

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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20 November 2013

### LBN104673.E

Lebanon: The Baath Party in Lebanon, including geographic, social and religious areas of influence; treatment of members by society and authorities; treatment of members who want to leave the party by the party, authorities, and society (2011-November 2013)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information about the Baath Party [also spelled Ba'ath, Ba'th; also known as the Arab Socialist Baath Party of Lebanon] was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

#### 1. Overview

Sources indicate that the Lebanese Baath Party is a branch of the Baath Party of Syria (*Accord* June 2012, 97 ; PHW 2012a, 823; *Ya Libnan* 4 Mar. 2012), which has been in power in Syria since 1963 and is led by Syrian President Bashar al Assad (PHW 2012b, 1400, 1401; *The Daily Star* 4 Aug. 2011). According to the *Political Handbook of the World*, the Baath Party is an international political movement that began in 1940, which advocates for a secular political unity of the Arab World (2012b, 1400). The English-language Lebanese newspaper *The Daily Star* indicates that the Baath Party calls for Arab nationalism and does not recognize countries as individual nation-states (4 Aug. 2011).

The *Political Handbook of the World* states that the Lebanese branch is "closely affiliated" with the Syrian branch (2012a, 823). Similarly, the *Daily Star* describes the Lebanese Baath party as "loyal" to President Assad (6 Sept. 2013). The newspaper has also reported an instance in which a Lebanese Baath official in Lebanon spoke publicly on behalf of President Assad, offering condolences to the family of a man killed by gunfire on the Syrian-Lebanese border (*The Daily Star* 12 Apr. 2012).

The Baath Party has two elected representatives in the Lebanese government (*The Daily Star* 4 Aug. 2011; PHW 2012a, 823; IFES Sept. 2011, 17, 23). Sources indicate that the Baath Member of Parliament (MP) for Marjaayoun-Hasbaya is Qassem Hashem (*ibid.*, 23; *The Daily Star* 7 Apr. 2011), who is a Sunni Muslim (IFES Sept. 2011, 23; Lebanon n.d.a). According to Al Jazeera, Hashem has held his position for 12 years (2 July 2013). The Baath MP for Baalbek-Hermel is Assem Qanso [also spelled Kanso] (IFES Sept. 2011, 17; *The Daily Star* 26 July 2013), a Shia Muslim (IFES Sept. 2011, 17; Lebanon n.d.b). Sources published in 2011 and 2012 identify Qanso as the leader of the Baath Party in Lebanon (*The Daily Star* 4 Aug. 2011; PHW 2012a, 823). According to *The Daily Star*, Qanso is one of several Syrian and Lebanese officials who have been subject to an assets freeze by the United States for "threatening stability" in Lebanon (29 July 2011). The *Daily Star* has also described Qanso as "an ally of Damascus" (19 June 2013).

In an article published on 30 January 2012, the *Daily Star* referred to Assem Qanso as the former Lebanese Baath Party head. In March 2012, sources identified Fayez Shukr as the party leader (*The Daily Star*

5 Mar. 2012a; Ya Libnan 4 Mar. 2012). In a 1 September 2013 article, Lebanon's state media source, the National News Agency, indicated that the leader of the party was Muhammad Qawwas.

The Baath Party in Lebanon is a member of the 8 March coalition of political parties, which also includes Hezbollah (*Accord* June 2012, 97; PHW 2012a, 823). The *Daily Star* reports that Hezbollah and the Baath Party in Lebanon have called for unity to "foil 'the conspiracy' against the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis" and called for the "eradication" of Israel (19 Oct. 2012). *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* indicates that Hezbollah "maintains a key strategic alliance with Damascus" and retains interest in the "survival of the Assad regime," reporting that its 8 March allies share its position on Syria (22 Mar. 2012).

In a 2012 article, Al Jazeera describes Baathists as the "traditional foes" of Salafist Muslims (2 July 2013).

## 2. Activities

In March 2012 in downtown Beirut, the Baath party staged a pro-Assad demonstration, as Salafists simultaneously held an anti-Assad rally (*The Daily Star* 5 Mar. 2012a; *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* 22 Mar. 2012; Ya Libnan 4 Mar. 2012). Sources indicate that there was no violence (*ibid.*; *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* 22 Mar. 2012; *The Daily Star* 5 Mar. 2012a). The *Daily Star* also reports that the pro-regime protesters were mostly Syrians working in Lebanon, but also included Lebanese supporters of the Baath party (5 Mar. 2012b).

In April 2013, a delegation of approximately 50 Lebanese politicians, including Baath MP Assem Qanso, travelled to Syria to meet with President Assad (*The Daily Star* 22 Apr. 2013; Reuters 22 Apr. 2013). According to Qanso, President Assad criticized Lebanon's official policy of "dissociation" from the Syrian conflict (*ibid.*; *The Daily Star* 22 Apr. 2013).

In July 2013, in Jalala [Jlala] in the Bekaa Valley, a live bomb was found near the offices of the Baath Party and was disabled by military forces (*The Daily Star* 23 June 2013; Lebanon 23 June 2013). At the time, the perpetrator was unknown (*ibid.*; *The Daily Star* 23 June 2013).

The *Daily Star* also reports on the following incidents involving the Lebanese Baath Party:

- In May 2011 in Beirut's Hamra district, a Lebanese Baath Party official attended a rally in support of the Syrian regime and reportedly stated, in reference to the situation in Syria, that the crackdown on anti-regime protestors by the Syrian security forces was "necessary to protect Syria from foreign-backed attempts at a revolution" (*The Daily Star* 24 May 2011).
- In Sidon in April 2012, supporters of the Baath Party and the Islamist party Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya reportedly clashed after Baath Party members vandalized anti-Assad banners put up by Al-Jamaa members (*ibid.* 6 Apr. 2012).
- In July 2013, Baath MP Assem Qanso led a delegation to Damascus and met with the Syrian Prime Minister and a senior Syrian Baath Party official (*ibid.* 26 July 2013). A party statement was issued, affirming that "[Lebanon's] Baath leadership stands by Syria's leadership and people against the conspiracy hatched against it by a number of regional and Arab states" (*ibid.*).
- In August 2013, Lebanese police forces reportedly arrested two men as suspects in a car bombing in Tripoli, Lebanon, that killed 47 people (*ibid.* 24 Aug. 2013). One of the men was described by the *Daily Star* as an "affiliate" of the Baath Party (*ibid.*).

Corroboration for the *Daily Star* reports could not be found by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information about the treatment of members of the Lebanese Baath party who want to leave the party by the Baath party, Lebanese authorities and society could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Academics specializing in Lebanon at the following institutions could not provide information for this Response: Brown University, Lebanese American University. Attempts to contact representatives at the Middle East Institute and the Lebanese Information Center were unsuccessful. A freelance journalist specializing in Lebanese politics did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Al-Monitor; Al-Arabiya; Australia – Refugee Review Tribunal; Canada – Public Safety; Carnegie Middle East Center; Middle East Institute; *Dar al Hayat*; eoi.net; Factiva; Lebanese Center for Policy Studies; Lebanese Information Center; Lebanon – Embassy of Lebanon in Washington, Embassy of Lebanon in Montreal; NOW; *Orient le Jour*; Syrian Arab News Agency.

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