as a village in the area of Akkar:

Danbo

Distance From Beirut: 113km

Altitude: 600m

Danbos name originates from the Syriac language, meaning “Nabos property” or “belongs to Nabo,” in reference to the temple of the Babylonian God Nabo, which was located here.

Danbo is located on the side of Girgi Mountain, and the village has a crescent shape.

The town is home to several archaeological vestiges, including a stone bearing a carving of a human head, some old cemeteries, a rock with Canaanite inscriptions, another rock bearing a carving of a cross, as well as a cave that contains a bed carved into rocks. In addition, the town includes the shrines of Sheikh Mohammad and Sheikh Ismail (‘Danbo’ (undated), Linking Lebanon website <http://www.linkinglebanon.com/villagedetails.asp?id=248> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 11).

The following map, sourced from a UN website and supplied as Attachment 10, shows Akkar as the most northern district of the North Lebanon Governorate. The location of the Akkar capital of Halba is also noted (‘Administrative Map of Northern Lebanon’ (undated), UN Lebanon website

http://www.un.org.lb/unnew/files/southleb/maps/ADMINISTRATIVE/Admin%20map%20of%20Northern%20Lebanon_A4.pdf – Accessed 20 August 2008 – Attachment 10).

The Lebanon Support website (a multi-stakeholder portal whose coordinators include bodies of the UN and the Lebanese government as well as community and non-government organisations) provides a detailed map of Lebanon which provides the following information in Attachment 19:

- Political Layer displaying the electoral weight of each of the opposition and the loyalists in each of the electoral districts of the 2005 General Elections.
- Confessional Layer, displaying a rough presentation of the geographic distribution of Lebanese confessions as well as the mixed areas.
- Security Layer: displaying the areas which have witnessed tensions and conflicts in the May 2008 events, as well as current conflicts in the North, Saida and the Bekaa.
- Deprivation Layer: displaying areas which witness high percentage of deprived house holds on the district level, as well as displaying areas which witness high concentration of deprived households per percentage of the total population in Lebanon (‘Mapping of Vulnerabilities in Lebanon (SE-1)’ 2008, Lebanon Support website, June [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/\\$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf) – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 19).

The Lebanon Support website’s June 2008 map details Akkar as a mixed confessional area comprising Sunni, Maronite and Orthodox communities. A large Sunni belt surrounds the eastern and southern areas of Akkar and a Maronite island within the Sunni belt neighbours Akkar to the east. The nearest Shia area is to be found further to the east (beyond the bounding Sunni and Maronite areas) in the Bekaa Valley area of Hermel. An outbreak of violence during the May 2008 clashes between loyalist and opposition supporters is noted for Akkar’s Halba area and other outbreaks are noted along the nearby coastal areas leading down to Tripoli. Tripoli is also listed as an area of security risk insofar as it has seen “recent conflicts and attacks on the Lebanese Army”. The Attachment 19 map is extensively detailed and is best viewed electronically at 200% using the magnification tool (‘Lebanon Support

(June 2008): Mapping of Vulnerabilities in Lebanon (SE-1) (Deprivation Indicators, 1996)' 2008, Lebanon Support website, June
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/\\$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/00BD785A71C24C8885257474007067B1/$File/ls_SEC_lbn080626.pdf) – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 19).

The Lebanon Support website provides background on the Akkar region in a January 2008 report which states that: “The population is mixed, consisting primarily of Sunni Muslims with a minority of Allawites and Christians (Maronites and Greek Orthodox) and very little Shiites”. The report notes the situation for Akkar residents in regard to the economy, education, employment opportunities, health services and access to outside areas. Pertinent extracts follow:

...Until 2004 Akkar was a district within the Governorate of North Lebanon, together with Minieh- Dinnieh, Tripoli, Zgharta, Bcharre, Koura and Batroun.

...Several studies have classified Akkar as one of the most deprived regions in Lebanon, with the highest overall poverty rates in the country. In 1998, Akkar was home to 12.5 percent of the poorest segment of the population in the country, with 63.3 percent of the families in this region living in poverty. Akkar has the lowest average individual income level and highest illiteracy rate in Lebanon. The region is characterized by a dense population and a high age-dependency rate. Akkar shows all the typical features of a poor and relatively isolated rural community, with bad infrastructure and low quality education and health services. Limited sources of income, as well as limited support from the public sector and civil society, has created a vicious cycle of poor living conditions and increased the level of marginalization of vulnerable groups.

...As a result of the July 2006 war, many families in Akkar suffered losses of income. The economic crisis and the Nahr al-Bared war posed further challenges to the already marginalized people of Akkar, aggravating the situation. But unlike other regions of Lebanon, Akkar did not benefit much from the post-war recovery programs. The government, as well as most of the local NGOs, international NGOs and donors focused their relief and recovery activities on the South, the Bekaa and South Beirut. These actors responded to the direct damages of the war in their aim to support the return of displaced people to their homes.

...The Governorate of Akkar is located in the far north of Lebanon, with the Mediterranean Sea on its western border, Hermel to the east, Syria to the north and the Bared River and the district of Minieh-Dinnieh to the south. It has a total surface area of 798km². Halba, the capital city of Akkar, lies 30km northeast of Tripoli and 112km of Beirut. Akkar is characterized by the presence of high mountains to the east and a relatively large coastal plain to the west, which is the second agricultural plain in the country in size and importance after the Bekaa.

...Akkar is considered the most rural district of Lebanon, with a rural population of 80 percent. The population is mixed, consisting primarily of Sunni Muslims with a minority of Alawites and Christians (Maronites and Greek Orthodox) and very little Shiites. Despite its isolated location and rural character, the region of Akkar is quite densely populated. In 1997, the population was estimated to be over 255,000 inhabitants, accounting for 6.4 percent of the total population of Lebanon. With a population density of 248 people/km² it ranks fifth in terms of population density after Beirut, Baabda, Mount Lebanon and Tripoli. Other peripheral governorates, such as South Lebanon, Nabatiye and the Bekaa, have been declining in population as a result of internal migration to Beirut and Mount Lebanon. North Lebanon, however, saw an increase between 1996 and 2004.

Families have on average 6.1 members compared to a national average of 4.8, whereas the average number of children in Akkar is the highest in the country; for Akkar versus 2.6 children for Lebanon as a whole.⁷ In some areas, such as Fnaydeq, Bibnine and Sahl Akkar, the average is more than eight children. Looking at the population by age bracket, Akkar has the highest percentage of residents below the age of 15 and the lowest percentage of people in the age bracket of 15-64 years. The percentage of elderly (5.4 percent) is also lower than the national level (6.9 percent).

...Administrative corruption is a challenge nationally and even more so in a remote area such as Akkar. In the absence of an efficient monitoring mechanism, money meant for the development of Akkar does not always reach its intended destination. Another factor that has contributed to the present deprived situation is the relatively late arrival of schools to Akkar. This has led to greater illiteracy and ignorance which has in turn hampered political awareness and civic empowerment, resulting in a lack of real political representation. The descendants of the old feudal families often became the politicians representing the area, and saw no personal benefits in fighting for the development of their poor farmer constituents.

The region suffers from a lack of services of all kinds, as well as the absence of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in most villages. While the various institutions built by Hezbollah provided services such as schools, health centers and social activities in the South and Bekaa during the last decade, in the North such organizations did not exist. Since the Syrian withdrawal Akkar has seen a modest increase in assistance through a few individual political initiatives by political figures such as Issam Fares, Saad Hariri, and Muhammad Safadi. In most cases this assistance has consisted of small scale investments limited to certain areas of interest within Akkar.

...Transportation

Public transportation in Akkar is also lacking, and the rate of car ownership is well below the national average. Only 52 percent of households interviewed had a private car, versus a national average of 62.4 percent, with 81.3 percent owning cars in Mount Lebanon. In view of the remoteness of most areas of Akkar and the general poor living conditions of Akkar residents, the absence of cheap public transportation puts huge constraints on the population, making it difficult and expensive to reach work, school and basic services such as health care.

Roads

One of the first observations recorded during the field assessment was the declining road conditions in Akkar. Besides increasing the chance of accidents, poor roads make access to the rural peripheries more difficult, limiting the mobility of the general population. Roads in Akkar are usually narrow, damaged and lacking proper safety measures. Another significant observation was the lack of sufficient rainwater collection canals. Roads are often blocked during severe weather, particularly during the winter. Internal roads managed by municipalities tend to be in the worst shape. In several villages the maintenance of the roads has emerged as an electoral issue, as candidates trade asphalt and cement for electoral votes. The neglect is most evident in the condition of the Abde-Halba road, an important link for all the regions of Akkar. Lack of maintenance has made this road to be in very bad shape, despite its importance to the region.

...Health Services

...There are very few practicing doctors in Akkar, with shortages in many specialties such as general medicine, family medicine and other fields most necessary for the administration of primary and preventive healthcare. The main cause of the limited presence of specialized doctors in the region, especially in the more remote villages, is the limited ability of many to

pay for healthcare. Akkaris often cannot afford to visit clinics and pay consultation fees. They turn instead to health dispensaries, which rarely offer quality healthcare.

...Both the July 2006 and Nahr al-Bared wars have also had their impact on health indicators in Akkar. Although comprehensive numbers are unavailable, the field assessment revealed that 5.8% of households interviewed had a member injured due to the war. Some injuries have led to temporary and permanent disabilities. In several cases, the war caused severe trauma. 25.1% of the households reported having at least one member who now suffers from a physical or psychological problem as a result of the two recent wars. Moreover, 65.3% of interviewed staff in the educational sector reported an increase in psychological or health problems among students since July 2006.

...Education

...In addition to the prevailing poverty, the Governorate of Akkar is characterized by lower educational achievement as compared to national averages. Akkar records low enrollment rates at most educational levels, particularly at the secondary and university levels, where it has registered the lowest in Lebanon.

...Field assessment findings revealed that some parents cannot even afford to send their children to public school. The burden of transportation costs is also high on parents, especially for secondary and university level students. Several villages have no secondary school, and the nearest university is in Tripoli. A standard roundtrip fare to Tripoli is 6,000 LBP (equivalent to US\$4), bringing the travel costs to attend university close to US\$80 a month.

Poverty

In 1998, Akkar accounted for 12.5 percent of the total number of deprived individuals in Lebanon, with 63.3 percent of the families in the region living in poverty and 23.3 percent of them in extreme poverty. Preliminary results of the 2004 mapping using the same living conditions index show that Akkar continues to have the highest share of poor households in Lebanon. Moreover, in 2004-2005 the highest poverty rates were recorded in Akkar and Minieh-Dinnieh, at 63 percent. Poverty is especially prevalent among female and elderly heads of household and people with disabilities. In fact, several studies have shown that disability increases the level of poverty by three times the national rate in Lebanon, making people with disabilities more vulnerable than any other group in Akkar.

Income Levels

Individual average income in Akkar is the lowest in Lebanon according to the Central Administration for Statistics. 22.7% of the individuals and 16.6% of the households in Akkar live on a monthly income of less than US\$40, compared to a national average of 6.3% for individuals and 4.5% for households. In addition, 73.1 percent of individuals in Akkar live on less than US\$107 per month, versus 38.9% in Lebanon. Almost half of the families in North Lebanon have to borrow to meet their minimum living expenses, compared to a national average of 38.3 percent. The situation since July 2006 has further deteriorated the poor living conditions many families faced in Akkar. Of interviewed households, 63.3 percent have seen a reduction in their income in the past year and a half. Almost everyone related this to the two recent wars and ongoing political instability. As for the causes of this reduction in income, 32 percent suffered from decreased work opportunities, 21 percent from transportation difficulties and 16 percent from decreased productivity. Eight percent witnessed a decrease in sales, while 23 percent of the cases were due to the loss of a job.

Unemployment

Unemployment was 13.5% in Akkar, primarily affecting young adults. Young adults are often unqualified and face difficulties in entering the labor market. Women are poorly integrated into economic life. Aside from exceptions here and there, people with disabilities are generally completely excluded from the economic life of the community. The wars and economic crisis have only added to the number of unemployed. In the field assessment, 14.5 percent of the households surveyed said they have lost work due to the recent wars.

Distribution of the Labor Force

The labor force in Akkar is distributed as follows: 29.6% work in agriculture and fishing; 17.6% in public administration, especially the army and security forces; 14.3% in trade; 8.4% in education; 8.4% in industry; 8.2% as crushers and construction workers and 6% in transport and communication. Men are primarily engaged in the military sector, which accounts for 14.8 percent of the male work force, and in agriculture, which accounts for 21.9 percent. After that, 11.5 percent work as equipment-operators and 9.4 percent in construction. There are also those who work in the national and international transport sector. Some 31.3 percent of females are employed in the educational sector as teachers, and 27.3% in agriculture, with many also employed in the services and trade sector, often as salespersons. Males begin joining the labor force at a very young age: 3.8 percent between the ages of 10 and 14 and 28.4 percent between ages 15 and 19.⁵⁴ Lacking professional skills, many young men seek an income in the informal sector, mostly outside the region. Some are active as day laborers in construction and manufacturing trades such as metal, tile, and aluminum work and automobile mechanics. There are also a considerable number of young men working in the tourism sector, mainly in hotels and restaurants of Jounieh and Bekfaya.

Sources of Income

Agriculture and employment, primarily in the army, play an important role in securing household income in Akkar. Earnings coming from the military represent the main mover of the economic cycle in Akkar. Generations of Akkar's young men have turned to the army as the most stable source of income available. Each family tries to have at least one relative in the army. In the field assessment, 19 percent of the households had at least one member in the military institution. The field assessment also revealed that households in Akkar often have multiple sources of income. In most cases the head of the household brings in money in combination with small agricultural or commercial activities. Remittances from relatives living abroad are also important in securing the basic needs of some families. The number of families reporting commercial activities as a source of income is high, as this includes all sorts of sales activities. In most cases people were selling small items in the streets or had a small shop at home.

...Economy

...The Nahr al-Bared war had a more direct impact on the region of Akkar. Agricultural activities in the areas surrounding the Nahr al-Bared camp were paralyzed while rockets fired by the Fateh al-Islam militia caused heavy damage to the land and crops. The fighting hindered the transportation of products to market, and created a shortage in supply of animal feed and veterinarian services. In an attempt to compensate for the losses incurred by the July 2006 war, some farmers had taken on loans and increased their production, but with the outbreak of the Nahr al-Bared war another harvest season was ruined.

...Both purchasing power and local demand for commercial goods are very low in Akkar and access to markets with higher demand or purchasing power is difficult due to the remoteness of the area. The low levels of income also limit investment in the region, and thus result in less commercial activity. The vast majority, 95.5%, of the commercial establishments in Akkar are small, employing less than five employees.⁶⁹ Most of these enterprises are small

grocery shops, with a smaller number of workshops and handicraft businesses as well. In 1996 the number of commercial establishments in Akkar was estimated at 12,296. Around 30 percent of them were on the plain along the road to Syria; 25 percent were located in Halba and its surroundings, and in Joumeh; another 20 percent were concentrated around Qobayyat, while the rest were found in Mount Akkroum, Wadi Khaled and the other areas of Akkar. As for their economic activities, 36.8 percent were engaged in retail trading, 28.1 percent in agriculture and mining, 8.4 percent in vehicle sales and maintenance, 8.3 percent in wholesale trading and the rest in other activities such as small industrial and handicrafts business. The Nahr al-Bared refugee camp was, before its destruction, a vital commercial centre not only for Akkar but for the entire northern region. It provided the region with cheap goods, often smuggled from Syria, and a variety of services. It was also a source of labor for the surrounding area. The number of businesses located in the camp was estimated at 443, employing around 450 people.

... While the July 2006 war negatively affected commercial establishments in Akkar in terms of reduction in sales and availability of supplies, the sector was hit much harder by the Nahr al-Bared war. Many businesses in the camp and the neighboring villages of Muhammara, Bibnine, Abde and Qobbet Bchamra suffered heavy damages and others were forced to close their business entirely. Up to 460 businesses employing over 1600 people in the surrounding area stopped operating during the war. The damage was not limited to the surroundings of the Nahr al-Bared camp, however. The interruption of traffic on the nearby highway had a detrimental effect on most of the businesses in Akkar. The survey that was held to determine the effects of the July 2006 and Nahr al-Bared wars on Akkar's commercial sector, showed that 91.5 percent of businesses interviewed saw a reduction in revenue and 68.6 percent suffered some kind of damage due to the two recent wars. The types of damages reported were as follows: 42.7 percent lost goods, 32.3 percent experienced a closure of business and 24 percent had physical damage to shops. Furthermore, 89.5 percent of businesses reported seeing a decrease in productivity, with 56.9 percent attributing this to a drop in sales, 17.5 percent to reduced purchasing power of clients, 13.1 percent to difficulties in transporting goods and 11 percent to an increase in the price of commodities (Mouchref, A. 2008, 'Forgotten Akkar: Socio-Economic Reality of the Akkar Region', Lebanon Support website, January. http://Lebanon-support.org/resources/MADA_Forgotten_Akkar_SocioEconomicReality_Jan08.pdf?PHPSESSID=72832cdeadc1fb02cdb142d9fb4292e7 – Accessed 29 August 2008 – Attachment 18).

