

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** LBN31663  
**Country:** Lebanon  
**Date:** 3 May 2007

Keywords: Lebanon – Allawi Muslim sect – Syrian Ba’ath party – Sunni militants – Akkar region

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

- 1. Please provide information on the Allawi Muslim sect in Lebanon.**
- 2. Please provide information on the organisation, size and role of the Syrian Ba’ath Party in Lebanon, and in Tripoli.**
- 3. Are there any reports of recent attacks on members of the Ba’ath party by persons or groups in the Lebanese community?**
- 4. Is there any information on whether there is any conflict between any known Sunni groups and members of the Ba’ath party.**
- 5. Is it likely that a person would not be able to seek assistance from the Lebanese police in the event they were threatened for reasons of his membership or imputed membership of the Ba’ath Party?**
- 6. Where is the Akkar region in Lebanon and is it an area which is under the protection of Syrian security authorities or influence? How far is Khoura Dahr El Ein from the Akkar region?**

**RESPONSE**

- 1. Please provide information on the Allawi Muslim sect in Lebanon.**

Information on the Allawi (or Alawite) Muslim sect in Lebanon is not extensive. The Alawite community is one of the smallest Muslim religious communities in Lebanon and one of eighteen religious groups which are officially recognised in the country (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Lebanon*, 15 September <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71426.htm> – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 1). An estimated 50 000 Alawites live in northern Lebanon, in and around Tripoli, according to the UK Home Office’s July 2006 *Country of Origin Information Report on Lebanon* (UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report – The Lebanon*, UK Home Office website, July [http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/lebanon\\_170706.doc](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/lebanon_170706.doc) – Accessed 23

April 2007 – Attachment 2). Electoral statistics sourced from the Ministry of the Interior show that there were 23 696 Alawites registered to vote for the 2005 elections. This represented 0.8% of the voting population. In the 2000 elections, 17 841 Alawite voters participated in voting for the North Lebanon electoral district/province, which encompasses Tripoli and the Akkar region (European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, p. 13 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/human\\_rights/eu\\_election\\_ass\\_observ/lebanon/final\\_report.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/lebanon/final_report.pdf) – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 3; ‘North Lebanon: Voters Info’ 2000, Libanvote.com website, <http://libanvote.com/project/info/Northlb.html> – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 4). The Lebanese electoral system allocates two parliamentary seats to the Alawite confession. The two Alawite Members of Parliament elected in the June 2005 elections were Mustafa Ali Hussein for the seat of North I Akkar, and Badr Wanous for the seat of North II Tripoli. Both were allied with Saad Hariri’s *Tayyar Al Mustaqbal* (Future Movement) List or Bloc (European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, p.64-5 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/human\\_rights/eu\\_election\\_ass\\_observ/lebanon/final\\_report.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/lebanon/final_report.pdf) – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 3 ; ‘Official election results for North Lebanon’ 2005, Yalibnan.com website, 21 June [http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2005/06/\\_lebanons\\_inter.php](http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2005/06/_lebanons_inter.php) – Accessed 30 April 2007 – Attachment 5).

A 30 April 2005 article from *The Daily Star* (made available on The Tharwa Project website) provides a brief history of the Alawites in Lebanon, and gives the opinions of a number of Alawite politicians and ordinary members of the community on their current situation, following the assassination of the Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian security in March-April 2005. The article also comments on the important fact that Alawites form a significant minority (12 per cent) in neighbouring Syria and that the Assad family, which has ruled Syria since the 1970s, is Alawite. (This issue is discussed more fully below.) The Tharwa Project is a non-government site intended to encourage inter-communal dialogue in the Middle East and North Africa:

BEIRUT: Allawites represent about 10 percent of Syria’s population, yet they are the dominant group, both economically and politically, much to the discomfort of the masses. In Lebanon, the off-shoot sect of Islam represents less than half a percent of the population and has long bemoaned its economic and political marginalization in the country. Accordingly, when Syrian troops were deployed in Lebanon in 1976, many Allawites saw in their entrance an end to a “long history of marginalization” and quickly declared their loyalty to then President Hafez Assad, himself Allawite.

In fact, it was Assad’s troops who supported the Allawites – considered a heterodox sect by many Shiites and Sunnis, as well as Druze – who formed alliances with the Maronite Christians in Lebanon during the civil war years against the Druze and Palestinians. But the near three-decade Syrian occupation did not balance the scales between Lebanese Allawites and the country’s other religious factions, despite the former’s adoption of its political line and complete devotion to Syrian leaders.

Allawite Tripoli MP Ahmad Hbous said Syria’s presence in Lebanon did not afford his sect any special privileges, noting that it was only through the acceptance of the Taif Accord in 1989 that the group was granted political participation. He said: “We lobbied during the 1960s and 1970s excessively for our rights and to participate in politics and just before achieving something, the war broke out. We could only reclaim these rights through Taif 15 years later.”

The Taif Accord, the peace deal that ended Lebanon's 15-year civil war, stipulated Allawites be granted two seats in Parliament (representing Akkar and Tripoli), two representatives to head governmental institutions and one diplomatic post. Hbous added: "Syria treated us equally. We neither won nor lost anything during its deployment and nothing will change with the redeployment, which was necessary even though it came too late."

But Hbous, who ran on former Interior Minister Suleiman Franjeh's electoral list in the 2000 elections, also supports some opposition demands; namely holding parliamentary elections on time and an international probe into former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination. He said: "We support every step and policy which brings about Lebanon's sovereignty over its land, but we also insist on establishing relations and cooperation between Lebanon and Syria."

Former Tripoli MP Ali Eid, who ran in the 2000 elections on former Premier Omar Karami's list, said: "The [Allawite] sect was never granted any privileges during Syria's 29-year presence. Their regime is secular, not sectarian like here, and thus for them it is not logical to distinguish any specific sect." Eid added that Lebanese Allawites are similar to Syrian Sunnis, exerting little or no power in the political arena.

He said: "Our rights were violated and neglected prior and during their presence in a country where everything is almost equally distributed between Christians and Muslims." Eid added that even though Allawites were great allies of the Syrians, they are first and foremost Lebanese but believe in the necessity of establishing and maintaining good relations with Syria and the Arab countries to preserve the Arab identity of Lebanon.

Commenting on the opposition movement since Hariri's killing, the former MP said many of its demands are reasonable. But he added Allawites have not adopted the opposition or loyalist's political line. He said: "We believe that sovereignty, freedom and independence should be achieved and that Lebanon's regime should be based on the equation of appointing the right figure in the right position regardless of religion."

Ali Hammoud, a retired government employee, said: "If some Allawites benefited from the Syrian presence in Lebanon during the past 30 years, that cannot and should not be generalized nor should one link us to the Syrian regime in any way." He added: "We criticize some Syrian policies but we are Arabs and care about Syria and have many family ties with Syria's Allawites."

