



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Lebanon

Lebanon – LBN37507 – Palestinians – Al  
Aqsa Martyrs Brigade – Nahr al Bared  
conflict  
15 October 2010

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**1. What is the attitude of the Lebanese authorities to the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade?  
Could a family link with the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade add to any risk of harm to  
Palestinian refugees, if known to the authorities in Lebanon?**

Very little information on the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in Lebanon was found, although backgrounders on the group report that it does have members in Palestinian refugee camps in the country.<sup>1</sup> More generally, Nadim Houry of Human Rights Watch (HRW) suggests that men who are affiliated with a Palestinian armed faction are treated with suspicion by Lebanese authorities, although he also notes that, while Palestinian refugees have been detained, HRW have received no reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian men over the past year. Mr Houry also stated that he did not know what the attitude of the Lebanese authorities towards the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade is.<sup>2</sup>

According to the US Department of State (USDOS) 2009 Country Report on Terrorism, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade comprises an unknown number of small cells of Fatah-affiliated activists.<sup>3</sup> A 2008 Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) backgrounder on the group states that these "localized, autonomous units... mostly act independently of each other".<sup>4</sup> The group is mainly located and operates in the West Bank but has conducted attacks inside Israel and Gaza. The group does have members in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon (this is the only information found on the group in Lebanon). Al-Aqsa's goal is to drive the Israeli military and West Bank settlers from the West Bank and establish a Palestinian state loyal to the secular nationalist Fatah. Iran reportedly provides funding and aid, allegedly through Hezbollah facilitators.<sup>5</sup> There are also reports that Hezbollah exerts influence over the group's activities in the Palestinian Territories.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State 2010, 'Chapter 6: Terrorist Organizations' in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August, pp. 239-240 – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> Houry, N. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice 'RE: Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon', 29 September – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State 2010, 'Chapter 6: Terrorist Organizations' in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August, pp. 239-240 – Attachment 1.

<sup>4</sup> Fletcher, H. 2008, 'Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade', Council on Foreign Relations website, 2 April [http://www.cfr.org/publication/9127/alaqsa\\_martyrs\\_brigade.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9127/alaqsa_martyrs_brigade.html) – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 3.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State 2010, 'Chapter 6: Terrorist Organizations' in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August, pp. 239-240 – Attachment 1.

<sup>6</sup> 'Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB)' (undated), Transnational and Non-State Armed Groups website <http://www.armed-groups.org/6/section.aspx/ViewGroup?id=35> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 4; 'Hezbollah becoming more visible in West Bank after Mughniyah death' 2008, *Haaretz*, source: *The Associated*

The attitude of the Lebanese authorities towards the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade is not known. As noted above the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade allegedly has some relationship to Hezbollah. The extent of the relationship (or even whether it exists), and how this would affect the attitude of the Lebanese authorities or their treatment of the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in Lebanon is not known. It is likely that the Lebanese authorities would be opposed to the group, although no information was located to indicate that authorities are actively pursuing the group. No reports were found of the group attacking targets in Lebanon. No information was found on the group's activities in Lebanon.

Lebanese authorities do fear the destabilising effect of the armed militias in Palestinian camps. There are ongoing reports of concerns about the threat posed by smaller Palestinian groups to Lebanon's security,<sup>7</sup> and fears of another conflict occurring like the one at Nahr al Bared refugee camp in 2007 [where the camp was destroyed, over 30,000 refugees displaced and a number of soldiers, civilians and militants killed].<sup>8</sup> There has been recent reports of intra-Palestinian feuding in the camps, especially between Fatah and Hamas, with fears that violence will spread.<sup>9</sup> There is ongoing discussion about the need to disarm Palestinian groups<sup>10</sup>, although little action has actually been taken so far.<sup>11</sup> The USDOS 2009 Country Report on Terrorism states:

LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces] commanders stressed that it has strengthened its surveillance capabilities over the 12 Palestinian camps and four Syrian-backed Palestinian military bases within its borders. Nevertheless, a porous border with Syria, weak internal camp security, and LAF reluctance to enter the Palestinian refugee camps all contributed to fears of another confrontation with an armed group, similar to the 2007 Nahr al-Barid conflict.<sup>12</sup>

**2. Is there any evidence that young men of Palestinian background in refugee camps are being treated with more suspicion now than in previous years e.g. at army checkpoints? If so, why and what sort of treatment might they receive while questioned or detained?**

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Press, 13 March <http://www.haaretz.com/news/hezbollah-becoming-more-visible-in-west-bank-after-mughniyah-death-1.241229> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 5; Issacharoff, A. & Stern, Y. 2007, 'Palestinians: Hezbollah influence in West Bank on the wane', *Haaretz*, 24 July <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/palestinians-hezbollah-influence-in-west-bank-on-the-wane-1.226107> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 6.