A June 2008 report on Islamic micro-finance in Northern Lebanon provides further information on the Akkar area (referring to it as the District of Akkar) and locates Danbo in the vicinity of Halba. Produced by postgraduate students at the *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale* in Milan and published on the website of an Italian think tank, *Associazione per lo Sviluppo di Strumenti Alternativi e di Innovazione Finanziaria* (ASSAIF; Association for the Development of Alternative Instruments and Innovative Finance), the report refers to Danbo as a village in the Akkar area of Middle Kaiteh, an area whose geographic boundaries are “Bared River – Main road of Halba” (see the table on page 4). The report also states that: “The religious distribution in Lebanon shows the highest presence of Muslims (both Sunni and Shiite) in the district of Akkar”. Some pertinent extracts follow:

The District of Akkar. Lebanon is divided into 6 Mouhafazats (governorates) as follows: Beirut, North-Lebanon, South-Lebanon, Nabatieh, Mount-Lebanon and Bekaa. Akkar is a caza (district) located in North-Lebanon. The preliminary results of the 2004 MPS show that Akkar continues to have the highest share of deprived households in Lebanon, thus confirming the previous data based on the Mapping of Living Conditions (MOSA-UNDP, 1998). This district, with 6.4 % of the total population, accounts for 12.5 % of those living below the threshold of the index of satisfaction of basic needs. Moreover, Akkar is the leading rural area in Lebanon, with 22.8% only of urban population.

The religious distribution in Lebanon shows the highest presence of Muslims (both Sunni and Shiite) in the district of Akkar. Religious norms discourage them from gaining access to the classic financial system. Moreover, the lack of Islamic financial institutions, especially those providing microfinancial products, excludes them from economic development since they cannot benefit from credit, insurance, leasing, etc.

In such a context, microfinance not only seems to have the chance of playing a fundamental role in the informal sector, to which it is usually addressed in developing countries, but also to become an alternative financing channel for micro and small enterprises, insufficiently assisted by the banking system and the government, and for the economically active poor. According to a preparatory study realized by UNDP, the district of Akkar can be divided in seven geographical clusters (source: UNDP, 2001) (Calò, C., De Nardi, S., Fausson, L.G., Genisio, B. & Pallotto, P. 2008, 'Islamic Microfinance: Alternative Development in Northern Lebanon', *Associazione per lo Sviluppo di Strumenti Alternativi e di Innovazione Finanziaria*, 19 June

<http://www.moe.gov.lb/pdf/Land%20Degradation/National%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Combat%20Desertification/Chapter%20III.pdf> – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 20).

The EU Election Observation Mission to Lebanon 2005 reported as follows of the 2005 elections results in Akkar and northern Lebanon. The names and affiliations of the parliamentarians for the North I Akkar area can also be viewed in a table on page 63 of the report. Of these seven representatives three are Sunni, two are Greek Orthodox, one is a Maronite and the last an Alawite. Four are listed as Future Movement members, three are listed as independent and all seven are listed as belonging to the Hariri bloc.

In Northern Lebanon, the electoral campaign witnessed mounting political tension linked to the importance given to the outcome of the country's last round of elections. Having already gathered about 45 seats, the Hariri-Jumblatt-Qornet Shehwan-Lebanese Forces alliance was seeking to grab at least 20 out of Northern Lebanon's 28 seats in order to obtain the absolute majority in the coming Parliament. They formed one complete list in each of the region's electoral districts: in North I, 11 candidates ran under the banner of "Reconciliation and reform", while in North II, 17 candidates formed the "National Unity- 14 March" list. The two lists achieved a complete victory, introducing 19 new MPs to the Lebanese Parliament.

They faced two other complete lists backed by General Aoun. In North I, the "People's will" list encompassing many MPs and former MPs was defeated by new candidates belonging to the Lebanese Forces (in the almost exclusively Maronite district of Bsharri) and to the Future Movement (in the mostly Sunni populated sub-districts of Akkar and Dinniye). The number of registered voters in Akkar's is twice as big as the other two electoral sub-districts combined, and was crucial in determining the winning list.

In North II, Aoun backed a list that included three of his loyal supporters (his son-in-law, a prominent retired judge and a former colonel who was jailed in Syria) and a varied coalition of important local political figures (Sleiman Franjeh¹⁸ in Zghorta, Abdel Majid al Rifai¹⁹, and Ahmad Karami²⁰). In this constituency, the predominantly Sunni qada of Tripoli represented by 8 MPs was crucial in determining the victorious list, due to its electoral weight (44.7% of the district's registered voters) (European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, pp.32-34 and 64

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_observ/Lebanon/final_report.pdf – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 41).

There may, nonetheless, also be problems for Future Movement unity in the Akkar area. In May 2008 it was reported that: "According to some political analysts, including Fida'a Ittani,

a regular columnist for the independent pro-opposition newspaper Al-Akhbar writing on May 14, the Future Movement, defeated in Beirut, no longer has any serious influence in the North". The relevant extract follows:

Meanwhile, the Hariri influence has been greatly weakened in Akkar near the Palestinian Refugee camp of Nahr al Bared and in the Tripoli area. According to some political analysts, including Fida'a Ittani, a regular columnist for the independent pro-opposition newspaper Al-Akhbar writing on May 14, the Future Movement, defeated in Beirut, no longer has any serious influence in the North.

Several Salafi al Qaeda-admiring movements are present in Lebanon and like Fatah al Islam's declaration this week that they will fight for the Sunnis, they vary in their attitudes from silent opposition to Future leader Saad Al-Hariri to fully supporting him as the leader of the Sunnis. These groups are valued by certain 'leaders' in Lebanon because are the only ones with coherent structures at the ideological, political, technical, and field levels.

Judging from Saad Hariri's confused statements at his subsequent news conference and statements by other parties, the bitterness of promised but unforthcoming assistance was evident.

For two days following the debacle of his forces imploding the head of the Future Movement said nothing. Finally on the 14th he broke his silence.

The Halba massacre, committed by Hariri's Mustaqbal militiamen which brutally and barbarically murdered 11 people from the opposition, did not seem worthy of discussion as he spoke. In a press conference on Tuesday, Hariri simply ignored what all the Lebanese had seen on TV from weapons, ammunition and alcohol found in Future movement offices, and instead listed a series of delusions.

"We awaited an open war on Israel, and yet here is an open war on Beirut and its people", he stated. Some interpreted this rather odd statement either as a subconscious slip of the tongue on Hariri's part expressing his frustration that the Israeli help did not arrive or that his reported earlier incoherent state persisted.

Hariri's original speech was reportedly so confused that the Saudi channel al-Arabiyya decided to cease broadcasting it and subsequently only read excerpts from what he said. It was only when US criticism resumed, and Hezbollah fighters drew back from the streets surrounding his house that Hariri was urged to stand up and speak again with a stronger tone: "This has been decided by the Iranian and Syrian regimes that wanted to play a political game in Lebanon's streets. For us nothing has changed. We will not negotiate with someone having a pistol pointed to our heads" (Lamb, F. 2008, 'Did Hezbollah thwart a planned Bush/Olmert attack on Lebanon?', People's Geography website, 16 May <http://peoplesgeography.com/2008/05/16/did-Hezbollah-thwart-bush-olmert/> – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 43).

On 26 June 2008 Michael Yound provided the following comments in *The Daily Star* on the political situation on the north. The report makes specific mention of the situation of the Future Movement in the north and Akkar in particular, finding that the Future Movement risks losing its control over the area's resident Sunnis and needs to do more to win the support of Christian communities.

Much more also needs to be done by the majority to outline a vision of a Lebanese state that can eventually overcome Hizbullah's vision of a non-state. Christians won't embrace that vision if they believe the majority is no better than Hizbullah. But the reality is that Saad

Hariri cannot define such a vision when he appears to be losing control over his justifiably angry Sunni community – in Saadnayel, Taalbaya, and Tripoli. Nominally, most Sunnis are staunchly behind the Future Movement, but on the ground the dynamics say the Hariri camp is being overtaken by events.

It is troubling, for example, that Hariri has not traveled once to Tripoli and the Akkar since the fighting last May. Yet it is essential for him to place his stamp on developments in that area, show his face with a Sunni base that has become, for better or worse, his street muscle, and most importantly prevent the Sunnis of the North from taking their resentment of Hizbullah too far, because the result will be open war. Hariri has no choice. A moderate, he will nonetheless be blamed for any upsurge in Sunni extremism. There are reports he is reorganizing the Future Movement. That's long overdue, but his priority must be to see to it that Tripoli and the Sunni areas around it, like the Sunni areas in the Bekaa Valley, are not lost to the state as are the areas under Hizbullah control.

March 14 still has a great deal in its favor, but it needs to develop a strategy that draws maximal benefit from these advantages. It needs, first of all, to talk to the Christians on their own terms. Muslim leaders in March 14 rarely ever address the concerns of Christians, never even make an appearance in their districts, abandoning too many of them to Michel Aoun. A single visit by Saad Hariri to St. Joseph University to exchange ideas with students, to lay out his plan for a future Lebanon, to discuss the anxieties of the young, perhaps also to defend, or conversely apologize for, the quadripartite electoral agreement of 2005, would have a tremendous impact. If March 14 represents a majority, then it should show it.

March 14 also needs to develop a coordinated election strategy to make certain that Christian rivalries inside March 14 won't facilitate a new Aoun victory in Mount Lebanon next year. This means forming consensual candidate lists as soon as is feasible, preferably in coordination with Michel Sleiman, who enjoys Christian support. It also means initiating required reconciliations where possible. Amin Gemayel, for example, needs to quickly resolve his differences with the Armenians in Metn, while Saad Hariri should explore a new relationship with Tashnak in Beirut, even if he loses a parliamentary seat in the process. The long-term gains from that could well counterbalance the disadvantages.

And most importantly, in defending a state project March 14, particularly the Future Movement, needs to show that it has a tight rein on what is today a humiliated and confused Sunni community. Hariri cannot defend the project of a stronger state while allowing the Sunnis outside Beirut to slip further into a war mentality. That Hizbullah's recklessness is to blame for this goes without saying. But national suicide, to borrow from Michel Sleiman, will spare no one. And if Lebanon goes down that path, Syria will very likely again be tasked with imposing order on the country, ending the fragile freedom we won three short years ago (Young, M. 2008, 'March 14 urgently needs a new impetus', *Daily Star*, 26 June http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=93495 – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 44).

In January 2008 an *Al Ahram* article reported:

Saad Al-Hariri has been buying loyalty from the poor of the north, donating some \$52 million to poverty stricken villages in Akkar and Danniya. There was no word, however, on whether or not these funds were to be channelled through the organs of the Lebanese state – which he claims to be defending – or as usual through “his men” in the north (Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, 'Razor Edge', Carnegie Endowment website, source: *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 14-20 February <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19914&prog=zgp&proj=zme> – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 45).

On 5 June 2007 it was reported that Alawite MP, “Mustafa Hussein, a Future Movement legislator from Akkar, [had] announced...that he was ‘renouncing’ his membership in the ruling March 14 Forces camp.” The report continues:

The Alawite MP said the objectives of the March 14 camp “differed drastically” from the goals set following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.

“We were all enthusiastic to join the March 14 group when it was first formed, because it was fighting for reforms and the sovereignty of Lebanon rather than subjecting Lebanon to another form of foreign tutelage,” Hussein added.

He described American hegemony over Lebanon as “dangerous,” adding that foreign intervention in Lebanese domestic issues “only contributes to widening the gaps between the Lebanese.”

The March 14 parliamentary majority has lost a number of its MPs over the past two years; however, the previous deputies died – whether of natural causes or in assassinations – whereas Hussein’s departure was the first deliberate one.

While Hussein did not say whether he would join the opposition, he did call for the creation of an independent parliamentary bloc to spur “legislative activity and to put an end to any incitement of sectarian bickering, which only serves our enemy Israel.”

In reaction to Hussein’s move, other Future Movement MPs from Akkar said their colleague’s decision was “reasonable,” because he was under “very much pressure in the last few months.”

“Our colleague is free to choose his own way,” other Akkar MPs said in a statement on Monday. “He is also free to choose the best means to fight the pressure exerted upon him recently and to protect himself and his family.”

Deputies Mustafa Hashem, Hadi Hobeish, Riad Rahhal, Azzam Dandashi, Mahmoud Murad and Abdullah Hanna met Monday to discuss Hussein’s decision.

The legislators said the Akkar parliamentary group was still an “integral” part of the larger Future Movement parliamentary bloc, which is a leading member of the March 14 Forces. The March 14 coalition has 71 MPs in the 128-seat chamber.

The Akkar parliamentarians’ statement said residents of the region were clearly aware of the true motives behind Hussein’s move, “which were clearly absent from our colleague’s news conference” (‘Akkar MP abandons March 14 Forces over “widening gaps” Hussein says camp’s objectives have changed “drastically”’ 2007, Daily Star, 5 June – Attachment 42).

Hezbollah’s lack of presence in the North

It is widely related that Hezbollah’s areas of operation are generally confined to Lebanon’s south, to the Bekaa Valley in the east, and to the southern suburbs of Beirut. Previous Research Responses have found little information to indicate that Hezbollah is maintaining a presence in or engaging in sorties in northern areas like the Akkar region or the Northern Governorate generally. Nonetheless, some recent reports have speculated that Hezbollah has the capacity to launch operations into northern areas. One report was located, appearing in August 2008, in which: “An Islamist leader who broke away from the Islamic Action Front showed Al-Arabiya TV documents which he said prove that there are security activities by Hezbollah in northern Lebanon”. According to this source Hezbollah was

attempting to “mobilize and arm [the Islamic Action Front] in Tripoli to engage in clashes with the followers of the Future Movement and the 14 March forces in general”. There have also been reports of attempts by Hezbollah to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with certain Sunni salafist groups operating in the area of Tripoli. An August 2008 *Daily Star* report refers to a number of sources which have dismissed the significance of this development given the level of support enjoyed by the Future Movement in the Tripoli area (for past Research Responses on this issue, see: RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response LBN32452*, 23 October – Attachment 13; RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response LBN32202*, 11 September – Attachment 23; RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN31811*, 5 June – Attachment 12; RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response LBN17035*, 8 October – Attachment 14; for speculation on Hezbollah’s capacity in the north, see: Phares, W. 2008, ‘Hezbollah’s network confirms terror goals’, *Middle East Times*, 20 May http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/05/20/Hezbollahs_network_confirms_terror_goals/3372/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 15; Smith, W.T. 2008, ‘Hezbollah ‘Five-times’ Stronger Than It Was in Israeli War’, *Middle East Times*, 15 August http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/08/15/Hezbollah_five-times_stronger_than_it_was_in_israeli_war/4107/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 16; for the Islamic Action Front report, see: ‘Sunni group gives “evidence” of Hezbollah security activities in north Lebanon’ 2008, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Al-Arabiya TV*, Dubai, in Arabic (19 August 2008), 21 August – Attachment 17; for the *Daily Star* report dismissing Hezbollah’s northern aspirations, see: Bluhm, M. 2008, ‘Hizbullah “botched” bid to win over Sunnis’, *Daily Star*, 21 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95242 – Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 40).

Recently, on 21 August 2008, *BBC Monitoring Middle East* noted a report broadcast by the “Saudi private capital-funded pan-Arab news channel Al-Arabiya TV on 19 August” in which: “An Islamist leader who broke away from the Islamic Action Front showed Al-Arabiya TV documents which he said prove that there are security activities by Hezbollah in northern Lebanon”. Extracts from *BBC Monitoring Middle East*’s transcript of the story follow below:

[Video report by Wa’il Isam]

An Islamist leader who broke away from the Islamic Action Front showed Al-Arabiya TV documents which he said prove that there are security activities by Hezbollah in northern Lebanon. According to the leader, these documents show that members of the Islamic Action Front received training in which they were mobilized against the Future Movement followers in Tripoli, and prove efforts to spread Shiism in Tripoli. [Al-Arabiya correspondent] Wa’il Isam has more details about this issue.

[Begin recording] [Video report by Wa’il Isam] Here is the office of the so-called emergency commission for the Islamic Action Front – a faction that has recently broken away from the Islamic Action Front led by renowned Islamic preacher Fathi Yakan. Shaykh Sayf-al-Din al-Husami, who led the dissent, accuses Hezbollah – his former ally in the Islamic Action Front, of implementing a project of control and expansion of power in Tripoli. This time he will show us evidence of his claims.

[Al-Husami] As a matter of fact, we in the Islamic Action Front were part of the Islamic Unification Movement but after dealing with them, we realized that there is a much larger project targeting the city of Tripoli and northern Lebanon in general. The project was

supported by Iran and Syria so as to be implemented by Hezbollah. Of course, we warned Hezbollah that if it expanded its influence and stormed the city of Beirut, we would retaliate any attack.

Hezbollah did not pay heed to our warning, so we had to storm its offices and obtained all information available which exposed the real scheme which was not tangible to us, but has been confirmed now through evidence, facts, and documents found in Hezbollah offices in Tripoli. First, this document sent by the Islamic Republic of Iran to Hezbollah ordering it to support northern Lebanon, and Tripoli in particular, proves that Hezbollah planned to establish a project in the city of Tripoli in which a monthly budget is allocated for Tripoli. This document is a rare one and dates back to 1987.

[Isam] We showed Shaykh Hashim Minqarah a copy of the documents which Shaykh Al-Husami obtained.