Hammoud rejected any suggestion that Allawites should be concerned about their future in Lebanon following Syria's pullout, saying "maybe afterward the accusation of being Syria's followers will be dropped and we can feel free to express our opinions and ask for more involvement in Lebanon's politics." According to Hammoud: "We should be given more government posts as well as a ministry, but we hope one day Lebanon will be a nation for all Lebanese equally, despite religious calculations."

Areen Hassan, a lawyer from Akkar who works and lives in Tripoli, said: "At the beginning of the civil war we allied with the Syrians thinking they would help us gain our rights and get political representation." He added: "However, we ended losing 700 people during the war and were considered as Syrians afterward. So we lost on both the political and military grounds."

Hassan is also former secretary of the Islamic Allawite Union, the institution which handles the sect's internal affairs. He said that the withdrawal will positively affect his sect for the simple reason Allawites are Lebanese. He added: "Not only did Syria outlive its usefulness in

Lebanon, but it was never of any to us Lebanese Allawites. The fact is we never had one minister, ambassador or high-ranking official.”

Youssef Habib, a hairdresser from Tripoli, said: “Allawites are a sect like any other in Lebanon. We are Lebanese first and foremost and never had any political affiliation with the Syrian regime but with Syrian Allawite relatives.”

Allawites have been present in modern-day Lebanon since the 16th century and **are estimated to number 100,000 today, mostly in Akkar and Tripoli. The sect is managed through the Islamic Allawite Union, a council of 600 members that are elected every four years** (‘Lebanese Allawites welcome Syria’s withdrawal as ‘necessary’ 2005, *The Daily Star*, 30 April sourced from The Tharwa Project website, <http://www.tharwaproject.com/node/2127> – Accessed 2 May 2007 – Attachment 6).

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided the following information on Alawites in Tripoli in January 2004, just over a year prior to the main Syrian withdrawal from the country:

B. Are the Alawis in Tripoli united or politically factionalised?

Alawite politics in Tripoli is influenced heavily by Syria. Under that broad umbrella, voting patterns may be understood in terms of clannish/tribal identities, not ideological conviction. As in all Lebanon, politics works on a patronage system, with people tending to vote for the candidate that is likely to deliver the greatest economic/social rewards for their loyalty. Often that is the one to whom they have the closest personal ties. Policy platforms are subsidiary to non-existent (DFAT 2004, E-mail to RRT, *DFAT Report 272 – Lebanon: RRT Information Request: LBN16296*, 19 January – Attachment 7).

Information on the Alawite religion as it is practiced specifically in Lebanon is very limited. The GlobalSecurity.org website provides the following on Alawites in its survey of religious sects in Lebanon. This information is undated but may date to as late as the 1980s:

### **Alawis**

**Several thousand Alawis were scattered throughout northern Lebanon in late 1980s.** Lebanese Alawis have assumed more significance since the rise to power of the Alawi faction in Syria in 1966, and especially since the Syrians established a military presence in Lebanon in 1976.

The Alawis are also known as “Nusayris” because of their concentration in the Nusayriyah Mountains in western Syria. They appear to be descendants of people who lived in this region at the time of Alexander the Great. When Christianity flourished in the Fertile Crescent, the Alawis, isolated in their little communities, clung to their own pre-Islamic religion. **After hundreds of years of Ismaili [a major Shia Muslim community] influence, however, the Alawis moved closer to Islam.** Furthermore, contacts with the Byzantines and the Crusaders added Christian elements to the Alawis’ new creeds and practices. For example, Alawis celebrate Christmas, Easter, and the Epiphany, and use sacramental wine in some ceremonies. For several centuries, the Alawis enjoyed autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, but, in the midnineteenth century, the Ottomans imposed direct rule. Regarding the Alawis as infidels, the Ottomans consistently persecuted them and imposed heavy taxation. During the French Mandate, the Alawis briefly gained territorial autonomy, but direct rule was reimposed in 1936.

**Alawis claim they are Muslims, but conservative Sunnis do not recognize them as such. In the early 1970s, however, Imam Musa as Sadr declared the Alawi sect a branch of Shia Islam.** Like Ismaili Shias, Alawis believe in a system of divine incarnation. Unlike Ismailis, **Alawis regard Ali as the incarnation of God.** Because many of the tenets of the faith are secret, Alawis have refused to discuss their faith with outsiders. Only an elect few learn the religion after a lengthy initiation process; youths are initiated into the secrets of the faith in stages. Alawis study the Quran and recognize the five pillars of Islam. Alawis do not set aside a particular building for worship. In the past, Sunni government officials forced them to build mosques, but these were invariably abandoned. Only the men take part in worship ('Lebanon – Religious Sects' (undated), GlobalSecurity.org website, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/lebanon/religious-sects.htm> – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 8)

Discussion on the Alawite sect and its practices is more often connected with neighbouring Syria, where the sect first emerged as a part of Islam between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. Approximately a million Alawites live in Syria, predominantly in the coastal northwest Syrian province of Latakia, a province adjacent to Lebanon's northern border and its Akkar region. While a majority in this part of Syria, they form just 12 per cent of Syria's total population, where the 70% majority is Sunni ('Who are the 'Alawis?', 2005, Suburban Emergency Management Project (SEMP) website, 3 July [http://www.semp.us/publications/biot\\_reader.php?BiotID=232&Letter=](http://www.semp.us/publications/biot_reader.php?BiotID=232&Letter=) – Accessed 18 April 2007 – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 9; : Kramer, P. 'How Syria's ruling sect found Islamic legitimacy: Syria's Alawis and Shi'ism' (undated) <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Alawis.htm> – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 10). More significantly, an Alawite family, the Assads, have ruled Syria since the 1970s and important security and intelligence positions are occupied by Alawites. However, Sunnis have also been given important political positions by the Assad regime in Syria and some opponents of the Assad regime are in fact Alawite (International Crisis Group 2004, *Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*, International Crisis Group website, pp.1-2 & 18, 11 February [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/arab\\_israeli\\_conflict/syria/24\\_syria\\_2\\_domestic\\_policy\\_challenge.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/arab_israeli_conflict/syria/24_syria_2_domestic_policy_challenge.pdf)- Accessed 30 April 2007 – Attachment 11).