<sup>7</sup> 'Unknowns Palestinian groups pose serious threat to Lebanon's security' 2009, *Lebanonwire*, 24 September <http://www.lebanonwire.com/0909MLN/09092403DS.asp> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 7.

<sup>8</sup> 'U.S. security official: No new concrete Mideast peace plan' 2010, *Haaretz*, 9 April <http://www.haaretz.com/news/u-s-security-official-no-new-concrete-mideast-peace-plan-1.703> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 8.

<sup>9</sup> 'Tension up in Lebanon's Palestinian camps' 2010, *UPI*, 29 March [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/) – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 9.

<sup>10</sup> Fattah, H. 2006, 'Lebanon Seeks Way to Disarm Palestinian Militia Groups', *New York Times*, 28 May [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/01/world/middleeast/01lebanon.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/01/world/middleeast/01lebanon.html?_r=2) – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 10.

<sup>11</sup> Yazbeck, N. 2010, 'Palestinian group refuses to disarm in Lebanon', Google News, source: *AFP*, 17 January <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jfY4PBpCWLUBA-F-sJXx7pej4d0A> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 11

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State 2010, 'Lebanon' in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August, p. 133 – Attachment 1.

There is some indication that the Nahr al Bared conflict in 2007 has resulted in a greater emphasis on security around Palestinian camps and suspicion of camp inhabitants. It should be noted that over 30,000 Palestinians fled the fighting in Nahr al Bared<sup>13</sup>, many to the nearby Baddawi refugee camp, and there were suspicions that wanted militants were among them.<sup>14</sup> There continue to be concerns that a similar situation to the Nahr al Bared conflict will arise in another Palestinian camp. The USDOS 2009 country report on terrorism states that “LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces] commanders stressed that it has strengthened its surveillance capabilities” over Palestinian camps.<sup>15</sup> The Baddawi refugee camp appears to be an area of concern, indicated by reports that the Lebanese Army has tightened security around Baddawi refugee camp, including establishing a new checkpoint<sup>16</sup> and, more recently, building a barrier around the camp because of “security concerns”.<sup>17</sup> An August 2009 *Daily Star* article reports on the “decision by the Lebanese Army to tighten the grip on the security situation in the north and crack down on terrorist cells there”.<sup>18</sup> A March 2010 article on the Electronic Lebanon website<sup>19</sup> describes the changes in the relationship between the Lebanese government and the Palestinian refugee camps and the tensions resulting from the erection of the barrier around Baddawi camp.<sup>20</sup>

Nadim Houry, director of the Beirut office at HRW, was contacted in regard to this issue.<sup>21</sup> As noted in the previous question, Mr Houry states that, while Palestinian refugees have been detained for a day or two, HRW have received no reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian men over the past year. HRW did document ill-treatment of certain Palestinian men detained during the Nahr al-Bared battle in 2007 as they were trying to leave the camp. Mr Houry’s advice follows in full:

I would need a bit more information about the case as it would depend on the camp and whether the men are affiliated with any Palestinian armed faction. In general, there are two camps that the Lebanese army keeps a watchful eye on. The Nahr al-Bared camp that was the scene of heavy fighting in 2007 between the army and Fatah al-Islam. To date, anyone (not just young men) going and leaving the camp goes through a military checkpoint. The second camp is Ain al-Helwe near Saida.

We did document ill-treatment of certain Palestinian men detained during the Nahr al-Bared battle in 2007 as they were trying to leave the camp. We have not

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<sup>13</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report: Lebanon*, 11 March, Section 2.d – Attachment 15.

<sup>14</sup> Hodeib, M. 2009, ‘Erection of checkpoint stokes tensions in Baddawi’, *Daily Star*, 24 August – Attachment 16.

<sup>15</sup> US Department of State 2010, ‘Lebanon’ in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August, p. 133 – Attachment 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hodeib, M. 2009, ‘Erection of checkpoint stokes tensions in Baddawi’, *Daily Star*, 24 August – Attachment 16.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Tension up in Lebanon’s Palestinian camps’ 2010, *UPI*, 29 March [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/) – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 9.

<sup>18</sup> Hodeib, M. 2009, ‘Erection of checkpoint stokes tensions in Baddawi’, *Daily Star*, 24 August – Attachment 16.