[Minqarah] Al-Shahid Foundation aims at helping the weak, the wounded, martyrs' [families], and others. This is section one of the fifth area. They started to divide Tripoli into sections and groups. Tripoli is divided to eight sections, and each section has about 25 or 26 Hezbollah elements in these areas, including engineers, university degree holders, car body workers, drivers, and other workers. They are launching a fully-fledged campaign. What is more important and serious is that Sunni families in Tripoli have converted to Shiism by Hezbollah, and here is a list of about 150 families in Tripoli who have converted to Shiism.

[Minqara] I wish they would inform me of list of these families so that we may help convert them back to Sunnis.

[Isam] What will you do if you have a list of these people?

[Minqarah] We want to see why they have converted to Shiism. I do not believe that Shi'is and Hezbollah will not accept this. It is not part of Hezbollah's project to covert Sunnis to Shiism. It is true that it wants to preserve the status of its party and Shi'i character, and it has the right to.

[Isam] Another issue which Shaykh Al-Husami disclosed is that Sunni fighters received military training by Hezbollah, which was the reason why he broke away later. But why was that?

[Al-Husami] The reason for the training was that we in the Islamic Action Front wanted to prepare 1,000 fighters to confront any Israeli attack against Lebanon, in which our extension was supposed to be the Sunni followers in the south. However, we were surprised to see that Hezbollah started to mobilize and arm us in Tripoli to engage in clashes with the followers of the Future Movement and the 14 March forces in general.

[Minqarah] Sayf al-Din himself received training and took a group with him to prepare for the resistance, and no thing more. I challenge him and I challenge others that nothing has been mentions about Sunnis and Shi'is in this regard. He is not more zealous about our Sunni character than we are. If anyone of those you spoke about dares to talk to the media, let him do it, identify himself in public, and say openly that there was instigation.

[Unidentified fighter] I was member of [words indistinct] for three years. They invited me to training to be prepared for confronting the Israeli enemy. We had colleagues from the Arab party, the Marada Movement, and other parties. We were surprised because they wanted us to fight what they claimed to be the Jews inside; namely, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and [Future Movement Head] Sa'd al-Hariri.

[Isam] Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, [founder of the Salafi Trend in Lebanon], read the documents with suspicion. What is your comment on these documents?

[Al-Shahhal] They prove that the principle of exporting the revolution is a creed that has emerged since the Iranian Revolution in Iran in the era of [Imam] Al-Khomeini. These names and statements show that they provide services so that people become convinced that the [Shi'i] sect is the right one. Certain names show that some people were convinced and converted to this line [of Shiism], and perhaps some were brought here to help this sect.

[Isam] No voice is louder than the voice of sectarianism in Lebanon. This saying does not always seem to be correct. Hezbollah's political alliance with some Sunni forces here in Tripoli has widened divisions among Sunnis. Conflicts and divisions among these Sunni factions have uncovered many hidden issues and what used to be whispered in the past is said in public today. [end recording] ('Sunni group gives "evidence" of Hezbollah security activities in north Lebanon' 2008, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Al-Arabiya TV*, Dubai, in Arabic (19 August 2008), 21 August – Attachment 17).

Two recent *Middle East Times* reports have argued that there are signals that Hezbollah is expanding and/or has the capability to penetrate regions previously considered outside its sphere of influence. A May 2008 report in the *Middle East Times* argues that: "The northern tips of the Hezbollah 'cable road' show clearly that its forces are deployed as far north as the eastern slopes of the Cedars Mounts":

A detailed map released by a French Web site citing Lebanese sources shows the main network of communications established by Hezbollah throughout Lebanon. It details the



organization's closed circuit telephone system, a network independent from the one operated by the government.

This parallel network was at the heart of the recent flare-up between Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's cabinet and Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.

...Why would Hezbollah wage such a risky war for a telecommunication system? Is it because of the income generated by the network to sell international phone calls? Less likely. The Iranian foreign aid to the

group was upgraded from \$300 million to a little less than \$1 billion a few months ago.

Obviously more revenue is always welcomed by the leaders of the so-called "resistance," but more important is the big picture revealed by the Hezbollah phone map.

Close analysis of the map tells us the following:

The "Red Lines" stretch from southern Beirut along the coast to the Hezbollah exclusive zones in the south. It covers a complex network of bases in the area, cuts through the Jezzine district and connects with the Bekaa Valley all the way up to northern Lebanon. The most important features and dimensions of the Hizbo-net are the following:

1. The net covers large parts of Greater Beirut: This can provide Hezbollah with the ability to organize its forces in Dahiye (southern suburb of Beirut) for assaults against West Beirut,

East Beirut and the Druze Mountain in Aley and the Chouf. The closed circuit can mobilize thousands of fighters without interception from Lebanese or international monitoring. It explains how Hezbollah launched its blitzkrieg offensive on Sunni Beirut, the Druze Mountain and was testing Christian Beirut, without real warning to the areas under attack.

2. The coastal cable-line links the Dahiye to the inner land of the Hezb. It serves to move troops and material from the south to the north without major detection. It explains how thousands of Hezbollah forces were moved from as far as Nabatieh and Tyre to Beirut. But it also tells about the capacity of Hezbollah to use it against UNIFIL forces in the future, if needed.

3. The network between the south and the Bekaa indicates a Hezbollah strategy to close the gap to the east.

As I have indicated in many articles and interviews previously, the Lebanese-Syrian borders are all that count to Hezbollah's terror network. As long as these frontiers are open for Iran to supply weapons and logistics via Syria, the state within the state can thrive and grow.

...4. In the mid-Bekaa, the cable route connects the center of the valley to one of the highest peaks in Mount Lebanon and thrusts into the mostly Christian districts of Byblos and Kesrouan. This shows that Hezbollah has already established an axis of penetration inside the Mount Lebanon area, at few kilometers only from the seashore.

5. Map A also shows that Hezbollah positions are connected to the Anti-Lebanon Range and thus to the Syrian hinterland. Militarily there are no Lebanese-Syrian borders to stop the flow of weapons and forces coming from Iran through Syria into Lebanon.

6. The northern tips of the Hezbollah "cable road" show clearly that its forces are deployed as far north as the eastern slopes of the Cedars Mounts. From these positions, the Iranian-backed forces can seize the highest peak south of Turkey, leap to the Akkar district and reach the northern borders with Syria.

7. More importantly, and because of the strategic bridge between Hezbollah and Iran, this communications network is a battlefield system which can be used by the Iranian Pasdaran and eventually by Syrian Special Forces in a potential mass return to Lebanon.

...Indeed, strategic projections show that Hezbollah can move its forces from the south toward Beirut (which was executed in May). But it also shows that combined forces of Hezbollah and Pasdaran can move on the Damascus road to Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the center of mountain as well.

Hezbollah-Pasdaran forces would move in the north on an East-West axis and jihadist elements and pro-Syrian forces can move from the borders to Tripoli.

The Hezbollah communication systems shows that when the time will come, massive reinforcements from Syria and Iran can move swiftly along axis already secured by Hezbollah across Lebanon. The invasion of West Beirut and the attacks against the Chouf and Aley districts are only the early signs of what is to come.

8. Last but not least, the Hezbollah communications network can also allow an activation of their massive rocket and missile system across Lebanon without significant interference from Western assets.

The aim of this powerful missile force seems to be against a potential "international" force tasked with the mission of bringing peace to the country. Here again Hezbollah – and Iran –

have already beaten the West in the race toward dominating the Eastern Mediterranean (Phares, W. 2008, 'Hezbollah's network confirms terror goals', *Middle East Times*, 20 May http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/05/20/Hezbollahs_network_confirms_terror_goals/3372/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 15).

An August 2008 *Middle East Times* report has made further claims about the expanding power and reach of the Hezbollah organisation. According to the report: Hezbollah's "military training and posturing has increased in regions of the country far beyond its traditionally recognized southern defenses (below the Litani River) and al-Dahiyeh (Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold near the airport)". The report states that: Hezbollah has been operating "provocatively close to Christian areas of Lebanon, and along, or near, strategically vital roads that pass through the mountains between the coast and the Bekaa Valley to the Syrian border". Relevant extracts follow:

In terms of weaponry, strategic and political positioning, and its ever-expanding international reach, Hezbollah is "five times more capable today," than it was at the beginning of the July 2006 war with Israel: A fact, according to experts, that prompted Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to tell his troops during a Tuesday morning tour of positions along the Golan Heights, "It's not for nothing that we're training here."

Not for nothing indeed. Poised just over the border in south Lebanon is Hezbollah; a Lebanon-based Shiite militia, considered to be a terrorist army by Israel and the United States, heavily funded and equipped by Iran and operationally supported by both Iran and Syria.

Hezbollah has strengthened its strategic positions across Lebanon in recent months. And in recent weeks, its military training and posturing has increased in regions of the country far beyond its traditionally recognized southern defenses (below the Litani River) and al-Dahiyeh (Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold near the airport).

... Since the attacks in May, eye-witnesses and open-sources from Arab language newspapers have reported an increasing number of Hezbollah paramilitary exercises – scouting, navigating, night operations – many of those exercises being conducted provocatively close to Christian areas of Lebanon, and along, or near, strategically vital roads that pass through the mountains between the coast and the Bekaa Valley to the Syrian border.

For instance, in the months before and weeks since the May attacks, Hezbollah and Pasdaran (Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) fighters – according to more than one independent source – have conducted small military exercises in the area around the town of Jezzine, east of Sidon.

"Reports about this have been limited, because journalists either don't fully recognize the strategic significance or they are afraid of Hezbollah," says Col. Charbel Barakat (Lebanese Army, ret.), a former infantry brigade commander who today directs the office of counterterrorism for the pro-democracy World Council of the Cedars Revolution. "Almost no Western journalists have reported this, and only a few Lebanese have."

Further north in the Sannine Mountains west of Zahle, Hezbollah has reportedly set up guided-missile batteries and early warning radar. Civilian hikers unfortunate enough to venture into this area reportedly have been detained, held, and interrogated for several hours by Hezbollah militiamen.

Also in recent weeks, Hezbollah and Pasdaran reportedly have been observed training and setting up temporary outposts in the Aqura area on the road between Aqura and Baalbeck –

and the security teams surrounding the exercise zone in one instance were reportedly wearing Lebanon Internal Security Forces (ISF) uniforms, though the ISF according to our sources denied they had policemen in the area at that time.

Aqura is key, because it is along the east-to-west road from Aqura to the coast that in a future war, Hezbollah plans to cut the country's largest Christian area in half. In such an attack – similar to what Hezbollah has previously done in Druze areas of the western Bekaa – Hezbollah fighters would knife through the Christian area, accessing pre-staged weapons and ammunition from the Shiite villages of Lasa, Almat, Ras Osta, and Kafr Salah which are located along (or fairly close to) the Aqura-to-Jbail trek.

“Hezbollah is establishing layered-defenses north of the Litani, in the southern and central Bekaa, and they have reinforced their presence in southern Beirut.” says Walid Phares, director of the Future of Terrorism Project for the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

“They also have created new positions in Mount Lebanon and in the far north near the highest peak of the Cedars mountains. Which means technically, Hezbollah – which means Iran – controls the highest ground in the region south of Turkey” (Smith, W.T. 2008, ‘Hezbollah ‘Five-times’ Stronger Than It Was in Israeli War’, *Middle East Times*, 15 August http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/08/15/Hezbollah_five-times_stronger_than_it_was_in_israeli_war/4107/ – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 16).

In August 2008 it was reported that Hezbollah and certain Sunni Salafist groups in the north had been negotiating a memorandum of understanding to cement terms of cooperation. Some commentators feel that this development constitutes a significant expansion of Hezbollah influence in the north. On 19 August 2008 Walid Phares commented as follows in *The Middle East Times*: “The agreement will serve as a launching pad to begin establishing a presence through these Salafis from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, all the way to the northern border with Syria”. Pertinent extracts from Phares's piece follows outlining the terms of the agreement signed on 19 August 2008.

On Aug. 19, leaders from Hezbollah and Salafist organizations called a press conference at Al Safir Hotel in Beirut's Raouche district and signed a memo of understanding between the two forces.

...It is believed that the move by Hezbollah to sign an agreement of understanding with Salafist organizations aims ultimately at penetrating the Arab Sunni world via Lebanon's Muslim community and maintaining an influence over the region's attitude toward the West.

According to Aqeel, “this move didn't come [out of the] void, but after many meetings away from media between representatives of Hezbollah and some Salafist groups.” These encounters, said An-Nahar, included the head of Hezbollah's political bureau Ibrahim al-Amin and Sheikh Safuan al-Zuhbi from the Salafist movement.

Another Beirut daily, Al-Mustaqbal (Aug. 18) wrote that Hezbollah has been successful in recruiting 15 Salafist groups in Lebanon including the Waqf Ahya' al-Turath al-Islami to form a “Salafist camp” allied to the Iranian-Syrian axis. Hezbollah officials, wrote Al-Mustaqbal, are declaring that Americans have been defeated in the region by “resistance” in Lebanon, Iraq and Gaza.

...The agreement commits to:

- 1) Condemn any Islamic group that assaults another.
- 2) Abandon incitement, which creates trouble and will allow the “enemies” to take advantage of the situation.
- 3) “Confront” the American agenda.
- 4) Firmly support Hezbollah and the Salafist movement against others.
- 5) Form a religious committee to discuss any disagreements between the Shiites and the Sunnis.
- 6) Respect each others’ opinions.

...The Salafist-Hezbollah agreement in Lebanon is a novelty from which there are a number of lessons to be learnt:

- 1) It demonstrates that Hezbollah continues to move forward after its big win in May against Lebanon’s first Fouad Siniora government and the March 14 Coalition.

The organization relentlessly controls the national security decision making process of Lebanon and is stretching its military presence in areas it had never reached before, such as into the heart of the Christian areas north of Beirut; and soon, the Sunni north.

The agreement will serve as a launching pad to begin establishing a presence through these Salafis from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, all the way to the northern border with Syria. In short, and as Salafist leaders opposed to the agreement have stated, this is a strategic penetration of the Sunni community in Lebanon via its most militant segment, the Islamist Salafis (Phares, W. 2008, ‘Special Report: Hezbollah Signs Pact with Salafis’, *Middle East Times*, 19 August

http://www.metimes.com/International/2008/08/19/special_report_Hezbollah_signs_pact_wit_h_salafis/3955/ – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 46).

On the following day, however, it was reported that: “Salafist groups [had] announced...their decision to ‘temporarily freeze’ a memorandum of understanding they signed with Shiite group Hizbullah one day earlier”:

“The agreement will be temporarily frozen pending appropriate circumstances that allow for its implementation,” Sheikh Hassan al-Shahhal, who signed the memorandum with Hizbullah’s Sheikh Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed told a news conference in Tripoli Tuesday evening (‘Salafist groups “freeze” agreement with Hizbullah’ 2008, *Daily Star*, 20 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95209 – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 47).

On 21 August 2008 a *Daily Star* report carried comments from a number of sources who dismissed the significance of Hezbollah’s attempt to expand its influence in the north through Sunni Salafist groups:

The brief life of a memorandum of understanding between Hizbullah and some Salafist groups from North Lebanon showed parliamentary majority leader MP Saad Hariri and his Future Movement foiling a badly executed effort by Hizbullah to encroach on Hariri’s electoral base around Tripoli, a number of analysts told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

“It’s a botched way to try to gain some influential political ground in the North,” Oussama Safa, executive director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. “It didn’t go very well.”

The eight-point memorandum, signed on Monday between the Hizbullah party and several Salafist groups, ostensibly endeavored to halt Shiite-Sunni violence that has besieged Tripoli since the May 21 Doha agreement that on paper ended two weeks of sectarian clashes. To the extent that the powerful Shiite party and various Salafist groups committed themselves in writing to renouncing violence, the memorandum did signify a positive step, said Ahmad Moussalli, who teaches international relations and Islamic studies at the American University of Beirut.

“It was a very good beginning for some sort of defusing the sectarian problems,” he said.

However, tensions remain high, with much of the Sunni population still smarting from Hizbullah’s lightning takeover of large swathes of western Beirut, and a move on the order of a memorandum does little to assuage Sunni unease, Safa said. The Salafists announced on Tuesday that they would “temporarily freeze” the memorandum.

“It’s one of the attempts to do too little, too late. None of that is really working,” he said, adding that reconciliation would require a bigger move, on the level of the coming national dialogue or an embrace between Hariri and Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

With the national dialogue looming, choosing instead to sign a deal with Salafists from North Lebanon reflects Hizbullah’s designs to chip away at Hariri’s core constituency around Tripoli ahead of general elections slated for next May, Safa said.

“A deal like this will help [calm sectarian strife], but this is not the primary motivation,” he said, adding that Hizbullah’s main goal was to “gather and bring into the fold some of those Sunnis who are already against the Future Movement.

...Hizbullah’s ploy makes sense from an electoral perspective, because the regional alliance of Hariri and his March 14 cohorts with the US, France and other Western countries pits him against many Sunni Islamist movements, Moussalli said.

In Tripoli, long home to conservative strains of Islam, support for Hariri “is strong, but I think it’s weakening,” Moussalli said. Salafist groups “started to have some distance from him.”

The venture into the North also signals that Hizbullah, atop Lebanon’s political heap after the events of May, wants to pry away enough Sunni and Christian voters for itself and its March 8 allies to secure a majority in the legislature, said retired General Elias Hanna, who teaches political science at Notre Dame University.