Whether Alawites are Muslims seems to have been very much undecided until 1973, when the late ruler of Syria, Hafiz al-Assad, requested official recognition of his Alawite faith from a leading Shia cleric in Lebanon. (The Alawite sect is most often seen as closest to Twelver Shi'ism.) The need for official recognition arose because of the new Syrian Constitution requiring that the country's president be a Muslim. Imam Musa-al-Sadr, head of the Higher Shia Council in Lebanon (also known as the Supreme Islamic Shi'ites Council), issued a ruling that Alawites were indeed part of Shia Islam, a fact which is confirmed by some by the fact that Alawites are also known as "Nusayris", after Muhammad ibn Nusayr or Nusayr an-Namiri who founded the sect in the ninth century. Doubt surrounds this man and his teachings. He is said to be a devotee of the tenth and eleventh Shia Imama, Ali al-Hadi (AD 868) the Tenth Imam, and Hasan al-Askari (AD 873) the Eleventh. The Alawites became a completely separate sect around the fifteenth century. In Syria, the Alawite religion is also said to be highly eclectic and syncretistic, with pagan and Christian elements, as well as being secretive where religious truths are guarded by *shaykhs*. While some features are said to be indisputably Shia, one feature distinguishing it from other strands of Islam and Shia Islam in particular is that the veneration of Ali is extended to point of Ali's deification and the incarnation of God. Alawites may also ignore certain Islamic dietary laws ('Who are the

‘Alawis?’, 2005, Suburban Emergency Management Project (SEMP) website, 3 July [http://www.semp.us/publications/biot\\_reader.php?BiotID=232&Letter=](http://www.semp.us/publications/biot_reader.php?BiotID=232&Letter=) – Accessed 18 April 2007 – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 9; : Kramer, P. ‘How Syria’s ruling sect found Islamic legitimacy: Syria’s Alwais and Shi’ism’ (undated) <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Alawis.htm> -- Accessed 23 April 2007 – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 10; Momen, M. 1985, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Twelver Shi’ism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, pp.58, 100, 220 – Attachment 12).

In January 2007 members of the Alawite community in Tripoli were involved in clashes with pro-government groups, supporters of Saad Hariri and son of the former Prime Minister who was murdered in February 2005. These clashes in Tripoli were one of many involving various groups that occurred in Lebanon from late 2006 and into early 2007, during protests and strikes led by Hezbollah in an attempt to put pressure on the government to resign. Those who clashed with the Alawite community are described as (largely) Sunnis belonging to the Loyalist or Hariri-led Future Movement Party, and as coming from the Bab el-Tibbaneh neighbourhood. Those Alawites who were involved lived in the nearby Baal Mohsen neighbourhood of Tripoli. Reports indicate two deaths and eleven injuries resulted from the clashes in Tripoli (Fisk, R. 2007 ‘Opposition demonstrations turn Beirut into a violent sectarian battleground’, *The Independent*, 24 January – Attachment 13; Hezbollah brings turmoil to Beirut’, 2007, *Desert Times (Salt Lake City)*, sourced from findarticles.com website, 24 January [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4188/is\\_20070124/ai\\_n17151476](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20070124/ai_n17151476) – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 14; ‘Sunni-Alawite Clash in Northern Lebanon’ 2007, beiruttobayside.blogspot.com website, 24 January <http://beirut2bayside.blogspot.com/2007/01/sunni-alawite-clash-in-northern-lebanon.html> – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 15; ‘One killed, 70 wounded in Lebanon protests’ 2007, Channelnewsasia.com website, 24 January [http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp\\_world/view/254291/1/.html](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_world/view/254291/1/.html) – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 16). Two reports on the *Strategic Forecasting* intelligence website were also found on clashes during the funeral of one of those killed, the Sunni Bilal Al-Hayik. These rely on the Saudi newspaper, *Al Hayat*, which refers to the Sunni groups involved as belonging to a “Salafi movement” or “Salafist al-Hariri bloc”:

Confrontations in the city of Tripoli, Lebanon, between **armed members of the Salafi movement and Shia Alawites** escalated Jan. 24 during the funeral of the Sunni Bilal Al-Hayik, Saudi newspaper *Al Hayat* reported Jan. 25. **The Salafis yelled anti-Iranian and anti-Syrian chants** and spoke out against Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Despite the presence of the army and security forces, gunfights broke out (‘Lebanon: Confrontation Escalates’ 2007, *Stratfor*, 25 January – Attachment 17)

...Saudi Arabia has made it clear that it has the means to drag Hezbollah to the negotiating table by provoking Sunni-Shiite clashes. **Independent Saudi newspaper Al Hayat** reported on Thursday that members of the **Salafist al-Hariri bloc instigated** clashes with **Shiite Alawites** in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli after a funeral for a Sunni protester who was killed in the riots. According to eyewitnesses, the members of the two sides threw grenades and exchanged gunfire for almost two hours as an Alawite shop was torched (‘Geopolitical Diary: Stepping Up the Game in Lebanon’ 2007, *Stratfor*, 26 January – Attachment 18).

Corroboration of the existence of Salafi or Salafist groups in Lebanon and Tripoli was found in a number of sources, though no further reports were found in the sources consulted indicating attacks against Alawites (International Crisis Group 2005, *Lebanon: Managing the gathering storm*, Middle East Report No 48, 5 December, p. 13 n.95 – Attachment 19; Belloncle, E. 2006 ‘Prospects of SSR in Lebanon’, *Journal of Security Sector Management*, Vol. 4, No.4, sourced from Colombia International Affairs Online (CIAO) website, [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/jssm/jssm\\_4\\_4/jssm\\_4\\_4a.pdf](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/jssm/jssm_4_4/jssm_4_4a.pdf) – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 20). In February 2005 the Salafist movement in Lebanon is reported as coming out in support of the Hariri family following the Prime Minister’s assassination in 2005 (Rougier, B. 2007 ‘The Sunni-Shia rivalry’, Middle East Online website, 16 January <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=19195> – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 21). One further reference was found to a specific Sunni/Salafist group in Tripoli, the “Sunni extremists ...perhaps from the Salafist *Hezb al-Tahrir* party in Tripoli” (Fisk, R. 2006 ‘Now Lebanon is Burning’, *The Independent*, 7 February, sourced from the Counterpunch website, <http://www.counterpunch.org/fisk02072006.html> – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 22).

On 1 April 2007, *BBC Monitoring Middle East* provided transcripts of an interview between Shaykh Ibrahim al-Salih, former Political Bureau chief of the Islamic Al-Tawhid Movement Command Council, and the journalist Jihad Nafi. The interview covered many issues on the political and sectarian situation in Tripoli. The interview includes the shaykh’s opinion on the recent January clashes involving the Alawite community, who believes it not to be a sign of sectarian strife in the city between Alawites and Sunnis:

[Nafi] How do you explain the regrettable events that took place between Al-Tabanah and Ba’l Muhsin, do you not think these incidents were a result of sectarian incitement?

[Al-Salih] The incidents that took place at Al-Tabanah between its two parts **cannot be considered a sectarian conflict**, since from the one side, the Alawites are not originally affiliated to Shiism, and Ba’l Muhsin, which is considered Sunni, perhaps houses more than half of the Alawite sect. It is true that perhaps the Alawite minority in Tripoli warns against the possibility of such a battle, but if this were possible, it would not have been stopped in the first place and no one would have been able to contain it. Also, it would not have occurred unless there was an aggressor, represented by some Tripoli youths, and in this case, this side was the aggressor; there was no sectarian strife, and this is what recently took place (‘Lebanese Sunni figure says forces linked to Al-Qa’idah operating in north’ 2007, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 1 April – Attachment 23).