<sup>19</sup> Electronic Lebanon is a project of the Electronic Intifada. “The Electronic Intifada (EI) is a not-for-profit, independent publication committed to comprehensive public education on the question of Palestine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the economic, political, legal, and human dimensions of Israel’s 40-year occupation of Palestinian territories. EI provides a needed supplement to mainstream commercial media representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article1387.shtml>).

<sup>20</sup> Moor, A. & Sharp, D. 2010, ‘Lebanese army encircling Baddawi refugee camp’, *Electronic Lebanon*, 26 March <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11166.shtml> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 17.

<sup>21</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to N. Houry ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 18.

received such reports in the last year but have received some reports of Palestinian men being held for a day or two while their case is being investigated ...<sup>22</sup>

A June 2007 HRW report includes details of the abuse meted out by Lebanese security forces while interrogating Palestinian detainees during the Nahr al Bared conflict.<sup>23</sup> As already noted, HRW have not received any reports of ill-treatment of detained Palestinian refugees over the past year.

The latest USDOS Human Rights Report states that “Palestinian refugees were subject to arbitrary arrest and detention by state security forces and rival Palestinian factions. No statistics on the number of such cases were available at year’s end.” Further:

During the year there were reports members of various Palestinian factions and foreign militias detained their rivals during clashes over territorial control of the camps, particularly in the north and south.

At year’s end 15,000 refugees had returned to areas adjacent to the [Nahr al Bared] camp. Displaced communities raised concerns about their security and freedom of movement, as security measures tightened in response to sporadic clashes in the northern part of the country.<sup>24</sup>

Advice on this question was sought from UNRWA Lebanon<sup>25</sup>. Mathijs le Rutte of UNRWA Lebanon responded that UNRWA is not in a position to provide authoritative advice on the matters as UNRWA does not systematically monitor and report on the general human rights situation of Palestinians in Lebanon.<sup>26</sup>

**3. Is there any evidence of an increase in discrimination against Palestinians in Lebanon recently? If so, please give an indication of what form this is taking and why it might be occurring.**

Information was not found on an increase in discrimination against Palestinians in Lebanon recently, although the conflict in Nahr al Bared reportedly damaged Palestinian-Lebanese relations<sup>27</sup> both locally and nationally, compounding fear and distrust between Lebanese residents and Palestinian refugees.<sup>28</sup> A March 2010 Electronic Lebanon article notes that the relationship was also strained locally as many of the Lebanese army soldiers who lost their lives in the fighting came from the surrounding areas of the camp.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Houry, N. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice ‘RE: Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 2.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Lebanon: End Abuse of Palestinians Fleeing Refugee Camp’ 2007, Human Rights Watch website, 12 June <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/06/12/lebanon-end-abuse-palestinians-fleeing-refugee-camp> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 20.

<sup>24</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report: Lebanon*, 11 March, Section 2.d – Attachment 15.

<sup>25</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to UNRWA Lebanon ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 21.

<sup>26</sup> Le Rutte, M. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 5 October – Attachment 23.

<sup>27</sup> ‘No refuge: Palestinians in Lebanon’ 2010, *Working Paper Series No. 64*, Refugee Studies Centre, June, pp. 15-16 – Attachment 24.

<sup>28</sup> Moor, A. & Sharp, D. 2010, ‘Lebanese army encircling Baddawi refugee camp’, *Electronic Lebanon*, 26 March <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11166.shtml> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 17.

<sup>29</sup> Moor, A. & Sharp, D. 2010, ‘Lebanese army encircling Baddawi refugee camp’, *Electronic Lebanon*, 26 March <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11166.shtml> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 17.

Nadim Houry of HRW was contacted in regard to this question.<sup>30</sup> Mr Houry advised that “[d]iscrimination against Palestinians, be it in their right to own property or work, has existed for years. I have not noticed an increase recently.”<sup>31</sup> Generally, the latest USDOS human rights report states that: “Widespread, systematic discrimination against Palestinian refugees and minority groups continued.”<sup>32</sup>

There has been a recent positive development in regard to working rights for Palestinians in Lebanon, although there are claims that in reality little has changed. *IRIN* states:

Recent amendments to Lebanese law grant work permits to Palestinians in the private sector, and some welfare benefits, and are an important step in the right direction, according to the UN’s agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), but many Palestinians say they fall short of what they had hoped for.<sup>33</sup>

An article on the Electronic Lebanon website gives the following summary of the Nahr al Bared events and the resulting strain on Lebanese-Palestinian relations:

The result of the fighting between Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army was devastating. The Nahr al-Bared refugee camp was completely destroyed and 33,000 Palestinian refugee civilians were displaced. Many of these refugees went to the nearby Baddawi camp whose population nearly doubled from 16,000 to 30,000. Lebanese-Palestinian relations were also heavily strained nationally and locally. This was compounded by the fact that many of the Lebanese army soldiers who lost their lives in the fighting came from the surrounding areas of the camp.