“They want to divide and rule,” Hanna said. “Hizbullah is not thinking about the South, about Baabda and Aley. It’s thinking about all Lebanon. It’s trying to work in Tripoli, as well as in Kesrouan.”

...Hizbullah also hooked up with some of the weakest of the North’s myriad Salafist groups, Hanna said. “How many people do they represent?” he asked. “They are nothing.”

The memorandum crumbled when Sheikh Dai al-Islam al-Shahhal, considered by some the founder of the Salafist movement in Lebanon and the cousin of the sheikh who signed the memorandum, came out against the agreement. The abrupt Salafist turnaround also exposed the utter absence of unity among the various Salafist entities, some of whom still stand firmly with Hariri, Hanna added.

“There are some rifts and divisions within the Salafist group,” he said. “Don’t lump all of the Salafists together. If you listen to what Shahhal is saying, he believes in the Constitution, in the institutions, etc.”

“Maybe [Hizbullah] miscalculated,” Hanna added. “When you go to Akkar and Tripoli, the [people] are 90 percent with the Future Movement. [Hizbullah] cannot bypass the Future Movement. It wasn’t good.”

Hariri parried Hizbullah’s advance by using his allies to exploit the Salafists’ disunity, which stems from their conflicting political allegiances to foreign Salafist umbrella groups, Safa said. “The Future Movement has countered by playing with the Salafist movement and their contradictions,” he said. “They’re definitely not united. It’s not the Salafi agenda that unites them.”

The memorandum “was too hastily cooked,” Safa added. “It did look like a big surprise.”

Some of those external Salafi currents may have accelerated the memorandum’s demise, Moussalli said. Strict Salafists regard the Shiites of Hizbullah as apostates from Islam, so foreign patrons of Salafist groups here might well have put their Lebanese brethren under pressure to annul the memorandum, he added.

“The Salafists do not view the Shiites as Muslims,” he said. To sign such an agreement “has ideological and religious connotations that go beyond the Lebanese context.”

Within the Lebanese context, the abortive memorandum might have some consequences on the elections it sought to sway, the analysts said. For example, Hariri might have to repay the Salafists for sabotaging the memorandum by letting them run on his party’s list of candidates in the parliamentary poll, Safa said.

“Future might have a Salafi or two on their ticket,” he said.

The frozen memorandum might also drive undecided Christian voters away from Hizbullah ally and Reform and Change bloc head MP Michel Aoun. Aoun also has a memorandum of understanding with Hizbullah, and Christian voters might be put off by the dalliance of Aoun’s main partner with groups that many Christians consider extremist, Hanna said.

Memorandum fallout will “for sure” damage Aoun, Hanna said. “By an indirect calculation, he is a friend of the Salafists.”

If the association between Hizbullah and the Salafists persists, Aoun’s deal with Hizbullah might turn into an electoral albatross for him, Safa said.

“His memorandum of understanding remains the thing he is most proud to show off,” Safa said. “It’s an unequal memorandum of understanding. It looks like a Lebanese-Syrian kind of accord.”

For now, the election ploy represented by the memorandum appears to have backfired, Safa said. “It’s a shrewd move to pull the rug from under the Future Movement, but this time the Future Movement was there waiting for them” (Bluhm, M. 2008, ‘Hizbullah “botched” bid to win over Sunnis’, *Daily Star*, 21 August

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=95242 –

Accessed 4 September 2008 – Attachment 40; see also: Khouri, R. 2008, ‘Absent the state, watch new pacts arise’, *Daily Star*, 20 August

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=5&article_id=95197# –

Accessed 20 August 2008 – Attachment 48).

Hezbollah, the Future Movement and Islamist and/or Salafist Sunni groups in the North

A January 2008 paper published by the Carnegie Middle East Center provides the following background on the complex relationship between Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), Hezbollah and the north's Sunni Islamist and Salafist groups; with some of the north's latter Sunni movements aligning themselves with the Future Movement while others have aligned with Hezbollah. The principal sections of the report dealing with these issues appear below. An entry on the Islamic Action Front (IAF) is also reproduced below given the significance which may flow from the August 2008 *Al-Arabiya* reports of collaboration between the IAF and Hezbollah. Sections on Fateh al-Islam are also included. An overview of the various other Sunni Islamist and Salafist movements operating in Lebanon can be found on pages 9 to 14 and also 16-21.

The emergence of Sunni Islamists as significant political actors in Lebanon is closely linked to Hariri's death, which deepened a sense of sectarian persecution and solidarity among the Sunna of the country. Politically, Hariri's rise to power in Lebanon came at the expense of traditional Sunni politicians. Hariri originated from a modest non-political family but had become a billionaire businessman in Saudi Arabia and returned to Lebanon to become Prime Minister in 1992; he had close relations with Syria for many years, but the relationship soured in the late 1990s. During the 1990s he had built himself up as the predominant Sunni politician in the country. In so doing, he worked systematically to exclude, co-opt, or neutralize other Sunni politicians. He came to be identified as the leader of the Sunna par excellence. When he was killed, Sunna were left with a huge leadership vacuum and "a sense of being orphaned," as one veteran Islamist figure put it. Also, the death of Hariri "Lebanonized" the Sunna. In a complete break with their history, Lebanon's Sunna began to act not only as a sect among other sects, but also as a minority whose existence was threatened, whose leaders were targeted, and whose sense of victimization was deep. It is within this context that the majority of Sunna became supporters of Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), a movement founded by Hariri that has become the predominant political force in the Sunni community under his son and successor, Saad. Most recently, the year-long protest movement spearheaded by Hizbollah and other opposition groups against the Hariri-backed government of Fouad Siniora was understood by the majority of Sunna in sectarian terms, as a "Shi'i"-led act of hostility against a "Sunni"-led government, rather than opposition to what those groups perceive as the government's failing policies and its poor performance during and after the summer 2006 war with Israel.

Shii-Sunni tensions reached an unprecedented peak in January 2007, when supporters of Hizbollah and the Amal Movement (another prominent Shi'i movement led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri) clashed with Mustaqbal supporters in violent scenes that reminded the Lebanese of the civil war days. Among those arrested during the clashes were members of a small Sunni Salafist group, al-Daawa wal-Tableegh (roughly, Proselytize and Inform). Some of the group's members had been implicated in a plot to assassinate Hizbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in March of 2006. Anti-Shi'i rhetoric came to permeate the everyday discourse of ordinary Sunna, and both the Sunni religious establishment represented by Mufti Rachid Qabbani and the political leadership of Mustaqbal played an important role in fanning the flames of sectarian tension on the Sunni side. The result is a "Sunni street," which is not only more sectarian and radicalized in general, but also has been left vulnerable to more extremist religious leaders who have a stronger message of sectarian hatred and rejection of the other. The religious establishment has not only turned a blind eye to the politicization of sectarian identities, at times, it has been party to it: the scene of Mufti Qabbani leading prayers in the government Serail, seat of the Siniora government, following the opposition sit-in, sent a clear message to the Lebanese that he was defending a "Sunni" position, thus serving further to define the conflict in sectarian terms.

Some Salafist forces, in alliance with Mustaqbal, also played a significant role in inciting sections of the Sunni street against the Shi'a and Hizbollah, under the banner of "defending Ahl al-Sunna." Anti-Shi'a leaflets filled with vitriolic language were found in Beirut and the Beqaa. Prominent religious scholars like Muhammad Ali al-Juzo, the Mufti of the governorate of Mount Lebanon, were given a platform to incite and mobilize their followers in dangerously strong sectarian language. It is within this context that radical Islamists—particularly from Salafist ranks—began to come into their own.

Although Mustaqbal presents itself as a modern movement embracing a moderate view of Islam and defends the concept of the state, it has had few qualms in undermining those mainstream Islamist forces that don't tow its line, such as the Islamic Action Front, while making alliances with forces that hold an ambivalent vision of the state and embrace a radical—and at times extremist and intolerant—view of Islam. The lack of a clear political or ideological vision on the part of Mustaqbal's leadership often forces it to resort to sectarian discourse in order to mobilize its social base. In this context, Islamists—particularly the radical elements among them—are regarded as useful tools in securing popular support.

The political crisis sparked by the resignation of all five Shi'a ministers from the government last November and followed by a year-long sit-in, clearly exposed the splits among Lebanon's Sunni Islamists and confirmed that they were not monolithic. While some of the Islamist forces allied with Mustaqbal played a significant role in exacerbating the sectarian tensions, other Sunni Islamists joined ranks with Hizbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement (a group composed mostly of Christians and led by former army general Michel Aoun) and other opposition parties against the Siniora government. The split exposed the political—as opposed to the sectarian—nature of the conflict; it also showed that Sunni Islamists were not only divided over their relationship with the main "secular" force in the Sunni street, i.e., Hariri's Mustaqbal, but most importantly that they were divided over what type of relationship to have with the Muslim "other," the Shi'a, and what relationship to have with their fellow Islamists, Hizbollah.

The relationship between Sunni Islamist movements and Mustaqbal is complex and ambiguous, to say the least. Islamists' votes in north Lebanon helped the Hariri bloc achieve a landslide victory there, winning all twenty-eight seats of the north in the 2005 elections. A pragmatic relationship emerged during the period that followed. While some Islamist forces sought an alliance with Mustaqbal in search of financial support, political influence, and protection, as is the case with some Salafist figures, others did it out of a sense of sectarian solidarity (e.g., the case of al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya). A third force, Hizb al-Tahrir, kept the relationship ambiguous, coming out neither in support nor in opposition to Mustaqbal. Yet other Islamists, such as the Islamic Action Front, chose to remain in the opposition camp. In the meantime, the Mustaqbal movement benefited from the mobilizational abilities and social capital of the Islamists, particularly in the north, but publicly kept them at arm's length, in order not to alienate their non-Sunni allies in Lebanon and their American and other Western backers.

Through his advisers and MPs in the north, Hariri worked on co-opting the Islamists. The majority of Salafists were among the co-opted forces as was al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya. The government tried to co-opt Hizb al-Tahrir by licensing the previously outlawed party; this moderated the party's stand but did not lead to its full co-option. The attempts at co-option alienated some mainstream Sunni Islamist forces like the Islamic Action Front as well as some Salafists, particularly those who embrace a more moderate and reformist stance toward the Shi'a and some other doctrinal issues.

There is growing evidence, however, to suggest that the alliances that Mustaqbal struck with some of these Islamist groups are being put to the test. Some criticize Mustaqbal's pro-Western alliance and its deviation from the cause of resistance. Others fault Mustaqbal for

failing to adequately defend the Sunni community. A number of Salafists and mainstream Islamists are questioning the alliance in light of the large-scale confrontation between the Lebanese army and the Salafist Fateh al-Islam group in Nahr al-Bared. That episode revived the Salafists' worst fears of being targeted by the security establishment—as was always the case during the thirty years of Syrian rule in Lebanon—or of being sacrificed on the altar of politics. The visit made by a delegation of the heads of Salafist associations (al-Hay'at al-Salafiyya) of the north, which represent many of the loosely affiliated Salafist religious, social, educational, and charitable organizations in Lebanon, to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) chief Ashraf Rifi on September 14, 2007, just a few days after the battles ended, reflected how deeply concerned they were over the fallout from the Nahr al-Bared confrontation. According to one source who attended the meeting, the two parties exchanged assurances that the Salafists were not targeted by the ISF. The delegation vowed to remain committed to safeguarding and defending national security, because "it was an important requirement to spread al-daawa (the Call), the Salafists' foremost priority," according to the Lebanese *as-Safir* newspaper.

One of the main points of contention upsetting the Hariri-Islamist alliance is the position vis-à-vis the issue of resistance. During the July 2006 war, Islamists affiliated with al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya returned to a cause they had long neglected: resistance against Israel. Some JI members fought alongside Hizbollah in the southern towns along the border with Israel. Today, the question of what role they can play as a resistance force has become one of the most pressing issues for them. The most radical among them say their "conflict" with Hizbollah is not sectarian but exists only because Hizbollah "monopolizes the resistance against Israel and does not allow other forces to operate."

Sunni Islamists' preoccupation with the issue of resistance can be understood within the context of seeking to acquire legitimacy in the Sunni street, which has always regarded itself as the defender of the nation's Arab identity and a champion of resistance against Israel. It is also a useful tool in the turf battles some Islamists have waged against Mustaqbal, which some forces accuse of "serving the Western project."

The Sunni Islamist question in Lebanon has become the focus of a vigorous debate among Islamists themselves in the country, particularly in the wake of two key developments: first, the confrontation with Fateh al-Islam, which the head of Lebanon's armed forces described as being affiliated with al-Qaeda; second, press reports that repeatedly spoke of "a growing presence of al-Qaeda on Lebanese soil." This raised fears that religious extremists now see Lebanon, like other failing states, as attractive terrain in which to establish a foothold. Initial police investigations of the attacks against the new United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) in the summer of 2007 as well as the bombing of a bus in Ain 'Alaq, a predominantly Christian area, in February of the same year, suggested that both have been the work of al-Qaeda-inspired Salafist groups or individuals. Police reports said that Fateh al-Islam was implicated in the Ain 'Alaq bombing, while a video message from al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, hailed the attack against UNIFIL without taking any responsibility for it.

...Lebanon's Sunni Islamists are neither monolithic nor unchanging. They run the gamut from fairly moderate organizations like al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya all the way to the radical Salafism of al-Qaeda-inspired groups such as the Dinniyyeh Group, which clashed with the Lebanese army in 1999. Some movements such as Tawheed used to embrace an extremist vision of politics as reflected during their takeover of Tripoli in 1984–85 (this involved the killing of political opponents, imposing a very strict code of conduct, and forcing non-Muslim residents out of the city). Today it holds a centrist approach to politics and stands in a political alliance with Hizbollah under the umbrella of the more mainstream Islamic Action Front.

Furthermore, Islamists have not met strong opposition or resistance from the Sunni social environment within which they operate. The north has been the birthplace of the majority of these Islamist movements. The city of Tripoli, as well as rural areas like Akkar and Dinniyeh, served as fertile ground for Islamists. Demographic factors are often cited to explain the phenomenon, as half of Lebanon's Sunni Muslims are concentrated in the northern provinces. Harsh economic conditions, social marginalization, and a dearth of state services are the classic motives often referred to to explain why Islamists find refuge and recruits in this part of the country. A report issued by the Council for Development and Reconstruction about poverty in Lebanon found that the monthly income of half of the families who live in Bab al-Tibbaneh, a poverty stricken area in Tripoli, does not exceed \$130. Another report estimated that 23.7 percent of Lebanon's poor live in Akkar. A vast network of social services and religious schools has helped increase the influence of Islamists among Lebanon's Sunna.

The Syrian military presence, which lasted for thirty years, was one of the crucial factors in shaping the evolution of Islamist movements. Most Islamists from across the board—with the notable exception of the Ahabash—bitterly recall a “policy of siege” imposed on their activities while under Syrian tutelage. Many Sunni Islamists make no secret of their anti-Syrian sentiments. Many were forced to go underground, their members were hunted, and their schools and places of worship were kept under the watchful eye of Syrian and Lebanese intelligence. However, Syrian and Lebanese prisons were breeding grounds for new recruits.

The period after Syrian withdrawal witnessed a surge in Islamist activities in the north. Islamists have been granted a freer space to act: however, they complain that the Lebanese authorities inherited from the previous security regime “a legacy of hostility” against all things Islamist.

There exists a schizophrenic relationship between the Islamists and the Lebanese security establishment with its two poles, the army and the Interior Security Forces. While the army has a record of confronting Islamists since 1999, the pro-Hariri internal security forces have maintained a close relationship with them.

...Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami (the Islamic Action Front, or IAF)

The IAF was formed in August 2006 by Fathi Yakan, a veteran of Islamist politics in Lebanon who had co-founded al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya. Yakan broke ranks with al-Jamaa in 2006 because of differences over their alliance with Mustaqbal. Yakan believes that under Saad al-Hariri's leadership, Mustaqbal is serving Western interests in Lebanon and allying itself with the United States and the axis of so-called “moderate” Arab regimes as opposed to the resistance camp of Syria, Iran, Hamas, and Hizbollah, of which Yakan is a strong ally. He says Mustaqbal is moving the Sunna away from their founding principles, namely resistance to US hegemony and safeguarding the Arab identity of Lebanon.

The IAF, in its founding statement, described itself as an independent entity created at a time when “the Islamic nation is subjected to a vicious US–Zionist attack. Its main goal is to work on national and Islamic unity and protect the Resistance and stand up to any attempts at sowing sectarian strife.”

IAF, according to its ideologues, seeks to occupy the space between “the US-orchestrated chaos and al-Qaeda chaos” in Lebanon, and to mobilize the sections of the Sunni street that do not identify with either. The movement is currently leading a media offensive to introduce itself to the Lebanese public. “We do not want this to be a one-man show,” said one young figure of the movement, referring to Yakan's influence on the IAF. The movement will, nonetheless, capitalize on Yakan's high profile as a veteran of Islamist politics. IAF is still in its early stages, but some leaked reports about the internal debates suggested that there is already a conflict over the place IAF should occupy in the current political crisis. IAF cadres

want to attract those segments in the Sunni street who think Mustaqbal lost direction under Saad Hariri's leadership. In several statements, Yakan seemed intent on creating "an Islamist resistance" that transcends sectarianism. He has been a staunch critic of Islamist forces that work to undermine Hizbollah's role as a resistance movement "and those who issue fatwas (edicts) against the Shia."