## **2. Please provide information on the organisation, size and role of the Syrian Ba’ath Party in Lebanon, and in Tripoli.**

The Country Information Service (CIS) of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship requested information on the Syrian Ba’ath Party in Lebanon from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in February 2007 in relation to the present case. The five questions sent by the CIS, and the response from DFAT, are provided below. Questions 1 to 3 focus specifically on the role and organization of the Syrian Ba’ath Party:

### **QUESTIONS: [23 February 2007]**

Q.1. What is the current relationship between Syrian Baath Party (SBP) and the current ruling party?

Q.2. Does the SBP have any branches in Lebanon? Especially in Tripoli?

Q.3. If in Lebanon and especially Tripoli, is there any information on its operation, membership, funding, working etc., and any other salient details about the SBP?

Q.4. What sort of treatment would a Lebanese (Alawi – Muslim) national who was a member of the SBP, currently face if their relative/father were also members of the SBP?

Q.5. Would an association with Syrian Baath party be of interest to the Lebanese authorities?

#### **RESPONSES: [12 March 2007]**

##### Background Provided by Post

The Ba'ath Party in Lebanon is very closely affiliated to the Syrian Ba'ath Party but is called the "Ba'ath Party" or the "Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party" in Lebanon. Information about Ba'ath Party operations and the treatment of those affiliated with the organisation in Lebanon is sketchy. Post will continue to seek further information.

Political instability in Lebanon has led to increased sectarianism. In the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14 2005, and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal, there were regular reports of Syrians being killed, beaten or threatened in Lebanon. Many returned to Syria over this period. Anti-Syrian sentiment remains high and Alawites are closely identified with Syria.

However, post is aware of very few violent incidents targeting Syrians over the last year. In the aftermath of the July-August conflict between Israel and Hizballah, sectarianism and the pro- vs. anti-Syrian divide strengthened. Although there is considerable anti-Syrian sentiment on the Lebanese street, there are also a large number of pro-Syrians. In Tripoli, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims there are a range of pro-Syrian parties, for example, the 'Syrian Socialist National Party' and Suleiman Frangieh's 'Marada Movement'.

R.1. The Lebanese Government, which is dominated by a coalition of parties called the 'March 14th Movement', has a poor relationship with the regime in Syria. This extends to parties in Lebanon which are affiliated with Syria, including but not limited to the Ba'ath Party. The March 14th Movement blames the Syrian regime for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14 2005 and subsequent political assassinations in Lebanon. Other elements in the Lebanese Government – notably the opposition March 8th Forces, comprised of Hizballah, Amal, the Free Patriotic Movement and other smaller pro-Syrian parties, have a good relationship with the Syrian regime.

##### **R.2. The Ba'ath Party has branches in Tripoli, Western and Central Bekaa and headquarters in Beirut.**

R.3. Information about the operation, membership, funding, working of the Ba'ath Party is not readily available. Post may be able to procure information on the Tripoli branch by contacting the Secretary of that Branch (please advise if you would like us to do so). Other interlocutors consulted thus far do not hold this information. An article in As Safir newspaper (Arabic) on 5 March 2007 cites the names of the Secretaries and Deputy-Secretaries of each branch. Post can translate this if desired (please advise). **The current regional Secretary General of the Ba'ath Party in Lebanon is Ghazi Saifeddine, who replaced Assem Qanso in January/February 2006.**

R.4. Following Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, post received unverified reports of verbal harassment of Alawites by anti-Syrian elements in northern Lebanon. We have not received any recent reports. Conceivably, if a person had more links to the Ba'ath Party – eg.

a relative who was a member – they may face greater harassment. Alternatively, a family link may offer them greater protection from their organisation and affiliates.

R.5. Political and religious affiliations enter into all aspects of life in Lebanon. An association with Syrian Baath party would probably be noted by the Lebanese authorities as part of any investigation being conducted by them. However, it does not seem likely that the Lebanese authorities would actively seek the names of those associated with the Ba'ath Party, **particularly given the Internal Security Force's limited resources.** Post is aware that the Lebanese authorities collect information about members of terrorist organisations, such as Asbat al Ansar (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No.07/29 – Lebanon: Alawi Muslim Member Of Syrian Ba'ath Party In Lebanon* (sourced from DFAT advice of 12 March 2007), 16 March – Attachment 24).

Attacks against Syrian workers in Lebanon still occur, with an escalation in some regions. As recently as 1 May 2007, the Prime Minister Fouad Siniora spoke out against such attacks:

Prime M Fouad Siniora urged the Lebanese on Monday to stop attacking Syrian workers, describing the attacks as “the most dreadful acts which are rejected by humanity, Arab identity and common interests with our Syrian brothers.” “I also urge security forces to quell any attack on Syrian workers no matter what,” Siniora said in a statement. **Security reports in the past two days have said that attacks on Syrian workers are increasing in several Lebanese regions** (‘Siniora urges Lebanese not to attack Syrian workers’ 2007, *The Daily Star*, 1 May [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=2&article\\_id=81886](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=81886) – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 25).

According to the Lebanese Information Centre, an independent, non-profit Research Institute based in the United States which favours a sovereign Lebanon, in the ten years to 2005 the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Baath Party had a significant role in controlling trade and labour with Syria, through the fact that the Lebanese Labor Secretary was chosen from either the Syrian Ba'ath Party or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party:

Economically, Lebanon is the primary market for Syrian agricultural and textile goods. Through one-sided treaties, Syrian producers have the ability to flood the market while creating disadvantageous conditions for Lebanese counterparts who are unable to export to Syrian markets or even enjoy the same conditions in their own market. The same treaties and official blessing have allowed Syrian cheap labor to flood the Lebanese market, in some estimates close to a million Syrians work today in Lebanon. It is not by accident that in the last ten years the **Lebanese Labor secretary has always been chosen from either the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party** (‘On The Way to Lebanese Sovereignty – “The Cedar Revolution”’ 2005, The Lebanese Information Center website, 4 March <http://www.licus.org/liclib/onthewaytosovereignty%2003-04-05.htm> – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 26).

The role of the Syrian Ba'ath Party in Lebanon became over time one of being an instrument of Syrian intelligence, according to Marius Dee, professor from the Middle East Studies Program at John Hopkins University. In a July 2005 hearing before the United States House of Representatives' Committee on International Relations, the professor stated that:

The models they [the Lebanese] emulated were those of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, and the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine. The culmination of the Cedar Revolution occurred on March 14, 2005, as you know, when the political opposition mounted an unprecedented

peaceful and non-violent rally of 1.2 million Lebanese calling for freedom from Syria, and the withdrawal of troops and intelligence apparatus, al-Mukhabarat, from Lebanese territory.