Another layer of fear and distrust was added to the already deeply troubled relationship between the Lebanese residents and Palestinian refugees. Periodically, ever since the end of the siege of Nahr al-Bared, media reports have circulated about the dangerously volatile situation in the camps.<sup>34</sup>

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## Attachments

1. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August.

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<sup>30</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to N. Houry ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 18.

<sup>31</sup> Houry, N. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice ‘RE: Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 2.

<sup>32</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report: Lebanon*, 11 March, Introduction – Attachment 15.

<sup>33</sup> ‘LEBANON: Palestinians still dissatisfied despite labour law changes’ 2010, *IRIN*, 30 August

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=90327> - Accessed 15 October 2010 - Attachment 25.

<sup>34</sup> Moor, A. & Sharp, D. 2010, ‘Lebanese army encircling Baddawi refugee camp’, *Electronic Lebanon*, 26 March <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11166.shtml> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 17.

<sup>35</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to UNRWA Lebanon ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 29 September – Attachment 21.

<sup>36</sup> Le Rutte, M. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice ‘Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon’, 5 October – Attachment 23.

2. Houry, N. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice 'RE: Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon', 29 September.
3. Fletcher, H. 2008, 'Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade', Council on Foreign Relations website, 2 April [http://www.cfr.org/publication/9127/alaqsa\\_martyrs\\_brigade.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9127/alaqsa_martyrs_brigade.html) – Accessed 14 October 2010.
4. 'Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB)' (undated), Transnational and Non-State Armed Groups website <http://www.armed-groups.org/6/section.aspx/ViewGroup?id=35> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
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6. Issacharoff, A. & Stern, Y. 2007, 'Palestinians: Hezbollah influence in West Bank on the wane', *Haaretz*, 24 July <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/palestinians-hezbollah-influence-in-west-bank-on-the-wane-1.226107> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
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8. 'U.S. security official: No new concrete Mideast peace plan' 2010, *Haaretz*, 9 April <http://www.haaretz.com/news/u-s-security-official-no-new-concrete-mideast-peace-plan-1.703> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
9. 'Tension up in Lebanon's Palestinian camps' 2010, *UPI*, 29 March [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/03/29/Tension-up-in-Lebanons-Palestinian-camps/UPI-98691269886694/) – Accessed 14 October 2010.
10. Fattah, H. 2006, 'Lebanon Seeks Way to Disarm Palestinian Militia Groups', *New York Times*, 28 May [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/01/world/middleeast/01lebanon.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/01/world/middleeast/01lebanon.html?_r=2) – Accessed 14 October 2010.
11. Yazbeck, N. 2010, 'Palestinian group refuses to disarm in Lebanon', Google News, source: *AFP*, 17 January <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jfY4PBPcWLUbA-F-sJXx7pej4d0A> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
12. Deleted.
13. Deleted.
14. Deleted.
15. US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report: Lebanon*, 11 March.
16. Hodeib, M. 2009, 'Erection of checkpoint stokes tensions in Baddawi', *Daily Star*, 24 August. (FACTIVA)

17. Moor, A. & Sharp, D. 2010, 'Lebanese army encircling Baddawi refugee camp', *Electronic Lebanon*, 26 March <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11166.shtml> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
18. RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to N. Houry 'Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon', 29 September.
19. Deleted.
20. 'Lebanon: End Abuse of Palestinians Fleeing Refugee Camp' 2007, Human Rights Watch website, 12 June <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/06/12/lebanon-end-abuse-palestinians-fleeing-refugee-camp> – Accessed 14 October 2010.
21. RRT Country Advice 2010, Email to UNRWA Lebanon 'Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon', 29 September.
22. Deleted.
23. Le Rutte, M. 2010, Email to RRT Country Advice 'Australian Refugee Review Tribunal request for information on Palestinians in Lebanon', 5 October.
24. 'No refuge: Palestinians in Lebanon' 2010, *Working Paper Series No. 64*, Refugee Studies Centre, June.
25. 'LEBANON: Palestinians still dissatisfied despite labour law changes' 2010, *IRIN*, 30 August <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=90327> - Accessed 15 October 2010.