Despite his defection, Yakan spoke well of al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and praised its role in joining the resistance against Israel's most recent aggression against Lebanon. He acknowledged that his movement seeks to include other Islamist and Jihadist forces and, most importantly, the Salafists.

The IAF is an umbrella organization that brings together several Islamist groups, including Harakat al-Tawheed with its two wings, one headed by Sheikh Bilal Shaaban and the other by Hashim Minqara, as well as other smaller Islamist groups such as Islam Without Frontiers, the Imam Ali Association, the Muslim Associations in Lebanon Forum, and the Islamic Action Forces.

...Al-Mustaqbal and Salafists: Marriage of Convenience

The political alliance of larger sections of the Salafist movement with the Western-backed March 14 forces might come as a surprise, but it can be understood within the context of sectarian affiliation and, in particular, the relationship with Saad al-Hariri's Mustaqbal. Hariri is viewed by the majority of Lebanon's Sunna to have inherited his father's leadership legacy. The Salafists, despite disagreement with Hariri over key issues that they voice privately, do not want to "break the Sunni ranks" by confronting Hariri. Secondly, both Salafists and Hariri can claim to be standing in the face of a common enemy, Hizbollah, although each for his own reasons. While in public Hariri does not associate himself with the Salafists, he never stopped his allies from using sectarian discourse to mobilize the street under the banner of defending Ahl al-Sunna. At times, Hariri himself resorted to such rhetoric when all other means failed.

Some of his supporters in Mustaqbal disagree with this view. They argue that some of them are uncomfortable with the alliance with the Salafists. Their political project, says one member of al-Mustaqbal, stands on a completely different foundation than the Salafists. "There is no alliance or animosity between the two," he says, adding, however, "Hariri's is a project which calls for a state for all its citizens; they want an Islamic state." Finally, he says, "Al-Mustaqbal is in opposition to Hizbullah not out of sectarian reasons, but simply because of its regional alliances."

The relationship between al-Mustaqbal and the Salafists is shrouded in ambiguity. While publicly al-Mustaqbal keeps a distance from Salafists, its MPs in the north work on building bridges with the Salafist movement, convinced that it has a wide popular base that can serve the interests of al-Mustaqbal during elections or periods of political tension. For example, al-Mustaqbal has benefited from the anti-Shi'a rhetoric adopted by some Salafist sheikhs to mobilize the Sunni street during its political conflict with Hizbollah. This rhetoric prevented the Sunna from questioning Hariri's political vision or lack thereof and made them focus on his hostility toward Hizbollah and, by association, the Shi'a.

The alliance has, nonetheless, gone through difficult times. The confrontation with Fateh al-Islam and the fact that the three main figures of the Sunni sect (Prime Minister Siniora, Hariri, and Mufti Rachid Qabbani) stood in support of finishing off a group that many Salafists regard as comrades, caused simmering tension and discontent in their ranks. Some Salafists also think they are "being used" by al-Mustaqbal in its political conflict against its rivals, be they other Sunni political forces or Hizbollah. They cite two incidents to support their case. One was the so-called "Tabaris incident" (Ghazwat al-Tabaris), in which many young

Salafists responded to a call by Dar al-Fatwa to take to the streets in protest against Danish cartoons ridiculing the prophet. The situation got ugly when the protesters set fire to the Danish embassy and attacked a number of churches in Ashrafiyya, a predominantly Christian neighborhood. Security forces interfered to stop the riots and many protesters, mostly Salafists, were arrested. They felt they were let down by Hariri and Dar al-Fatwa, neither of whom defended them or stepped in to set them free. The second incident took place last January, when young Salafists took to the street against supporters of Hizbollah and the Amal movement. The army intervened to break up the protest. Many protesters were arrested. Hariri remained silent, despite the fact that these young men took to the streets prompted by sectarian mobilization carried out by al-Mustaqbal members. Such incidents fed a growing perception within Salafist ranks that Hariri “is not doing enough to protect the Sunna and their rights.”

Fateh al-Islam

...The confrontation with the Lebanese army, which led to the liquidation of Fateh al-Islam and a humanitarian disaster for the 40,000 Palestinian refugees, took everyone by surprise. A bank robbery near Tripoli in May led to clashes in the streets of Tripoli between security forces and members of Fateh al-Islam, the suspected robbers. Two members of the group were killed. In revenge, Fateh al-Islam members slaughtered at least fifteen Lebanese soldiers near the refugee camp. The army decided to attack the camp to capture those responsible. What was meant to be a quick operation went on for three months, suggesting that the group had been armed to the teeth and was prepared for such a confrontation. At the same time, Salafist figures close to Absi said that Fateh al-Islam leaders did not want a showdown with the Lebanese state and that the battle was badly timed.

Fateh al-Islam members were charged with killing soldiers and civilians and transferring explosive material. Although there are conflicting reports about the number of the detainees belonging to Fateh al-Islam, on August 20, the security forces announced that 227 people had been arrested and accused of belonging to Fateh al-Islam, sixty-nine of whom were said to be Lebanese nationals. Absi, who is believed to be on the run now, said in earlier press interviews that his organization had no connection with al-Qaeda and does not want to target UNIFIL and that its ultimate goal was to “defend Islam and Muslims.”

While it is true that Fateh al-Islam might not have a direct connection with al-Qaeda, nonetheless, it adopted al-Qaeda’s recruitment patterns with regard to the many Arab nationals who constituted part of its fighting force. On September 25, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) said that the Fateh al-Islam detainees were all Arab nationals, some of whom had entered the country legally and posed as rich Gulf tourists or Sunni clerics coming to “defend Ahl al-Sunna against the extremist Shia trend.” Although police investigations of the detainees, including some high-ranking members, such as Abu Salim Taha, the group’s spokesperson, suggested that Fateh al-Islam had made no organizational connection with al-Qaeda, there seemed to have been some initial contacts with members of al-Qaeda in Iraq. A report presented to the Lebanese cabinet on September 24 by army intelligence chief George Khoury said the group had links with many regional forces. While Syria had facilitated entry into Lebanon for some of the fighters, most of them, including Saudis, Yemenis, and Chechens, entered the country through the Beirut airport. Khoury revealed that the funding for these flights had come mainly from Saudi Arabia through charitable organizations and individuals. He said a list of those organizations and individuals and the exact amounts of money contributed has been submitted to Saudi intelligence officials.

As Fateh al-Islam becomes history, the important thing is the impact this military confrontation will have on the rest of the Salafist groups, particularly those that embrace al-Qaeda’s worldview. Many Salafist figures argue that the confrontation has dealt a fatal blow

to al-Qaeda-inspired Salafists. The mistake Fateh al-Islam committed, they argue, is that it ignored “the exceptionalism of the Lebanese context.”

...The year 2006 saw a number of arrests of groups and individuals who are inspired by al-Qaeda’s doctrines. There are now over 250 detainees in Lebanon’s main Roumieh prison who belong to al-Qaeda-like Salafist groups, or what are commonly known as Jihadi Salafists. The arrests, however, do not necessarily mean there is an organizational existence for al-Qaeda in Lebanon. Lebanese Internal Security Forces Chief Ashraf Rifi explained that what existed in Lebanon was “a fake al-Qaeda.” In other words, the arrests of individuals and groups who are inspired by al-Qaeda does not constitute proof that al-Qaeda exists in Lebanon. Rifi, who is close to Hariri, maintained good relations with Lebanon’s Salafists. He even went so far as to engage some Salafist figures in the mediation efforts between the ISF and Fateh al-Islam. One prominent Salafist who was asked to be a mediator between the two parties said neither Fateh al-Islam nor the ISF wanted the battle in the first place. “Some elements within Fateh al-Islam forced an ill-timed confrontation on the group,” he said.

Many thought that this “close” relationship between the ISF and many Salafist leaders should have spared the country and the security forces the catastrophic situation in Nahr al-Bared. Yet it did not. For no matter how much security chiefs may have thought they had the “Salafists under control,” some elements were bound to deviate from the script.

It is no surprise that the squalid Palestinian camps in Lebanon are fertile ground for radical Salafist groups. The camps do not fall under the supervision of the Lebanese state, according to a previous agreement between the state and Palestinian factions. It is not true, however, that the Lebanese state or the security establishment does not have access to the camps. Lebanese intelligence does maintain a presence through “its men” in the camps. So it should have been aware of the developments that were taking place. Besides, most of those groups, if not all of them, had been in contact with not only the security and military establishments but also with Lebanese political forces, as was the case with MP Bahia al-Hariri and Jund al-Sham in Ain al-Helwa refugee camp (Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, ‘Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists – A Growing Force’, *Carnegie Papers*, no. 6, January – Attachment 49).

Akkar men in Beirut fighting

According to Samah Idriss, an activist and writer interviewed by Stefan Christoff for the Electronic Intifada website, the Future Movement bussed in men from Akkar to fight in the May 2008 Beirut conflict. According to Idriss: “In certain cases people coming from Akkar weren’t even aware prior to arriving in Beirut that they were coming to the capital to fight”:

[Samah Idriss:] Also it is critical to note that many pro-government forces who fought against the opposition in recent days, were people traveled from extremely impoverished areas like Akkar in northern Lebanon, led by the Future Movement to Beirut which was offering money to impoverished people to fight against opposition forces in Beirut. In certain cases people coming from Akkar weren’t even aware prior to arriving in Beirut that they were coming to the capital to fight, thinking that they were coming to Beirut to fill labor positions; these are people who were manipulated by the Future Movement.

Many people from Akkar, in this context, quickly surrendered to opposition forces in West Beirut, declaring on local TV and radio that they weren’t aware that they were being led by pro-government forces, mainly the Future Movement, to Beirut to fight the opposition. Also some youths who fought for the opposition forces were led to fight with money, however this is a minority. It’s important to recognize that the terrible economic situation in Lebanon is leading people to fight in multiple cases (Idriss, S. interviewed by Christoff, S. 2008, ‘Lebanon in crisis: an interview with editor Samah Idriss’, Electronic Lebanon website, 10

May <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9527.shtml> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 50).

Posting on the Back in Beirut blog, on 29 August 2008, Paul Cochrane provided details on the involvement of Akkar men in Beirut's May 2008 events sourced from "an employee of the Hariri-owned, pro-government Future TV (FTV) channel". According to this source the Future Movement stationed men from Akkar outside the FTV channel to defend the premises. The men were reportedly armed only "with batons" and melted away. The relevant extract follows:

That evening, as reported by only a few media outlets and relayed in a firsthand account from an employee of the Hariri-owned, pro-government Future TV (FTV) channel, the Future movement brought in thousands of men from Akkar and Tripoli to the Kantari area of West Beirut. "There were two six-wheeler trucks full of mattresses for the guys to sleep on in preparation for a fight. When we saw them we felt more comfortable, then the next day they all disappeared. Maybe they ran away or the Future movement changed its mind and didn't want a clash. The men were paid to be there, and not armed, just with batons," he said (Cochrane, P. 2008, 'On the Media Battle for Lebanon, May 2008', Back in Beirut website, 29 August <http://www.backinBeirut.blogspot.com/> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 51).

The shortlived presence of Akkar men in the Beirut fighting was also noted in a report published on the *Al Ahram* website:

But this time was different. Gun-battles engulfed the whole districts of Ras Al-Nabaa and Corniche Al-Mazraa and spread to neighbouring areas. In Ras Al-Nabaa, a stronghold of Al-Hariri's Future Movement with pockets of Shia loyal mainly to Amal, men in civilian clothes with rifles slung across their shoulders took up positions in garages of plush new flats and hiding behind cars. For six or seven hours, the air was a deafening cacophony of machinegun and Kalashnikov fire, punctuated by the thump of RPGs and the crack of sniper shots, the night lit by flaming cars.

By morning, the Future Movement's three centres in the area had fallen and gunmen, some Amal, others wearing yellow Hizbullah armbands, stood on street corners. Future's arms caches – testimony to two years of denials that the movement was building a militia – were turned over to the army.

Groups of men from the northern Sunni areas in Tripoli and Akkar, visible on the streets over the past few weeks to the irritation of some residents, had vanished. Shell-shocked locals stocked up at the few open grocers' shops and hurried home, crunching over broken glass with their heads down (Fielder, L. 2008, 'No going back', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no.897, 15/21 May <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/897/re62.htm> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 52).

Future Movement conflict with Hezbollah aligned SSNP in Akkar District

As is noted above, in response to Question 1, the events of May 2008 also saw reports of violence in Akkar's capital of Halba in which Future Movement supporters are said to have clashed with (and according to some sources massacred) "members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a secular pro-Syrian group allied with the Shiite Hezbollah". According to Israel's *Haaretz* news service "12 gunmen were killed and 20 wounded". According to the *Ya Libnan* news service "3 members of the Future Movement (Al Mustaqbal) and 9 members of Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) were killed". A *New York Times* report listed the incident as a Future Movement revenge attack following Hezbollah's occupation of Beirut.

According to the *New York Times* report: “an angry mob set fire to the offices of a militia allied with Hezbollah and killed 11 of its members” (Stern, Y. & Issacharof, A. 2008, ‘Hezbollah fighters retreat from Beirut after 37 die in clashes’, *Haaretz*, 10 May <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/981696.html> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 53; ‘Saturday’s live coverage of the war in Lebanon’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 10 May http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/1415_governmen.php – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 54; Worth, R.F. & Bakri, N. 2008, ‘Hezbollah Ignites a Sectarian Fuse in Lebanon’, *New York Times*, 18 May http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/world/middleeast/18Lebanon.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 55).

One of those killed in the Halba violence was reportedly an Australian citizen:

Marcel Sheikh said her husband, Fadi Sheikh, who died in the Lebanese city of Halba on Saturday, “went on holiday and he got caught in whatever happened”.

...Earlier, the Lebanese Consul-General Mohammed Skayni received confirmation that Mr Sheikh was one of 12 people killed when 100 pro-government loyalists attacked the office of an opposition political party.

...The Age online believes Mr Sheikh was a member of the Lebanese National party and was in its local office – a gathering point – when he was killed by pro-government supporters.

Antoun Issa, a member of the Australian Lebanese Youth Association, today said Mr Sheikh had been visiting his parents for the first time in several years after emigrating to Australia with his wife in the 1990s, Mr Issa said.

The mob attack was part of fighting in Lebanon between Shiites loyal to the Lebanese opposition group Hezbollah and Druze supporters of the ruling coalition.

In the country’s worst civil strife since the 1975-90 war, dozens have been killed and more injured.

Mr Sheikh, from Craigieburn in Melbourne’s northern fringe, was in a coalition opposition office, used for providing the community with safety advice and information, when it was stormed by a pro-government mob, Mr Issa said.

He said the mob attacked everyone inside the building, including Mr Sheikh, who was not in Lebanon for any political reason.

“He just happened to be there in the wrong place at the wrong time when a mob of about 100 pro-government loyalists attacked,” Mr Issa said.

...A Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) spokesman said Mr Sheikh’s death underlined the highly dangerous situation in Lebanon and the need for Australians to continue to exercise extreme caution (Jackson, A. 2008, ‘Melbourne man killed in Lebanon “was on holiday”’, *The Age*, 12 May <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/05/12/1210444292099.html> – Accessed 5 September 2008 – Attachment 56).

Following these events Hezbollah published claims that the Future Movement had massacred SSNP members, claims denied by the Future Movement leadership:

MP Saad Hariri issued a statement saying that the Hezbollah-owned Al-Manar channel had “organized a campaign to fabricate news and broadcast fabrications of bloody events,” in reference to the tragic killings in the town of Halba in Akkar over the past few days.

“This is an open attempt to hold the Future Movement responsible and posit the Syrian Social Nationalist Party as the victim,” added Hariri, the head of the Future Movement, whose own television network was shut down by armed members of the Hezbollah-led opposition last week.

Hariri accused Al-Manar of launching campaigns of systematic incitement against the Mufti of Akkar, Sheikh Osama Al-Rifai, and of attempting to hold him responsible for the crimes in Akkar (‘Hariri warns Hezbollah against slandering Akkar mufti’ 2008, *NOW Lebanon*, 14 May <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=42869> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 57).

Writing for *BBC News* Jim Muir expressed the view that: “Sunni reaction in the north of the country produced some of the worst atrocities of this violent episode, when supporters of Saad Hariri took revenge on followers of a Syrian-backed party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party”. The report also notes the manner in which “Sunni fundamentalists” became involved in the conflict while “Hezbollah’s Christian allies, notably General Michel Aoun, kept out of the fray”. The relevant extract follows:

Sunni reaction in the north of the country produced some of the worst atrocities of this violent episode, when supporters of Saad Hariri took revenge on followers of a Syrian-backed party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

Tensions were felt in all parts of the country with mixed communities. Sunni fundamentalists began to come out of the woodwork, feeling that their moment had come.

The pragmatic stance taken by Walid Jumblatt and his Druze community averted what could have been a ferocious bloodbath in the mountains – a spectre that could rise again if fighting resumes.

Hezbollah’s onslaught put the Shias on a collision course with both the Sunni and Druze communities which would have been hard to reverse had it gone much further.

The Christian areas were largely spared trouble – mainly because Hezbollah’s Christian allies, notably General Michel Aoun, kept out of the fray and did not attempt to block roads on the 7 May general strike, which acted as the vehicle for Hezbollah’s move.