The Cedar Revolution, as I see it, has three objectives. **First and most important, the end of the Syrian military occupation. This was achieved in large measure in the aftermath of demonstrations and officially completed by April 26, 2005.**

Whether all Syrian intelligence, al-Mukhabarat, agents have left Lebanon is a moot question. **For almost three decades, Syria's occupation of Lebanon transformed a number of political parties and organizations into instruments of its own intelligence services.**

**Those included minor parties like the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party,** and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, as well as major organizations such as Nabih Berri's Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

**I argue that although Syria has withdrawn its army and its official intelligence apparatus from Lebanon, it still maintains a very large Trojan horse called Hezbollah** (*Lebanon Reborn? Defining National Priorities And Prospects For Democratic Renewal In The Wake Of March 14, 2005*, 2005, Hearing Before The Committee On International Relations House Of Representatives, U.S. House of Representatives Committee Hearings website, 28 July [http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa22657.000/hfa22657\\_0.HTM](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa22657.000/hfa22657_0.HTM) – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 27).

Members of the Party continue to be politically active. In a series of large street protests in Beirut in late 2006 and early 2007 led by Hezbollah, which were intended to destabilise and overthrow the current Lebanese anti-Syrian government of Premier Fouad Siniora, members of the Lebanese Ba'ath Party were among the protestors ('Mass crowd joins protestors in Beirut for third consecutive day' 2006, Monsters and Critics website, sourced from *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 3 December [http://news.monstersandcritics.com/middleeast/news/article\\_1228977.php/Mass\\_crowd\\_joins\\_protestors\\_in\\_Beirut\\_for\\_third\\_consecutive\\_day](http://news.monstersandcritics.com/middleeast/news/article_1228977.php/Mass_crowd_joins_protestors_in_Beirut_for_third_consecutive_day) – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 28). Furthermore, the Syrian Ba'ath Party has members elected to the Lebanese Parliament. From 2000 to 2005, the Baath Party had two members in parliament. These members were Assem Qanso, a Shi'ite from the Baalbeck-Hermel riding, and Hashem Qassem, a Sunni from the Marjeyoun-Hasbaya riding (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *LBN39108.E Lebanon – The Syrian Baath Party; whether it forces Christians to join the party; connection between the Syrian Baath Party and the Syrian forces in Lebanon*, 11 June – Attachment 29). In the most recent 2005 elections, the Syrian Ba'ath Party was weakened but retained one seat in the parliament, the Marjeyoun-Hasbaya seat won at the time by Hashem Qassem (European Union Election Observation Mission 2005, *Parliamentary Elections Lebanon 2005 Final Report*, European Union website, pp. 34-35, and 62 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/human\\_rights/eu\\_election\\_ass\\_observ/lebanon/final\\_report.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/lebanon/final_report.pdf) – Accessed 7 March 2006 – Attachment 3).

**3. Are there any reports of recent attacks on members of the Ba'ath party by persons or groups in the Lebanese community?**

**4. Is there any information on whether there is any conflict between any known Sunni groups and members of the Ba'ath party.**

In the days immediately following the death of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 in a suicide bombing widely blamed on Syria, supporters of Hariri did attempt to burn the local offices of the Syrian Ba'ath Party in Beirut ('Beirut blast was suicide attack' 2005, *BBC News* website, 15 February [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4266587.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4266587.stm) – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 30). No other reports were found detailing attacks on members of the Ba'ath Party by either persons or groups in the Lebanese community, or which detailed conflicts between Ba'ath Party members and Sunni groups.

However, some information was found on the growing strength and presence of moderate and extremists Sunni groups in Lebanon. Some are indicated to resent the Syrian presence in Lebanon besides actively resisting Hezbollah. Following the death of Rafik Hariri, the Sunni faction led by Rafik Hariri's son Saad had began increasingly to arm itself. Analysis offered on the *Strategic Forecasting* website describes the situation in Lebanon in the lead up to the second anniversary (on 14 February 2007) of Hariri's assassination between the Shia Hezbollah and the Sunni faction of Hariri. The report includes information indicating that since February 2005 there has been a will by Sunni groups backing Hariri to arm themselves and create a militia as a form of self-defense against Hezbollah:

Hezbollah is also busy monitoring the steady armament of **Lebanon's Sunni faction, which is led by Saad al-Hariri (the slain former prime minister's son) and is heavily supported by Saudi Arabia and Jordan.** Truckloads of arms including automatic rifles, guns, grenade launchers, heavy machine guns and mortars, ammunition and military uniforms are being regularly unloaded in building basements in mostly Sunni west Beirut. Saad al-Hariri is procuring arms paid for by Saudi Arabia to give the essentially **urban Lebanese Sunnis the means for self-defense.** In addition to Arab suppliers, the Lebanese parties associated with al-Hariri's anti-Syrian March 14 bloc are purchasing arms through Eastern and Southern European agents. Sources say popular items on their shopping lists include sniper rifles, night-vision binoculars, land mines and short-range missile launchers. Providing further evidence of the arms buying frenzy, used AK-47 prices in the local market already have risen from \$200 to \$700 since the 2006 summer war with Israel. Al-Hariri loyalists also have conducted training exercises on light and medium arms in schools, mosque yards, parking lots and social clubs in Beirut.

During the Lebanese civil war, Lebanon's Sunnis primarily relied on the Palestine Liberation Organization for their protection. In the aftermath of the war, the late al-Hariri believed it was the duty of Lebanese Sunnis to restore law and order in the country and to demilitarize the various factions. To this end, he created the Saudi-funded Hariri Foundation to provide an opportunity for Lebanese youths from all sectarian backgrounds to pursue a college education. **His assassination and the summer 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, however, shook things up and gave the Sunnis under Saad al-Hariri's leadership a wake-up call to create their own militia.** In Tarik al-Jadidah (a predominantly Sunni working-class neighborhood in Beirut), graffiti reveals the changing attitudes of Lebanese Sunnis: "Saad, you are as precious as our eyes; arm us and we will take care of the rest." ('Lebanon: A Tempestuous Anniversary Approaches' 2007, *Stratfor*, 5 February – Attachment 31).

Further evidence that the current Lebanese government may be supporting Sunni militant and radical groups in Lebanon as a counter to Hezbollah is provided by the article, 'A Strategic Shift', by Seymour M. Hersch in *The New Yorker*. The article includes reference to several Sunni groups in northern Lebanon and to the presence of Salafi groups (used in the sense of Sunni extremists or *jihadists*), who were referred to by one source (in question 1 above) as involved in clashes with Alawites in Tripoli:

American, European, and Arab officials I spoke to told me that the **Siniora government and its allies had allowed some aid to end up in the hands of emerging Sunni radical groups in northern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and around Palestinian refugee camps in the south.** These groups, though small, are seen as a buffer to Hezbollah; at the same time, their ideological ties are with Al Qaeda.