Their position has been further undermined by the Hezbollah attack, which stirred atavistic Christian fears of a militant Shia takeover. (Muir, J. 2008, ‘Hezbollah in dangerous territory’, *BBC News*, 16 May http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7403951.stm – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 58).

Also of interest may be an attack which occurred during the same period in Tripoli where “pro-government demonstrators burned the offices of the pro-Syrian Baath Party”. According to a *BBC News* report of 11 May 2008:

Lebanese troops have deployed in the northern city of Tripoli to end fierce fighting between Hezbollah sympathisers and supporters of the government.

...Earlier, pro-government demonstrators burned the offices of the pro-Syrian Baath Party.

They stamped on posters of Syrian President Bashar Assad and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

They could also be seen throwing furniture and files from the Baath offices and a local opposition politician's office ('Lebanese army sends troops north' 2008, *BBC News*, 11 May http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7394395.stm – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 83: 'Troops patrol Beirut after Hezbollah pullout' 2008, *The Age*, source: *Reuters*, 11 May <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/troops-patrol-beirut-after-hezbollah-pullout/2008/05/11/1210444233301.html> – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 84).

Other conflict outbreaks in the North: Allawites and Sunnis near Tripoli

2008 has seen continued outbreaks of violence in the Tripoli area between Sunni residents of the supporters of the Tebbaneh suburb and Alawite residents of the Jabal Mohsen (Baal Mohsen) suburb. *Research Response LBN33419* of 27 June 2008 provides information on the various issues which may have driven recent clashes in Tripoli between local Alawites (reported to be pro-Syrian and aligned with Hezbollah) and local Sunnis (reported to be anti-Syrian and aligned with Saad Hariri's Future Movement). *Research Response LBN33419* provides background on the manner in which different news reports have framed this event; with various reports presenting the conflict through one or more of the following frames: a conflict driven by local issues; a conflict driven by national political allegiances; and/or a conflict driven by national sectarian tensions (with some sources presenting the Allawite community as a Shia sect, though sources vary on the question of whether Allawites see themselves, and/or are perceived by others, as Shia). *Research Response LBN33419* is supplied as Attachment 59 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33419*, 27 June – Attachment 59).

An August 2008 report provides the following overview of the current situation between Tebbaneh's Sunnis suburb and Jabal Mohsen's Alawites in Tripoli, noting recent outbreaks of violence in May, June and July 2008. Extracts dealing with the violence appear below while extensive background information can be found elsewhere in the report, supplied as Attachment 32, on the various confessional, political and militia groups which have struggled for control of the area.

With the onset of a national political crisis in November 2006, violence broke out sporadically in Tripoli. In January 2007, as opposition demonstrators burned tires and blocked roads to protest the March 14 coalition's refusal to form a national unity cabinet, Sunni and Alawite militiamen clashed in the city, leaving two people dead. Violence in Tripoli erupted again in May 2008, during Hezbollah's tour de force aimed at forcing the Lebanese government to abandon efforts to disable its cable communication network. Clashes between Sunni and Alawite gunmen left at least one person dead.

Although the Doha Accord brought Lebanon's political crisis to an end and eased tensions between March 14 and the opposition, violence continued to flare up in Tripoli. On June 22, fighting between Alawite and Sunni gunmen erupted, leaving nine people dead before the Lebanese Army moved in to secure the peace. A second round of fighting broke out on July 25, also leaving nine people dead. In late July, UNICEF estimated that 3,500 Alawite families and 2,300 Sunni families had fled their homes (Yazbeck, R. 2008, 'Return of the Pink Panthers?', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 32)

In August 2008 it was reported that: “Future Movement MPs are blaming Hizbollah, which heads the opposition, of fomenting the violence in Tripoli by providing arms and training to the Alawites of Jabal Mohsen” (Blanford, N. 2008, ‘Fighting rages on in Tripoli’, *The National*, 26 July

<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080726/FOREIGN/989642518/0/BUSINESS> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 66).

Other conflict outbreaks in the North: the Nahr al-Bared conflict

As is noted elsewhere in this response, May to September 2007 saw a significant episode of conflict take place in the north of Lebanon in the vicinity of the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared, which is found just to the north of Tripoli neighbouring the Akkar township of Bebnin. The fighting saw Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni Salafist group which had based itself in the Nahr al-Bared camp, clash with the Lebanese army. Soldiers from Akkar featured prominently in the fighting; according to an August 2007 *NOW Lebanon* report:

“Bebnin...sent 150 soldiers to the camp, 11 of whom were killed and 27 wounded”.

Neighbouring Akkar residents were reportedly subject to rocket attacks during the conflict. According to the *Naharanet* news service: “Fatah al-Islam militants fired more than a dozen katyusha rockets indiscriminately hitting civilian targets in the Akkar and Dinniyeh provinces that abut Nahr al-Bared. No casualties were reported”. A number of Research Responses have been completed on the Nahr al-Bared conflict including *Research Response LBN33576* of 29 August 2008 and *Research Response LBN32457* of 23 October 2007, and these are supplied as Attachment 62 and Attachment 63 respectively. Information on reports referring specifically to Akkar related issues are overviewed below. It may also be of interest that, according to an August 2008 *Daily Star* report, supporters of Fatah al-Islam recently “pelted [A Future Movement MP] with stones and bottles during [a] protest in the Northern coastal city of Tripoli” (Ghaddar, H. 2007, ‘Bebnin’s sacrifice’, *NOW Lebanon*, 29 August

<http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=11350> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 61; for the *Naharanet* rocket attack report, see: ‘War for Burrows at Nahr al-Bared Follows Fall of Fatah al-Islam’s HQ’ 2007, *Naharnet*, 19 July

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/0/57680EBFB95F8745C225731D004E5386?OpenDocument> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 65; RRT Research &

Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33576*, 29 August – Attachment 62; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Response LBN32457*, 23 October – Attachment 63; for the attack on the August 2008 attack on the Future Movement MP, see: ‘Future MP attacked during speech at Islamist protest’ 2008, *Daily Star*, 9 August

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=1&article_id=94922 – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 64).

In August 2007 *NOW Lebanon* provided the following report on the manner in which fighting at Nahr al-Bared had affected Akkar’s nearest town, Bebnin. According to the report:

“Bebnin has sent 150 soldiers to the camp, 11 of whom were killed and 27 wounded”. The report also relates that “Akkar’s attachment and dedication to the army is complemented by a fierce loyalty to Hariri and the Future Movement, which has been further strengthened since Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon”.

Mustafa is from Bebnin, Akkar’s closest village to the besieged refugee camp, and one which has made some of the greatest contributions – and sacrifices – to the army’s campaign.

Bebnin has sent 150 soldiers to the camp, 11 of whom were killed and 27 wounded. “We all fought with the army when Fatah al-Islam insurgents reached our village the first day of the confrontation, and many civilians used their personal weapons to stop the terrorists from

getting to the village,” the father added. He spoke with tears in his eyes, but it is clear that his faith and confidence in the Lebanese army is absolute.

The relationship between the army and the Akkar region, including Bebnin, is deeply rooted in Lebanese history. As one of the poorest regions in Lebanon, generations of Akkar’s young men have turned to the army as the most stable source of fixed income available. Today, every home in Bebnin has at least one or two soldiers in the army. “Every young man’s or child’s ambition is to join the army,” Khalid al-Masri, a member of the Municipal Council of Bebnin, told NOW Lebanon. “They realize that education is getting them nowhere and life is becoming more and more difficult for poor people.”

Located between Tripoli and the northern Syrian border, Bebnin, like the rest of Akkar, has suffered much neglect from the Lebanese state, especially during Syria’s hegemony. The marginalized district’s only link with the Lebanese state is the institution of the army, which has absorbed a significant number of its young men.

...Akkar’s attachment and dedication to the army is complemented by a fierce loyalty to Hariri and the Future Movement, which has been further strengthened since Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon. Hariri and other March 14 politicians hold the Syrian regime responsible for supporting the insurgents battling the army and facilitating their passage into Lebanon.

...Bebnin’s injured soldiers are being hospitalized at the army’s expense, however, and families of those killed have received some compensation from the government as well as various political parties. Masri said the High Commission for Relief gave each family LL 20 million (over \$13,000). “They also received \$2,000 from the Future Movement, associated with Hariri, and \$5,000 from the Issam Fares Foundation, in addition to the compensations to be paid by the army once the procedures are complete,” he noted. He also confirmed that the army pays all the funeral expenses for the fallen soldiers (Ghaddar, H. 2007, ‘Bebnin’s sacrifice’, *NOW Lebanon*, 29 August <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=11350> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 61).

According to a March 2008 *San Francisco Chronicle* report the 2007 Nahr al-Bared conflict continues to affect the neighbouring Akkar areas in terms of both lasting communal enmity and a diminished economy (for more information see: Duncan, D. 2008, ‘Lebanese struggle with broken economy’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 March <http://www.pulitzercenter.org/openitem.cfm?id=835> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 67).

It may also be of interest that August 2008 saw reports of a bombing in Tripoli which killed and wounded a number of Akkar residents travelling on a bus. *The Guardian* reported that: “Some officials said the Tripoli bombing may have been the work of al-Qaida-inspired militants seeking revenge for the military’s assault last year on their bastion in a nearby Palestinian refugee camp, Nahr el-Bared”. The report follows:

The bombing was Lebanon’s deadliest in more than three years, hitting a main Tripoli street crowded with people heading to work. The bus was left riddled with shrapnel, its windows blown out, as soldiers and bystanders carried away the dozens of bleeding wounded in the glass-strewn street.

...Some officials said the Tripoli bombing may have been the work of al-Qaida-inspired militants seeking revenge for the military’s assault last year on their bastion in a nearby

Palestinian refugee camp, Nahr el-Bared. Hundreds were killed in the months long battle that ended with the militant Fatah Islam group fleeing the camp.

Since then, Fatah Islam has claimed responsibility for several small attacks on soldiers, including a May 31 bomb blast that killed a soldier in Abdeh, near Tripoli. Fatah Islam's leader, Shaker al-Absi, has vowed to "hunt down the followers of Gen. Michel Suleiman," who was the army commander during the Nahr el-Bared battle.

The army described the blast as a "terrorist attack targeting the army directly."

Security officials said 10 soldiers and eight civilians were killed, while 46 people were wounded. A senior military officer told The Associated Press that at least 13 people were killed, including 11 soldiers. The discrepancy in figures could not immediately be explained. All the officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

...The bomb – packed in a bag with nuts and bolts to maximize casualties – was set by the side of central Tripoli's Banks Street and was detonated by remote control, security officials said. The small public bus was carrying passengers from the Akkar region, further north, home to many military members.

...Tripoli, about 50 miles north of Beirut on the Mediterranean coast, is Lebanon's second-largest city and has a mostly Sunni Muslim population dominated by groups loyal to the Western-backed political bloc that has a majority in parliament.

Despite a relative calm elsewhere, Tripoli has in the past weeks witnessed sectarian clashes between Sunni fighters and followers of the Alawite sect, an offshoot Shiite sect, that killed and wounded dozens of people.

...Lebanon has seen a series of explosions in the last 3 years, including a 2005 truck bombing that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut, an explosion that sparked the political and security upheaval in the country.

But there have been no serious attacks against politicians or public places since February (Mroue, B. 2008, 'Bomb in northern Lebanese city kills 18', *Guardian*, 13 August <http://www2.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-7721920,00.html> – Accessed 27 August 2008 – Attachment 21).

A *BBC News* report also noted that the bomb victims were from Akkar and that most were "off-duty soldiers".

The bombing of a civilian bus in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli could hardly have come at a more sensitive time.

...The bus had just arrived in Tripoli from the northern Akkar region. Most of the victims seem to have been off-duty soldiers coming from an area known for its strong military traditions.

Suspicious therefore could focus on Fatah al-Islam, or another shadowy Sunni extremist group, perhaps wanting vengeance for the battle of Nahr al-Bared or hoping to sow seeds of conflict between Shias and mainstream Sunnis (Asser, M. 2008, 'Lebanon lurches back to the brink', *BBC News*, 13 August http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7558251.stm – Accessed 27 August 2008 – Attachment 22).

It may also be of interest that there have been reports of resurgence among pro-Syrian Christian militias in nearby Zgharta District. *Research Response LBN32920* of 18 February 2008 provides information on the activities of the pro-Syrian Marada movement (formerly known as the Liberation Army of Zgharta) (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN32920*, 18 February – Attachment 68).

3. Might active Future Party members be refused protection by the authorities from harm because of their political allegiances?

Information follows below on the two primary state forces entrusted with state protection in Lebanon: the police (known as the Internal Security Forces or ISF; and also as the Interior Security Forces; or *Forces de Sécurité Intérieure* or FSI) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Divided equally along confessional lines the LAF is said to have taken a neutral posture in recent times for fear of generating civil conflict within its own ranks whenever Hezbollah and the Future Movement have clashed. For instance, of the May 2008 violence the ICG observed that the military “studiously remained neutral throughout the fighting – largely out of fear that its multi-confessional army could splinter if forced to take sides”. Until recently the police, or ISF, was reportedly also divided along roughly equal confessional lines. In recent years, however, the ISF has doubled in size taking in a vastly Sunni stream of recruits. The ISF is now reportedly perceived as a Sunni dominated instrument of the Future Movement led government. The ISF is also said to have been transformed in recent years from a marginalized instrument of Syrian occupation into a better armed, better resourced, and better trained institution, with an anti-Syrian posture. This said, several sources also relate that Hezbollah is beyond the control of the ISF to some extent, and it continues to be reported that Hezbollah is a law unto itself in the areas it controls (for information on the neutral posture of the LAF, see page 4 of: International Crisis Group 2008, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, Middle East Briefing no.23, 15 May – Attachment 1; for the equal confessional mix of the army and the Sunnification of the police, see: Mooney, W.K. 2007, ‘Stabilizing Lebanon: Peacekeeping or Nation-Building’, *Parameters*, Autumn, pp.36-37

<http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/07autumn/mooney.pdf> – Accessed 25 August 2008 – Attachment 73; for further information on police Sunnification and increased resources and manpower, see: Stack, M.K. 2006, ‘Sunni forces in Lebanon swell’, *The Seattle Times*, 1 December http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2003456196_Lebanon01.html – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 77; Mackinnon, M. 2006, ‘West helps Lebanon build militia to fight Hezbollah’, Lebanonwire website, source: *Globe & Mail*, 1 December <http://www.Lebanonwire.com/0612MLN/06120128GNM.asp> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 76; Gambill, G.C. 2007, ‘The Rise of Fatah al-Islam’, *Middle East Monitor*, June/July, vol.2: no.1 http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0705/0705_5.htm – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 75; Ryan, B. 2007, ‘Securing Internal Security’, *NOW Lebanon*, 12 November <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=19296> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 74; for information on the ability of Hezbollah to operate beyond the law at some times and in some places, see: UK Home Office 2006, *Operational Guidance Note: Lebanon*, 20 September – Attachment 69; ‘Is Hezbollah untouchable?’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 2 May http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/is_Hezbollah_un.php – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 72; DIMIA Country Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No 362/02 – Treatment of former detainees by Hezbollah*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 3 December 2002), 5 December – Attachment 79).

An overview of the available information follows below.

A September 2006 *Operational Guidance Note* on Lebanon by the UK Home Office provides advice on state protection from Hezbollah in the context of discussing the security of members of left wing parties. The report finds that: “Outside the South of Lebanon there is no evidence that in general members of these parties could not approach the Lebanese authorities for protection therefore in the remainder of the country there is a sufficiency of protection”; but also that: “individuals who establish that they are of significant interest to Hezbollah, may not be able to obtain protection in South Lebanon and other Hezbollah areas and may not be able to internally relocate”. It may also be of interest that the report makes the following findings in regard to the issue of state protection for a person claiming fear of the Amal group: “Outside the South of Lebanon there is no evidence that in general those fearing Amal could not approach the Lebanese authorities for protection therefore in the remainder of the country there is a sufficiency of protection”; but also that: “If the claimant has such a high profile to be of national interest they are unlikely to avoid the attentions of Amal by moving to another area of the country”. The relevant extracts follow:

Members of left wing parties fearing Hezbollah

Hezbollah operates in the southern suburbs of Beirut the Beka’a Valley, and southern Lebanon. Hezbollah holds 10 seats in the Lebanese parliament and is generally seen as a part of Lebanese society and politics.

Dedicated to opposing Israel, Hezbollah has formally advocated the ultimate establishment of Islamic rule in Lebanon. Hezbollah are known or suspected to have been involved in numerous anti-US and anti-Israeli terrorist attacks. Hezbollah has an estimated membership of several thousand supporters; a few hundred operatives and operates in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Beka’a Valley, and southern Lebanon.

...**Sufficiency of protection** The security forces consist of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) under the Ministry of Defence, which may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; the Internal Security Forces (ISF) under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), which enforce laws, conduct searches and arrests, and refer cases to the judiciary; and the State Security Apparatus, which reports to the prime minister and the SG under the MOI, both of which collect information on groups deemed a possible threat to state security. ...Outside the South of Lebanon there is no evidence that in general members of these parties could not approach the Lebanese authorities for protection therefore in the remainder of the country there is a sufficiency of protection.

...There have been no known reports of reprisals against people by Hezbollah, or any accounts of enforced recruitment. The authorities are willing and able to offer sufficiency of protection and internal relocation is not unduly harsh in the majority of cases.

However, individuals who establish that they are of significant interest to Hezbollah, may not be able to obtain protection in South Lebanon and other Hezbollah areas and may not be able to internally relocate, therefore in some cases a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection may be appropriate. Caseworkers should note that Hezbollah are just as likely to pursue people for non-convention reasons such as those they have personal feuds with or those who have lost out in power struggles to those whose politics, ethnicity or religion they do not like.

Fear of persecution by Amal

...The Amal movement was established in 1975 by Imam Musa as Sadr, an Iranian-born Shia cleric of Lebanon Ancestry who had founded the Higher Shia Islamic Council in 1969. Amal, which means hope in Arabic, is the acronym for Afwaj al Muqawamah al Lubnaniyyah (Lebanese Resistance Detachments), and was initially the name given to the military arm of the Movement of the Disinherited.

By the early 1980s, Amal was the most powerful organization within the Shia community and perhaps was the largest organization in the country. Its organizational strength lay in its extension to all regions of the country inhabited by Shias. However, tensions between Amal and Hizbollah repeatedly boiled over as both groups rushed into south Lebanon to establish their presence in the former Israeli-occupied zone.

Amal contested the 2005 legislative elections with Hizbollah as the Resistance and Development Bloc. In both the South and the Bekaa Valley, Hizbollah and Amal, together with local figures, drew up lists for all available seats, Shiite and non-Shiite, fielding their own candidates together with other Syrian loyalists. The Hizbollah/Amal list won overwhelmingly in the South and the Bekaa. Amal held 15 seats after the legislative elections and their leader Nabih Berri was re-elected as Speaker. In an atmosphere of relative insecurity and fear, ordinary citizens increasingly look to their sectarian communities for succour and protection; meanwhile, many leaders have either withdrawn to mountain-top bases or taken temporary refuge abroad.

...Outside the South of Lebanon there is no evidence that in general those fearing Amal could not approach the Lebanese authorities for protection therefore in the remainder of the country there is a sufficiency of protection.

Conclusion Whilst there is evidence that Amal as an organisation has used violence there are no reports of individual ill-treatment by Amal or those who oppose it. In the majority of cases there is sufficiency of protection available outside of South Lebanon. Internal relocation to an area away from Amal influence would not be unduly harsh in the majority of cases therefore a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection would not usually be appropriate. If the claimant has such a high profile to be of national interest they are unlikely to avoid the attentions of Amal by moving to another area of the country. In those circumstances a grant of asylum would be appropriate (UK Home Office 2006, *Operational Guidance Note: Lebanon*, 20 September – Attachment 69).

The most recent report by the US Department of State on human rights in Lebanon offers the following findings on Lebanon's security forces:

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The security forces consist of the LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces] under the Ministry of Defense, which may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; the ISF [Internal Security Forces] under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), which enforces laws, conducts searches and arrests, and refers cases to the judiciary; the State Security Apparatus, which reports to the prime minister; and the SG under the MOI. Both the State Security Apparatus and the SG collect information on groups deemed a possible threat to state security.

Laws against bribery and extortion by government security officials and agencies also apply to the police force. In practice, however, a lack of strong enforcement limited their effectiveness. The government acknowledged the need to reform law enforcement, but the lack of political stability and security hampered these efforts. The ISF maintained a hotline for complaints (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - for 2007 – Lebanon*, 11 March – Attachment 70).

A January 2008 report published by the Carnegie Middle East Center refers to Lebanon's police as the "pro-Hariri internal security forces" (Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, 'Lebanon's Sunni Islamists – A Growing Force', *Carnegie Papers*, no. 6, January – Attachment 49).

January 2008 saw the assassination of a police intelligence officer who "worked for an intelligence unit which was seen as close to anti-Syrian ruling majority leader Saad al-Hariri and which was frequently criticized by the Syrian-backed opposition". The report continues:

He was a communications engineer who security sources said was responsible for tracking mobile phone communications made by attackers in previous killings and of Islamist militant cells.

The unit had also been closely involved in the U.N.-led investigation into the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, and in a crackdown on al Qaeda-inspired militants whom the army fought last year.

...In the northern city of Tripoli, crowds of mourners gathered in the mosque's courtyard to offer their prayers for Eid, who had been targeted before, and his companion.

Earlier at police headquarters in the affluent Christian suburb of Ashrafiyeh, Eid and his companion's coffins were draped in the red and white Lebanese flag.

Last month, a car bomb killed the army's chief of operations, Francois Hajj, in east Beirut.

The ruling majority says Syria is behind Hariri's slaying and many of the more than 30 bombings that have hit Lebanon in the past three years, often targeting anti-Syrian figures. Damascus has denied involvement in any of the killings.

Eid's killing comes at a time of a deepening political crisis in which the Western-backed ruling coalition and Hezbollah-led opposition have been at odds for over a year ('Lebanon bids farewell to slain intelligence officer', *Ya Libnan*, 26 January http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/01/Lebanon_bids_fa_1.php – Accessed 8 September 2008– Attachment 71).

In May 2008 the *Ya Libnan* news service reported claims that Hezbollah was beyond the control of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces police service:

Beirut – In weeks past, several incidents have made clear that Hezbollah and its partisans are not subject to the command of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) – or that they at least consider that they are not.

The party in recent years has regularly flouted the ISF's authority, with officers complaining that Hezbollah controlled areas are "no-go zones" and that its followers are untouchable.

Among the incidents: the kidnapping and release of French Diplomat Karim Pakzad, who was detained for several hours for "suspicious" photography; an attack on ISF officers in mid-April, whereby party loyalists forced the release of Hezbollah members who had been arrested at a checkpoint; and the previous detainment of another officer who had been investigating an illegal construction site in the Ghadir suburbs.

"Hezbollah considers itself above the laws which limit its activities, and parts of its existence," suggested Imad Salameh, Hezbollah expert and assistant professor of political science and international affairs at the Lebanese American University.

The Party of God is also in vocal opposition to UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, which, if applied, would jeopardize Hezbollah's operation. And so, Hezbollah acts above the law from time to time, whereas "other laws that may not be in direct contradiction with its operation, Hezbollah can cope with and abide by," argued Salameh.

Though many see Hezbollah's willingness to break the law and to further expand its authority in "closed areas" as an obvious reflection of its desire to establish a "state within the state," the ISF is to blame, too, for so often turning a blind-eye on flagrant Hezbollah violations.

According to one ISF source, the relationship between the ISF and Hezbollah is well defined, as Hezbollah "has made clear that they should not be approached by state organs." The ISF's compliance with this demand is thanks to a governmental decision, since it "believes that the ISF should allow Hezbollah to continue operating as is until the issue is solved on a regional level," the source explained. "This is why the tents in downtown are still there."

"Closed areas"

Throughout its short history, Hezbollah has maintained "closed areas" in the southern suburbs of Beirut and in southern Lebanon. Over the years, these have been crucial to its resistance operations. Since the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 and in the run-up to 2004, however, Lebanese politicians of various leanings have called for the party to disarm, or to at least moderate its armed presence. During this period, said Salameh, Hezbollah complied with some government demands, "allowing the state to take on various forms in its areas."

However, in the aftermath of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's February 2005 assassination and the Syrian troop withdrawal two months later, "Hezbollah has grown more hostile toward demands for disarmament and for its areas to be [accessible to] Lebanese authority," said Salameh. "Hezbollah is now, more so than ever before, feeling that domestic players are trying to undermine its role."

In practice, these security measures of Hezbollah's threaten the credibility of the state security apparatus, which in turn increases tensions between Hezbollah and the government on other levels. The problem has several times compromised the security of Lebanese citizens. In late March for example, a dangerous escalation in tensions between residents of Tripoli's Abu Samra neighborhood and the Islamic Unification Movement (Tawhid), potentially could have been avoided if the ISF had not hesitated to enter these "closed areas." Hezbollah, say reports, protected the Islamic Unification Movement "on a security level" through its official Hajj Wafiq Safa.

In another recent incident, when citizens were attacked by armed opposition members at a downtown restaurant, the ISF failed to step up to the plate. MP Atef Majdalani attributed the problem to "a psychological and moral subjugation of the national security forces... who are unable to intervene and protect citizens from de facto militias."

A state within a state?

The "state within a state" mentality is not new to Lebanese who have long decided legal questions of personal status according to sect. Hezbollah, however, has developed this notion further, by extending borders, including everything from road services, to electricity and phone services, social and medical services, and even to buying land and properties, placing the territory under their own jurisdiction.

These developments undermine the state's ability to enter the areas as it deems in need of surveillance. Even Electricite du Liban (EDL) employees have, for example, felt threatened

when entering certain “closed areas.” Former President Emile Lahoud actually had to commission ISF officers to accompany these EDL employees from time to time.

The problem today, said Salameh, is Hezbollah’s military positioning in a climate of severe confessional imbalance. “Today, the system is no longer able to attain the balance [it needs],” he argued. This may lead to another 1958 or 1975, concluded Salameh.

According to the ISF source, Hezbollah’s disregard for the state authority is indicative of its disregard of the state as a whole, particularly during the current crisis. As the political vacuum continues unabated, the state sadly seems to have just accepted that Hezbollah will operate on its own terms. As such, the problem is not simply that Hezbollah has chosen to create a “state within a state,” but also that it has been allowed to do so by the government. And so long as the state continues to allow Hezbollah to demarcate its own boundaries, the more likely it is that further confrontations between Hezbollah and the ISF will ensue (‘Is Hezbollah untouchable?’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 2 May http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/is_Hezbollah_un.php – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 72).

An Autumn 2007 report published in the US military journal, *Parameters*, makes the following observations on the loyalties of the Lebanese security forces:

During the opposition-led Beirut demonstrations in January 2007, most local observers regarded the Internal Security Forces (ISF) as dominated by Sunni groups and partial to the 14 March ruling coalition. The recent US delivery of riot-control gear and vehicles to the ISF may be viewed as empowering the Sunnis to take on the Shia, thereby exacerbating the sectarian aspect of the conflict. The Lebanese army, on the other hand, is widely viewed as an impartial, cross-confessional, national institution (despite a high number of Christians in the senior officer ranks). The LAF commander, Lieutenant General Michel Suleiman, is a protégé of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, yet has urged the army to exercise restraint and neutrality in the face of protests. This restraint and neutrality is critical to the Lebanese government’s efforts to gain legitimacy against sectarian challengers (Mooney, W.K. 2007, ‘Stabilizing Lebanon: Peacekeeping or Nation-Building’, *Parameters*, Autumn, pp.36-37 <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/07autumn/mooney.pdf> – Accessed 25 August 2008 – Attachment 73).

In November 2007 the *NOW Lebanon* news service provided an extensive report on the recent history and perceived nature of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces police service. The report claims that: “In the past two and a half years, the ISF has emerged as a robust force”. The posture and capabilities of the force are said to have changed from previous years when: “the ISF was systematically marginalized in favor of the Syrian-controlled army”; according to *NOW Lebanon*: “Prior to 2005, most ISF troops even went without weapons due to lack of funding”. Alternatively, the report also notes that: “Opposition figures have accused the ISF of being a partisan tool of March 14 and the Future Movement in particular, citing the large numbers of Sunnis that have joined the ISF’s ranks in the past couple years”. Of the size and composition of the force, *NOW Lebanon* notes that in recent years the ISF has grown “from around 12-13,000 to some 24,000 troops”; and that “many of these new recruits were Sunni. Before the expansion, Shia represented about a quarter of the troops. But while the percentage of Shia in relation to Christians and Sunnis has shrunk in the ISF, there has been no large exodus – indeed, there are new Shia recruits as well”.

Over the weekend, greater Beirut was put on high alert, with Lebanon’s strictest-ever security measures implemented, indefinitely, in the hope of preventing violence from breaking out and blocking terrorist attacks amid the ongoing presidential crisis. The alert will remain in place

through the election of Lebanon's next president – and its aftermath. The Lebanese army is leading the efforts for now, but sources indicated last week that the Internal Security Forces will take over as the parliamentary sessions begin. Indeed, the ISF will be playing a key role in keeping the peace throughout the alert, with units deployed at numerous flashpoints across the capital.

In the past two and a half years, the ISF has emerged as a robust force capable, for the first time, of leading an operation on this scale. Nonetheless, there has been much scrutiny and criticism of the ISF's development by Syria's Lebanese allies since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. Opposition figures have accused the ISF of being a partisan tool of March 14 and the Future Movement in particular, citing the large numbers of Sunnis that have joined the ISF's ranks in the past couple years.

Alain Aoun, an official with Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, told NOW Lebanon in September that, "It's well known that they are turning the ISF into a militia for the Hariri group. They created a body inside the ISF whose allegiance is to Hariri."

Given the history of opposition accusations of partisanship and nefarious plots against the Internal Security Forces, it is worth examining the nature and extent of the changes that have brought the ISF where it is today. As the ISF takes to the streets to protect the capital, NOW Lebanon speaks with sources on the inside about the sometimes controversial renaissance of one of Lebanon's most crucial security bodies.

A long-neglected force

Under Syrian rule, the ISF was systematically marginalized in favor of the Syrian-controlled army, which was itself neglected in the face of the ongoing Syrian military occupation. Prior to 2005, most ISF troops even went without weapons due to lack of funding. So while the rapid withdrawal of Syrian troops was a victory for Lebanese sovereignty, it left the country with something of a security vacuum.

Whereas the army technically reports to the president, the ISF reports to the interior minister and through him to the prime minister. Following the accession to power of the present March 14 ruling majority in 2005, the leadership of the ISF and Interior Ministry immediately set about instituting wide-ranging changes in an all-too anemic force.

Rebuilding from the ground up

Under Director General Ashraf Rifi, who was appointed during the interim government of Najib Mikati in early 2005, the ISF grew from around 12-13,000 to some 24,000 troops, and admittedly, many of these new recruits were Sunni. Before the expansion, Shia represented about a quarter of the troops. But while the percentage of Shia in relation to Christians and Sunnis has shrunk in the ISF, there has been no large exodus – indeed, there are new Shia recruits as well.

More significantly, the new leadership had to rewire the whole organizational structure.

Security sources, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the information, told NOW Lebanon that "the ISF needed restructuring all over, and there have been lots of changes on all scales. After Rifi came in, he changed all the old leadership; they haven't been fired, but they are 'frozen' or sidelined within the ISF."

Today, the various branches of the ISF all report to Rifi directly, with two exceptions. The "Interpol" and border patrol divisions both have some direct liaisons with General Security

because they deal with foreigners and immigration issues. Security sources noted that this ambiguity has led to difficulties, as General Security is perceived as having pro-opposition leanings.

The source noted further, “It’s been difficult because everything has had to go around [Pro-Syrian president Emile] Lahoud, dealing directly with the government.”

Funding pours in

Utilizing hundreds of millions of dollars given by a variety of donor countries, the ISF greatly expanded its capabilities both in terms of training and equipment. According to security sources, in addition to the much-publicized \$60 million grant along with other equipment and vehicles from the United States, the ISF received more than \$100 million over the past two years from the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reportedly donated spare parts and 250 new vehicles respectively, though the dollar values of these and any additional grants are unknown.

The European Union also donated a DNA-testing laboratory to the Interpol branch worth around \$20 or \$30 million, and sources estimate the dollar value of the German-sponsored border patrol team at around \$20 million as well.

The US Embassy in Beirut told NOW Lebanon, “Thus far, the US government has provided assistance to a variety of different ISF units, and we will be providing a lot more. We have provided civil disorder management and other equipment to the ISF Mobile Forces, as well as police vehicles to several ISF units, which the ISF have used in carrying out their police duties.”

Training programs have also been expanded. According to security sources, “France, Britain, Spain and Italy have offered training in police procedures, and each month four or five trainees are sent over.” The US funds are also partially for training purposes.

The US Embassy reported that instructor training was planned on top of basic training, “so that ISF training will not always require international assistance.”

Protecting the state proves controversial

When asked to clarify his remarks about a “body inside the ISF whose allegiance is to Hariri,” Alain Aoun explained that he was referring to “the Moualamaat [Information Branch], created by [Youth and Sports Minister Ahmad] Fatfat when he was interim [interior] minister.”

The Information Branch, the intelligence unit within ISF headed by Lt. Col. Wissam Hassan, has been greatly expanded by Rifi. Its budget and activities are confidential – security sources noted that “it was not more than the publicly known funds, but it was significant. New vehicles, money and overseas training are involved.”

The Information Branch, like any intelligence bureau, has naturally been shrouded in secrecy. Its primary mission has related to pursuing armed and hostile groups within Lebanon and monitoring militia activity. In October, Hassan and his Defense Ministry counterpart General George Khoury held a press conference presenting their findings on militia rearming and reporting on their attempts to combat it. It was also the Information Branch that had been pursuing Fatah al-Islam leading up to the outbreak of conflict in Nahr al-Bared this past spring.

The major changes instituted within the ISF have been targeted at addressing three problems, according to sources.

“One is trying to secure the borders and ‘security islands,’ such as the Palestinian camps and Hezbollah’s military zones, where the government does not have control. Second, they have been concentrating on investigating the assassinations and working with the special tribunal process. Third is the restructuring.”

The restructuring is largely complete, and sources report that the initiative to secure the borders should be complete “within the next two months.” The special tribunal, of course, has a long way to go.