During a conversation with me, the former Saudi diplomat [?] accused Nasrallah [Hezbollah's leader] of attempting "to hijack the state," but he also objected to the **Lebanese and Saudi sponsorship of Sunni jihadists in Lebanon.** "Salafis are sick and hateful, and I'm very much against the idea of flirting with them," he said. "They hate the Shiites, but they hate Americans more. If you try to outsmart them, they will outsmart us. It will be ugly."

Alastair Crooke, who spent nearly thirty years in MI6, the British intelligence service, and now works for Conflicts Forum, a think tank in Beirut, told me, "The Lebanese government is opening space for these people to come in. It could be very dangerous." **Crooke said that one Sunni extremist group, Fatah al-Islam, had splintered from its pro-Syrian parent group, Fatah al-Intifada, in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, in northern Lebanon.** Its membership at the time was less than two hundred. "I was told that within twenty-four hours they were being offered weapons and money by people presenting themselves as representatives of the Lebanese government's interests—presumably to take on Hezbollah," Crooke said.

The largest of the groups, **Asbat al-Ansar**, is situated in the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp. Asbat al-Ansar has received arms and supplies from Lebanese internal-security forces and militias associated with the Siniora government.

In 2005, according to a report by the U.S.-based International Crisis Group, **Saad Hariri, the Sunni majority leader of the Lebanese parliament and the son of the slain former Prime Minister—Saad inherited more than four billion dollars after his father's assassination—paid forty-eight thousand dollars in bail for four members of an Islamic militant group from Dinniyeh.** The men had been arrested while trying to establish an Islamic mini-state in northern Lebanon. The Crisis Group noted that many of the militants "had trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan."

According to the Crisis Group report, Saad Hariri later used his parliamentary majority to obtain amnesty for twenty-two of the **Dinniyeh Islamists**, as well as for seven militants suspected of plotting to bomb the Italian and Ukrainian embassies in Beirut, the previous year. (He also arranged a pardon for Samir Geagea, a Maronite Christian militia leader, who had been convicted of four political murders, including the assassination, in 1987, of Prime Minister Rashid Karami.) Hariri described his actions to reporters as humanitarian.

In an interview in Beirut, a senior official in the Siniora government acknowledged that there were **Sunni jihadists operating inside Lebanon.** "We have a liberal attitude that allows Al Qaeda types to have a presence here," he said. He related this to concerns that Iran or Syria might decide to turn Lebanon into a "theatre of conflict." (Hersch, S.M 2007, 'A Strategic Shift', *The New Yorker*, 5 March

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa\\_fact\\_hersh?printable=true](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa_fact_hersh?printable=true) – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 32).

Some further information was found on the Dinniyeh Sunni/Islamist group from northern Lebanon referred to in the article by Hersch. An *Amnesty International* report of 2003, which criticised the treatment of the Dinniyeh militants by the Lebanese government, provides

background to this and other Sunni groups. The Dinniyeh group is described as being opposed to the then pro-Syrian government and to the Syrian presence in Lebanon:

**The political leadership of the Sunni Community has historically centred around clans in Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon.** However, the period during and after the end of the civil war witnessed the emergence of a number of Sunni groups in the political scene embracing more pronounced religious agenda and with different forms of organization. These groups appear to share a common resentment of the current confessional system of government and what they regard as their marginalization by the ruling Sunni clans. **Prominent among these are the Tripoli-based al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah (The Islamic Group), and Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami (The Islamic Unification Movement).** However, **only al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah has managed so far to secure seats in parliament.** In addition to the presence of Islamist opposition groups, the Sunni Muslims of the north also claim that successive Lebanese governments have failed to heed their calls for social justice, including addressing unequal development and social and economic deprivation. These factors have led in recent years to occasional confrontations, sometimes violent, between sections of the Sunni communities in the north and the authorities. This in turn has resulted in serious human rights violations against Sunni Islamist activists, such as arbitrary detention, torture and unfair trial.

## 2.2 The Dhinniyyah events

**The Dhinniyyah group is a collective of Sunni Islamist activists who are opposed to the present Lebanese government and to the Syrian presence in Lebanon.** The group appears to be bonded together by personal and family relations as is evident from the names of the members. The leader of the group was Bassam al-Kinj (also known as Abu-'Ayisha). The nucleus of the group was reportedly established in 1997 by Abu-'Ayisha and a small number of friends. **Like other Sunni Islamist groups in the underdeveloped north of Lebanon, and around Tripoli, the Dhinniyyah group believe they are marginalized by the state and that their interests are not protected by the current confessional system of government in Lebanon. In addition they are believed to be linked to other Sunni Islamist groups in the region including Jam'at al-Tawheed and Usbat al-Ansar, the latter being regarded by the Lebanese authorities as a "terrorist" group** (Amnesty International 2003, *Lebanon: Torture and unfair trial of the Dhinniyyah detainees*, 18 May – Attachment 33).

According to a 2003 news article from *The Christian Science Monitor*, some of those from the Dinniyah group who were able to escape the 2000 crackdown by the Lebanese government are said to have fled to Tripoli, (Blanford, N 2003 'Lebanon targets Islamic radicals', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 May <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0520/p06s02-wome.htm> – Accessed 24 April 2007 – Attachment 34).

## 5. Is it likely that a person would not be able to seek assistance from the Lebanese police in the event they were threatened for reasons of his membership or imputed membership of the Ba'ath Party?

The ability of someone in Lebanon, threatened for reasons of membership of a political organisation such as the Ba'ath Party, being able to seek assistance from local police is affected at present by the general political and security instability in the country. The police force in Lebanon is the Internal Security Forces (ISF) within the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). It enforces laws, conducts arrests and refers cases to the judiciary, among other things (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Lebanon*, 6 March – Attachment 35; 'Lebanon: General Directorate of Internal Security Forces -State

Security Service' (undated), GlobalSecurity.org website <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/lebanon/dgisf.htm> – Accessed 26 April 2007 – Attachment 36). In general, the ISF's ability to carry out these responsibilities is affected by its "limited resources", as the March 2007 DFAT report quoted in question 2 above states (DIAC Country Information Service 2007, *Country Information Report No.07/29 – Lebanon: Alawi Muslim Member Of Syrian Ba'ath Party In Lebanon* (sourced from DFAT advice of 12 March 2007), 16 March – Attachment 24). The ISF has also been affected by events since the Hariri assassination in February 2005 and the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict of July-August 2006. The commander of the ISF, Major General Ali al-Hajj, was along with other senior Lebanese security officials forced to step aside in the wake of Hariri's death and the withdrawal of Syria's military and intelligence forces in early 2005. A preliminary United Nations investigation at the time, in March 2005, stated that the Lebanese security services "demonstrated serious and systematic negligence" and had "failed to provide the citizens of Lebanon with an acceptable level of security". The UN report is quoted in an article titled 'Upheaval in Lebanon's security services' from *Janes Intelligence Review*:

Lebanon's security services, Syria's main instrument for maintaining domination of its neighbour for the last 15 years, have been thrown into turmoil by the withdrawal of Syria's military and intelligence forces following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February.