Addressing the issue of the “security islands” is another matter altogether. The Nahr al-Bared conflict illustrated the vast difficulties that extending government control to the Palestinian camps could entail. Looking to Hezbollah’s military zones, it must be recalled that it took a major war and UN intervention to even get the Lebanese army deployed to South Lebanon. The ISF is still much weaker than even the Lebanese army, and without a change in the political will to tackle these issues, there is little hope for further extending state control.

The opposition accuses the government of building a force to protect itself, and the proper response is, “of course!” The purpose of any domestic security force is to protect the proper functioning of the state, maintain order and enforce the state’s monopoly on violence.

If Hezbollah sees such a project as directed against it, this may in the end say more about Hezbollah than the ISF (Ryan, B. 2007, ‘Securing Internal Security’, *NOW Lebanon*, 12 November <http://www.nowLebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=19296> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 74).

A June/July 2007 report published by the *Middle East Monitor* provides the following observations on the allegiance and posture of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces police service, claiming that “the Siniora government’s “Sunnification” of the internal security forces (ISF) may have bolstered its ability to contend with the Shiite Hezbollah movement, it has proven to be ineffective in combating Sunni Islamists”.

Because its base of political support hinges on the Lebanese Sunni community (which sympathizes strongly with overwhelmingly Sunni Palestinians), the March 14 coalition was not only loathe to violate the extraterritoriality of Lebanon’s refugee camps, but reluctant to enter into a confrontation with any predominantly Sunni group. Thus, while the Siniora government’s “Sunnification” of the internal security forces (ISF) may have bolstered its ability to contend with the Shiite Hezbollah movement, it has proven to be ineffective in combating Sunni Islamists. When a Sunni mob set fire to the building housing the Danish embassy in February 2006 (to protest the publication of offensive cartoons), hundreds of ISF riot police stood by and watched.

...In February 2007, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published a report claiming that the ruling coalition has funded Fatah al-Islam and other armed Islamist groups as a counterweight to Hezbollah. Although March 14 leaders vehemently denied this claim, Siniora’s office raised suspicions by acknowledging “some organizations in the North and South have received aid from parties which have identified themselves as representatives of the Lebanese government or the Internal Security Forces.” Apart from the Hariri family’s payoffs to Jund al-Sham, however, there is little direct evidence of explicit funding of armed Sunni Islamist groups (which appear to receive most of their funding from wealthy donors in Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf States) (Gambill, G.C. 2007, ‘The Rise of Fatah al-Islam’,

In December 2006 *The Globe and Mail* reported as follows of the development of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces police service finding that: "With Western help and support from Persian Gulf states, the Lebanese government has been quietly building up a loyal force dominated by Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians in anticipation of a possible showdown with the Shia Hezbollah militia and other pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian forces"; and that: "With the regular Lebanese army seen as unreliable in a crisis – it fractured along sectarian lines during the civil war – Mr. Siniora's government and its foreign backers have invested heavily in the ISF". According a "a military analyst" sourced by the report the ISF had previously been a "force of about 12,000 men" "a third of [which] were Shiites"; at the time of reporting the ISF is said to have "doubled in number, with Sunnis and Christians making up most of the new troops. According to Gen. Hteit, just 1,000 of the 12,000 additions are Shiites". Hteit also reportedly claimed that: "the army [had] shrunk to 40,000 men, 15,000 of whom are now policing the south of the country, a term of the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel". Pertinent extracts follow:

...the buildup began 17 months ago, soon after the pro-Western peaceful Cedar Revolution that swept Mr. Siniora into office, the minister acknowledged. The government's stability may depend on the behaviour of a separate Western-backed force of 24,000 men that was dramatically strengthened to defend the government from just such a challenge.

Syria and Iran have long poured money and weapons into Lebanese groups, primarily Hezbollah. But since Mr. Siniora and his allies took office in 2005, the United States, France and several Sunni Arab countries have set about trying to create a counterbalancing force.

Critics charge that the force is dominated by Sunnis, and that its real purpose is to defend the government of Mr. Siniora, a Sunni, against the growing power of the country's large Shia population. Most of the country's Sunnis back the pro-Western government, while most Shiites support Hezbollah. The country's Christians are split.

Since the Syrian army's departure from Lebanon in early 2005, the United States and France have been providing money and training to the Internal Security Forces, as the light-blue-uniformed police force is known. With the political situation souring further in recent weeks, the United Arab Emirates stepped in to provide the unit with an emergency "gift" of thousands of rifles and dozens of police vehicles.

The UAE and other Sunni Arab states are concerned about Iran's widening influence in the region, cabinet minister Ahmad Fatfat said in an interview, adding that the ISF has received intelligence help from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait. Iran is Hezbollah's primary backer.

"In Lebanon, it seems we are an arena between Syria and Israel, but there's a new role for Iran. [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei spoke of this clearly," Mr. Fatfat said, referring to recent comments in which Iran's supreme leader said Lebanon would be the battleground on which "America and the Zionists" would be defeated.

Today, the ISF will be responsible for defending the Prime Minister's office, known as the Grand Serail, from demonstrators expected to pour into the adjacent Riad al-Sohl square. The backbone will be a smaller special-forces unit of 325 crack troops known as the Panthers, identifiable by their dark blue uniforms and modern weaponry.

With the regular Lebanese army seen as unreliable in a crisis – it fractured along sectarian lines during the civil war – Mr. Siniora's government and its foreign backers have invested heavily in the ISF.

The United States, which sees Mr. Siniora's government as a flagship for its "new Middle East," gave \$1.5-million (U.S.) in "rushed" military assistance to the ISF just before the outbreak of the summer war between Israel and Hezbollah, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation has provided training. Washington promised millions more, but it's unclear whether it was ever delivered.

The ISF has also set up a separate \$30-million intelligence-gathering apparatus – in a country that already had three other such services – because the other forces were seen as dominated by Christians and Shiites and infiltrated by Syria. Observers say the ISF's intelligence unit is widely reviled by suspicious Christians and Shiites.

"There is no trust of the police here. The police are seen as a Sunni-dominated sectarian force," said Timur Goksel, a professor of public administration at the American University in Beirut.

According to Amin Hteit, a military analyst and retired Lebanese army general, the ISF was a secondary force of about 12,000 men, compared with 63,000 in the regular army, before the Syrian withdrawal. Reflecting the generally accepted population breakdown, a third of its members were Shiites.

The ISF has since doubled in number, with Sunnis and Christians making up most of the new troops. According to Gen. Hteit, just 1,000 of the 12,000 additions are Shiites.

Gen. Hteit, a Shiite who keeps a framed picture in his home of himself with pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, said the force was built up and its Shia representation lessened in order "to keep the government far from popular danger. They need a force to defend the government palace."

Meanwhile, he said, the army has shrunk to 40,000 men, 15,000 of whom are now policing the south of the country, a term of the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel.

The ISF is already deeply resented among those who plan to march on the centre of Beirut today. In October, riots were sparked after two children were killed and 12 people were injured when ISF members opened fire on a demonstration in a Shia neighbourhood.

Sayyidah Ali Naji, whose 11-year-old son Mohammed died after being shot twice in the head during those demonstrations, said she will be protesting today. "We expect anything from [the ISF]," she said. "But we are not afraid" (Mackinnon, M. 2006, 'West helps Lebanon build militia to fight Hezbollah', Lebanonwire website, source: *Globe & Mail*, 1 December <http://www.Lebanonwire.com/0612MLN/06120128GNM.asp> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 76).

Also in December 2006 Megan K. Stack of the *LA Times* reported as follows of the development of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces police service noting that a "dramatic increase in interior-ministry troops, including the creation of a controversial new intelligence unit and the rapid expansion of a commando force, is meant to counter the growing influence of Shiite-ruled Iran and its ally here, Hezbollah, Cabinet minister Ahmed Fatfat said this week:

The Lebanese government has nearly doubled the size of its security forces, with some 11,000 mostly Sunni Muslim and Christian troops in recent months, and armed them with donated weapons and vehicles from the United Arab Emirates, a Sunni Gulf state.

The dramatic increase in interior-ministry troops, including the creation of a controversial new intelligence unit and the rapid expansion of a commando force, is meant to counter the growing influence of Shiite-ruled Iran and its ally here, Hezbollah, Cabinet minister Ahmed Fatfat said this week.

The quiet, speedy troop buildup indicates that Lebanon's anti-Syria ruling majority, led by Premier Fouad Saniora, has been bracing itself for armed sectarian conflict since the withdrawal of Syrian forces in the spring of 2005

It also reflects growing tensions across the region between US-allied Sunnis who hold power in most Arab nations and the growing influence of Iran and Hezbollah.

The US-led toppling of Iraq's Sunni-dominated regime in 2003, along with the growing power and ambition of Shiite-led Iran, has dramatically fed tensions and fears between Islam's two major sects, analysts say.

Sunnis around the region, especially the US-backed Sunni governments of the oil-rich Arab Gulf, have grown increasingly fearful of Shiite power. That animosity has seeped into Lebanon, especially after the strong military performance of Hezbollah against Israel in the summer war.

Over the past week, government officials have moved some 8,000 additional troops – 5,000 from the army and 3,000 from the expanded Internal Security Force (ISF) – into Beirut in preparation for a massive, Hezbollah-led demonstration set for today, Fatfat said.

...About a month ago, the new ISF troops were outfitted with weapons and equipment donated by the United Arab Emirates, an opulent confederation of Sunni states, said Fatfat, a Sunni Cabinet member who brokered the deal while serving as Lebanon's interior minister.

Nasrallah, who has declared Fatfat and the rest of the government illegitimate tools of US interests, controls a heavily armed, openly religious militia of Shiite guerrillas. The mixed-sect Lebanese army, which has at least 60,000 ground forces, is overseen by Christians but is believed to have no strong political allegiances overall.

The role of the United Arab Emirates in the reinvention of the ISF illustrates the broader, regional implications of tensions between Lebanon's Sunnis and their Christian and Druze allies on one side, and Shiite Hezbollah, which has tight ties to both Iran and Syria.

The US refused earlier this year to donate weaponry to the Lebanese interior ministry, Fatfat said. Still, the US administration is friendly with the United Arab Emirates, and the creation and arming of anti-Hezbollah forces in Lebanon are widely seen to be in the interests of the US (Stack, M.K. 2006, 'Sunni forces in Lebanon swell', *The Seattle Times*, 1 December http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2003456196_Lebanon01.html – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 77).

In October 2006 a Beirut based blogger complained as follows of Lebanon's police:

Anyone in Lebanon would testify that the so called police is as corrupt and incompetent as the pre-war militias. All you need to do is drive next to an ISF and watch them run you off the

road. The state and its security forces are made up of the same people who commit violations on a daily basis. Lebanon's police officers, many unreformed ex militia members, set a bad example every day. Those in the population who would otherwise be law abiding citizens find themselves forced to copy their behavior to survive. And when security forces clash with violators, it looks like a clash within a gang of violators, and not between the law and criminals (AK 2006, 'Terrorism and the city', Beirut Beltway Blog website, 15 October http://Beirutbeltway.com/Beirutbeltway/2006/10/terrorism_and_t.html – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 78).

In December 2002 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided the following information on the willingness of Hezbollah to pursue persons of interest in the context of suspected collaboration with Israel. The advice may be of interest insofar as DFAT states that, if Hezbollah was committed to targeting the person in question, "he could be reached anywhere in Lebanon: Beirut would not provide him protection from an organisation as influential as Hezbollah". It also states that while such a pursued person "might seek protection from the Lebanese police or security authorities...if the [pursuing Hezbollah] perpetrator is a senior member of Hezbollah, or has secured protection from the party, we would assess that he would be largely immune from criminal investigation or prosecution". The advice follows in detail:

Background

The applicant claims he was imprisoned by the Lebanese authorities ... for suspected membership in Israeli intelligence service and suspected membership of the south Lebanese army (SLA), and also for entering enemy territory (Israel). He claims that he was not a member of the Israeli intelligence service or the SLA, and that he was wrongfully convicted, sentenced and imprisoned ... [and] tried in a military court.

The applicant fears that ... he will be killed by Hezbollah if he returns to Lebanon, because they want revenge for his alleged dealings with Israel, and that the Lebanese authorities will not protect him.

Questions: [03/12/02]

Q.1 are members of Hezbollah likely to pursue persons they believe have collaborated with Israel, or who they deem to have been members of the south Lebanese army (SLA), in particular if such persons have already been sentenced by the Lebanese authorities, and have served that sentence?

Q.2 If so, would the leadership of Hezbollah condone such pursuit, or would such action be by individual Hezbollah members acting alone without formal endorsement by the Hezbollah leadership? What treatment would [such] persons ... be likely to receive at the hands of Hezbollah?

Q.3 Would Lebanese authorities provide protection for persons who may be persecuted by Hezbollah, have recently been convicted, sentenced and served time?

Q.4 Would ... [such people] be able to receive assistance from the Lebanese authorities in ... Marjayoun, or would ... [they] have to relocate to Beirut (or elsewhere) in order to receive such protection from Hezbollah?

...Answers: [03/12/02]

A.1 Lebanese citizens who have served sentences for collaboration with Israel are occasionally exposed to further persecution from members of the community in which they reside, or communities badly affected by Israel's occupation (1978-2000). The worse affected regions include the towns and villages of south Lebanon. This behaviour is not officially sanctioned by Hezbollah's leadership although members of the party might commit such action independently.

A.2 In our assessment, Hezbollah would not condone pursuit of former detainees. However, the party might "excuse" revenge attacks where they have been committed by a local Hezbollah commander, or someone connected to him, or an individual with strong political affiliations or personal connections to the party. Renegade and independent elements of the party might, for example, inflict serious physical damage on the residence of the former detainee or inflict serious personal injury.

A.3 Former detainees who have experienced persecution from Hezbollah members or related elements might seek protection from the Lebanese police or security authorities. However, if the perpetrator is a senior member of Hezbollah, or has secured protection from the party, we would assess that he would be largely immune from criminal investigation or prosecution.

A.4 If ... [such a person was] being targeted by Hezbollah, he could be reached anywhere in Lebanon: Beirut would not provide him protection from an organisation as influential as Hezbollah. But we remain of the view that Hezbollah would not officially sanction retribution against an individual, particularly someone who is deemed to have "paid his dues" by serving a prison term. But if ... [he] is being pursued by an individual acting independently of Hezbollah, then residence in an exclusively Christian town might afford some protection (if ... [he] is also a Christian).

...Comment

We would not dismiss the possibility that rogue elements claiming to have links to Hezbollah might act without the authority of the party to provoke trouble in communities where former detainees have re-settled. There is a strong possibility their behaviour could be motivated by personal or community factors unrelated to Israel or other sensitive political issues. We would note, too, that former detainees are likely to suffer persecution from fellow nationals who have suffered at the hands of the Israeli occupying army or south Lebanon army. There have been many incidents in recent years of returning detainees suffering persecution, assault and/or physical damage to homes as punishment for collaboration with Israel and the SLA. However, and as far as we can recall, there have been no reports of deaths (DIMIA Country Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No 362/02 – Treatment of former detainees by Hezbollah*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 3 December 2002), 5 December – Attachment 79).

In August 2004 DFAT provided the following advice in regard to the taking of statements by Lebanon's police (the request related to the specific circumstances of a Christian woman being targeted by a Syrian stalker):

A.4. By law, for offences committed within the past 24 hours, the police are required to take a statement from the victim. If the police refuse, the victim can go to an office of the general prosecutor and insist that a statement is taken. Once 24 hours has elapsed, the victim has to go to an office of the general prosecutor and submit his/her complaint in writing in order to obtain follow-up action.

In practice statements are not always taken, usually when the police do not regard the crime as serious or if the victim can not provide enough details to permit follow-up. Women often have a harder time convincing the police of a crime's seriousness than men. Domestic violence allegations are particularly likely to be ignored, but a woman who goes alone to a police station to report some other type of crime (ie unaccompanied by a male relative) may

also not be taken seriously (DIMIA Country Information Service 2004, Country Information Report No. 62/04 – RRT Request LBN16846: Police Support And Protection In Relation To Charges Brought Against Syrians In Lebanon, (sourced from DFAT advice of 12 August 2004), 25 August – Attachment 80)

Previous Research Responses on state protection from Hezbollah

The issue of state protection for persons from the north fearing Hezbollah was recently addressed in *Research Response LBN33576* of February 2008, and this is supplied as Attachment 81 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33576*, 7 February – Attachment 81).

Question 5 of *Research Response LBN31663*, of May 2007, provides information on the general availability of state protection in Lebanon for someone who has been threatened because of their membership of a political group. It draws on sources such as the International Crisis Group, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, DFAT and news articles. The main points include:

- The ability of someone to seek assistance from local police is affected at present by the general political and security instability in the country.
- The Internal Security Services (ISF) is the name of the police force in Lebanon. Its ability to carry out its responsibilities is restricted due to limited resources.
- The security services were thrown into turmoil by Syria's withdrawal from the country in 2005, since Syria had largely controlled them.
- The security services were judged by a UN report to have failed to provide Lebanese citizens with an acceptable level of security, contributing to a culture of impunity and intimidation.
- There was a pervasive lack of faith in the justice system, which was believed to be riddled with cronyism and corruption.
- People were increasingly seeking protection from their own sectarian communities (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN31663*, 3 May – Attachment 82).

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