The chiefs of the three leading services stepped down after a preliminary UN investigation accused the Lebanese agencies and their masters in Damascus of creating a climate of political tension that led to the assassination, although it stopped short of openly accusing them of complicity. The investigation also criticised their efforts to investigate the attack, in which 19 other people died.

The report by the UN mission, released on 24 March, was withering in its criticism of Damascus and Beirut. "The Mission concluded that the Lebanese security services and the Syrian Military Intelligence bear the primary responsibility for the lack of security, protection, law and order in Lebanon," the report noted. **"The Lebanese security services have demonstrated serious and systematic negligence in carrying out the duties usually performed by a professional national security apparatus. In doing so, they have failed to provide the citizens of Lebanon with an acceptable level of security and, therefore, have contributed to the propagation of a culture of intimidation and impunity. The Syrian Military Intelligence shares this responsibility to the extent that of its involvement in running the security services in Lebanon."**

... Since the UN report, four of the six most important security chiefs agreed to step aside while the international investigation is underway. That fell short of formal resignation, but with the probe expected to last for three months and likely to be even more scathing than the UN report, it was widely viewed as a major gain for the anti-Syrian opposition and a severe setback for Syrian influence in Lebanon.

The most prominent officer involved was Major General Jamil Sayyed, director of the Ministry of Interior's General Security Department (GID). Sayyed, an army officer, was given command of the GID when Lahoud was 'elected' president in 1998. He was a bitter enemy of Hariri, who had blocked his promotion to general until Lahoud became president. The other chiefs who stepped aside were Major-General Raymond Azar, head of Military Intelligence, and **Major General Ali al-Hajj, commander of the Internal Security Forces (ISF)**. The director of the State Security service, Edward Mansour, was also placed at the disposal of the government. Acting commanders were named to replace Sayyed, Azar and

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Hajj, but not for Mansour. Addoum, who was briefly justice minister in one of the post-Hariri governments, had also stepped aside for the duration of the UN investigation.

...Finally, on 25 April, Sayyed resigned, signaling the collapse of the Syrian-installed security apparatus that had effectively run Lebanon since the end of the civil war in 1990. Sayyed had played a crucial role in the Syrian takeover, and pro-Syrian officers took over every senior and most mid-level positions in the Lebanese security establishment ('Upheaval in Lebanon's security services' 2005, *Janes Intelligence Review*, 1 June – Attachment 37).

Several months later, in December 2005, the International Crisis Group provided the following assessment of the security services and judiciary in its report, *Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm*:

Of all the issues raised by Hariri's assassination, few were as important as the status of security and intelligence services and the judiciary. Demonstrations denounced their performance prior to the crime and during its investigation but also, and more generally, their lack of integrity and unaccountability. **The Fitzgerald report – born of the initial fact-finding mission into the murder – described a bewildering situation in which security agencies had overlapping purposes, undefined or vague mandates, ambiguous lines of authority, and ability to infringe on civil rights without judicial oversight. It confirmed widespread suspicion they were answerable and more loyal to individuals rather than political institutions, in clear violation of constitutional and legal requirements. With such impunity and the prevalence of informal, unsupervised arrangements, security agencies regularly violated human rights.**

Six months on, the government has largely focused on changing persons rather than improving institutions. More structural, systemic and durable changes are needed. The call for an international committee to uncover "the truth" (*al-haqiqa*) about the assassination was **symptomatic of the pervasive lack of faith in a justice system seen as riddled with corruption and cronyism. Judges complain of undue political pressure and interference. Internal investigations into allegations of corruption and judicial abuse are not made public and seldom result in sanctions, let alone prosecutions. Military courts routinely overstep their jurisdiction – in principle restricted to crimes committed by military personnel and members of the security forces – by indicting civilians** (International Crisis Group 2005, *Lebanon: Managing the gathering storm*, Middle East Report No 48, 5 December, pp.25-26 – Attachment 19).

The ICG report also pointed out that the general insecurity which prevails in Lebanon is such that it has forced "ordinary citizens increasingly to look to their sectarian communities for succour and protection" (International Crisis Group 2005, *Lebanon: Managing the gathering storm*, Middle East Report No 48, 5 December, p. 6 – Attachment 19). In fact, by April 2005 local (unarmed) neighbourhood watch groups of young men had already formed as a result of the perceived inaction of the ISF and from a "fear of violence by mischievous allies of Damascus". A *Financial Times* article from April 2005 also indicated that "small groups strongly allied to Syria" were becoming more active, and pointed to reports of weapons distribution to "radical Sunni Islamist organisations":

On the main street in Fourn al-Shoubak, a Christian neighbourhood in Beirut, shops and commercial centres are cordoned off at night, surrounded by rocks and tyres to prevent cars from parking. Young volunteers from the neighbourhood stand guard in front of a yellow police line, watching for suspicious cars and unfamiliar drivers.

Suddenly, an army vehicle appears and an officer steps out. He tells the young men that they are free to stand on the street but warns they have no right to stop cars and act like the local police.

**Neighbourhood watch groups have been springing up across Lebanon's Christian heartland, as the departure of Syrian troops from the country fuels fears of violence by mischievous allies of Damascus.**

After a series of bombs exploded after dark in Christian areas over the past month, municipalities have promoted self-dependence, organising local youths to protect the streets and prevent a return to the violence of the 1975-1991 civil war.

**“Internal security forces aren't doing anything, they sit inside their stations and don't come out,”** says George Nahra, leader of the Fourn al-Shoubak group. For many politicians, however, these groups could represent a counter-productive trend, a step towards the re-emergence of militias in Lebanon. The young men are not armed but one of them admits that many families still have weapons at home.

**“You can't blame people for taking care of their own security when security forces aren't being responsible. But this is dangerous,”** says Ghattas Khouri, an MP who belongs to the parliamentary bloc that was led by Rafiq Hariri, the assassinated former prime minister.

... **Small groups strongly allied to Syria have become more active in recent weeks and there have been reports of weapons distribution to radical Sunni Islamist organisations** that had largely disappeared in recent years (Khalaf, R & Ghattas, K. 2005 'Political limbo fuels fear of militia revival in Lebanon', *The Financial Times* website, 11 April <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/b7ac2be8-aabb-11d9-98d7-00000e2511c8.html> – Accessed 27 April 2007 – Attachment 38).

Lebanon was further destabilised as a result of a conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in July-August 2006 which caused significant disruption, loss of life, and material destruction in Lebanon, especially in southern Lebanon, the suburbs south of Beirut, and the Bekaa Valley. The eventual Israeli withdrawal bolstered Hezbollah's calls for Siniora's anti-Syrian government to be dissolved, leading to six pro-Syrian Members of Parliament and Cabinet resigning in November 2006 and to the large scale protests in late 2006 and early 2007 referred to above. As a result the Lebanese government has considerably strengthened the ISF thanks to support from foreign nations. A January 2007 report from *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* summarises the recent changes to the ISF thus:

But more important, for now at least, has been the government's quiet expansion of the paramilitary **Internal Security Forces** over the last few months. It has doubled the ISF's strength to 24,000 by recruiting mostly Sunnis and Christians, armed with US-made weapons provided by the United Arab Emirates, which like other Sunni Arab regimes do not want to see Shia power expanded into Lebanon.

The ISF is attached to the interior ministry, which is currently in Sunni hands, and Siniora's critics denounce the emergence of this expanded force as little more than Sunni militia to protect the government if the shooting starts. Meantime, Siniora's beleaguered government, and Lebanon's stability, hangs by a thread ('Gemayel's assassination fans the flames in Lebanon' 2007, *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, 1 January – Attachment 39).

While the increase to the ISF and the overseas assistance is mainly directed at containing Hezbollah and pro-Iranian influence within the country, a US embassy report on its country's

assistance to Lebanon does state that the measures are intended to “help the ISF to expand policing operations in Beirut and throughout the country, while also serving to protect the Lebanese people and their democratically elected government from security threats posed by civil disturbances” (‘United States Turns Over 60 New Vehicles to the Internal Security Forces Part of \$54.5 Million Security Assistance to Lebanon in 2006’, 2007, US Embassy in Beirut website, 7 February <http://beirut.usembassy.gov/lebanon/PRISF020707.html> – Accessed 2 April 2007 – Attachment 40).

## **6. Where is the Akkar region in Lebanon and is it an area which is under the protection of Syrian security authorities or influence? How far is Khoura Dahr El Ein from the Akkar region?**

The Akkar region is in northern Lebanon and shares its northern and eastern borders with Syria. A World Health Organization map indicates the location of Akkar and is provided in Attachment 41 (World Health Organization Map, ‘Middle East Crisis – Humanitarian intervention: Beneficiaries’, 2006, sourced from the Lebanon under Siege website, <http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/Documents/WHO-Beneficiaries%5B2%5D.gif> – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 41). The city or town of “Dahr El Ein” is located in the Khoura region of northern Lebanon (‘Places: Lebanon>North Lebanon>Koura’ 2007, UN Jobs website, 31 March [http://unjobs.org/duty\\_stations/lebanon/north-lebanon/koura](http://unjobs.org/duty_stations/lebanon/north-lebanon/koura) – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 42). The Khoura, Koura, or El Koura region is located along the Mediterranean coast south of Tripoli (‘Koura’ (undated), Ministry of Tourism website, <http://www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb/eng/index.asp> – Accessed 2 May 2007 – Attachment 43; the World Health Organization Map misplaces ‘Koura’ with ‘Bchirre’, ‘Middle East Crisis – Humanitarian intervention: Beneficiaries’, 2006, sourced from the Lebanon under Siege website, <http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/Documents/WHO-Beneficiaries%5B2%5D.gif> – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 41). No information was found on the exact location of Dahr El Ein within Koura. A scaled map indicates that the district capital of Koura, Amioun, is 34 kilometres distant in a straight line from Halba and 50 kilometres from Quobayet, two main centres in Akkar (‘Map of Lebanon’, *Lonely Planet: Lebanon*, Lonely Planet Publications, Melbourne, 2001 – Attachment 44).

By 12 March 2005, reports indicated that the last Syrian troops had left northern Lebanon but that nine Syrian intelligence offices remained, including one in Akkar (Karam, Z. 2005, ‘Last Syrian Troops Leave Northern Lebanon’, 12 March, *Associated Press Newswires* – Attachment 45). A June 2005 report in *Jane’s Intelligence Review* indicated that while “plain clothes intelligence units” remained in some parts of Lebanon, none were referred to as located in Akkar:

**Officially, Syria’s massive intelligence presence in Lebanon ended with the withdrawal of forces that was completed on 26 April. But the Syrians are reported to have relocated key plain-clothes intelligence units in the southern slums of Beirut, a stronghold of Damascus’ key allies, the Shi’ite movements Hizbullah and Amal, and in the Bekaa Valley of eastern Lebanon. US officials remain deeply sceptical that all Syrian intelligence units have withdrawn. UN teams monitoring the withdrawal were refused access to Damascus-backed Palestinian militia camps in Bekaa suspected of harbouring Syrian intelligence agents.** The expected removal of Lebanon’s security chiefs, all irrevocably tied to their masters in Damascus, is expected to signal a major overhaul of these services to make them more accountable and transparent. But given the depth of Syrian penetration, this may take a long time (‘Upheaval in Lebanon’s security services’ 2005, *Janes Intelligence Review*, 1 June – Attachment 37).

No further information could be found on the whether Akkar is currently under the influence or protection of Syrian security authorities. Politically the region overtly supports the anti-Syrian government of Saad Hariri, according to a press release from Hariri's office:

The Head of the Future Parliamentary Bloc MP Saad Hariri received this afternoon in Koraytem a large delegation from Akkar region that included 73 heads of municipalities accompanied by Akkar Mufti Sheikh Usama Rifai, and MPs Riyad Rahhal, Abdullah Hanna, Mustapha Hashem, Azzam Dandashi, Mahmoud Murad and Hadi Hubeish.

At the outset of the meeting, Mufti Rifai asserted the support of the people of Akkar for MP Hariri for better or for worse, in order to resume the legacy of Martyr Prime Minister Rafik Hariri the path of sovereignty, and independence and the construction of Lebanon in general and Akkar in particular which suffered a historic deprivation over the last decades.

For his part, MP Hariri said: "With your cooperation and support we will continue the legacy of Martyr Premier Rafik Hariri in achieving his dream of balanced development and construction especially for the region of Akkar which suffers from historic deprivation due to the domination policy which prevailed during the last decades." (Press Release: Rafic Hariri' 2007, Rafic Hariri Official website, 4 April <http://www.rhariri.com/news.aspx?ID=4837&Category=PressReleases> – Accessed 1 May 2007 – Attachment 46).

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#### **International News & Politics**

*The Daily Star* <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/>

#### **Region Specific Links**

Middle East Online website <http://www.middle-east-online.com>

#### **Topic Specific Links**

Libanvote.com website <http://libanvote.com/>

The Lebanese Information Center website <http://www.licus.org/>

#### **Search Engines**

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

### Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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