



**1. Please provide detailed information on Al-Mourabetoun, including on the movement’s history, ideology, structure, leadership, membership, influence and geographical ties.**

Researcher’s note: there are several variant spellings of Mourabitoun, and usage in the following advice is as per source usage.

### **History**

According to the Federal Research Division of the US Library of Congress, the ‘Murabitun’ is the militia arm of the Independent Nasserite Movement (INM). This report states that the Murabitun emerged during the 1958 civil war, “remained a strong force during the 1970s”, and played a prominent role in the civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1985. The Murabitun fought in alliance with the Palestinian movement against Phalangist forces, and against Israel. In 1985, the Murabitun was “virtually eliminated” by a Progressive Socialist Party (PSP – a mainly Druze party) and Amal (one of two dominant Shia parties, along with Hezbollah) joint operation, and its leader Ibrahim Kulaylat was “forced into exile”.<sup>1</sup>

A June 1985 report from the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) concurs, stating the Murabitun, described here as a “Nasserist militia identified with the Sunni community and close to Arafat’s Fatah”, was “smashed” by the PSP and Amal in April 1985.<sup>2</sup>

An August 2008 article from *NOW Lebanon* places the defeat of the Mourabitoun in 1984, and claims that after that the group “largely fell off the political radar”. Its remaining members served as “Syrian proxies, maintaining ‘security’ in Beirut’s Sunni neighbourhoods” through the 1990s. According to this source, the Mourabitoun re-emerged after the 2000 elections “as a Syrian-backed party”, and quotes Lebanese sources who claim that it has been “absorbed” by the pro-Syrian Al-Ahbash party, described as “a group whose beliefs incorporate aspects of Shia, Sunni and Sufi Islam”. This new incarnation of the Mourabitoun leans toward supporting the opposition March 8 coalition, but analysis of the current position of the Mourabitoun is complicated by there being a competing group claiming the name and supporting the ruling March 14 coalition and the Future Movement.<sup>3</sup>

A November 2007 report also sourced from *NOW Lebanon* names the Mourabitoun as being among former militias that are “reorganising structurally”, and claims that it “has reappeared as a political entity allied to the March 14 bloc”. This report also notes that

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Lebanon: Independent Nasserite Network’ 1987, Country-Data.com website, (Source: Country Studies Series by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress), December <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-8042.html> – Accessed 26 March 2010 – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stork, J. 1985, ‘The War of the Camps, The War of the Hostages’, *MERIP Reports*, No. 133, June, pp. 3-7, 22 – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> Nash, M. 2008, ‘They’re back?’, *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

gunmen wearing Mourabitoun logos “helped reinforce Lebanese troops” during the 2007 siege at Nahr-el-Bared refugee camp, near Tripoli.<sup>4</sup> An October 2005 United Nations Security Council report on the investigation into the assassination of former president Rafiq Hariri stated that a “weapons store was raided by the ISF on 26 July 2005 and five people, with close connections to the former Mourabitoun militia, were arrested”.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ideology**

According to the abovementioned report from the US Library of Congress, the INM’s “ideology was reflected by its motto: ‘Liberty, Socialism, and Unity.’” This report also notes that the group “was a firm supporter of the Palestinian movement in Lebanon in the late 1960s”.<sup>6</sup>

In a May 1979 interview with MERIP, Dr. Samir Sabbagh of the Independent Nasserite Movement (*Murabitun*) and professor of constitutional law at the Lebanese University in Beirut provided an overview of the ideology of the *Murabitun*:

As *Murabitun* we feel that we have to transform our political and economic system. We have an archaic political system which is based on the constitution dating from the foundation of Lebanon in 1926, Politically, we are trying to transform our system into one based on wider popular participation, one person/one vote, and to have some equilibrium between the various sectors of the population. We have an economic system based on the service sector. The national wealth of the Lebanese people is concentrated in the hands of the minority: we want to widen this fraction, to redistribute the wealth. We are not in the near future going to establish our socialist system, but at least we would like to transform this monopolist economic system into one which is based on social equity... We are for a program based on three points: 1) the unity of the country, 2) the Arabism of the country and the respect of all treaties signed by the state with the PLO, and 3) the future development of Lebanon.<sup>7</sup>

### **Structure**

No information was located on the structure of the Mourabitoun.

### **Leadership**

The Mourabitoun was founded and led by Ibrahim Qoleiat (also Kulaylat), who was forced into exile in 1984 or 1985. The pro-March 14 version of the Mourabitoun is led by Mohammad Dergham, while a source from the pro-March 8 version of the Mourabitoun claims that party “is still led by Qoleiat, who is living in exile”.<sup>8</sup>

The only other reference to a Mourabitoun leader which could be located named Youssef Ghazawi as the head of a Mourabitoun delegation which met former Lebanese Prime

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<sup>4</sup> Blanford, N. 2007, ‘Lebanon’s arms race’, *NOW Lebanon*, 8 November <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=18908#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 4.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Security Council 2005, *Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)*, United Nations website, 19 October, p. 61 <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/563/67/PDF/N0556367.pdf?OpenElement> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Lebanon: Independent Nasserite Network’ 1987, Country-Data.com website, (Source: Country Studies Series by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress), December <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-8042.html> – Accessed 26 March 2010 – Attachment 1.

<sup>7</sup> Mroueh, K. & Sabbagh, S. 1979, ‘Lebanon is Where the US and Israel will Settle Accounts with the Palestinians’, *MERIP Reports*, No. 77, May, pp. 12-15, 26 – Attachment 6.

<sup>8</sup> Nash, M. 2008, ‘They’re back?’, *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

Minister Omar Karami in December 2009. It is not clear from this report which branch of the Mourabitoun Ghazawi represented, and no further information on him was found.<sup>9</sup>

### Membership

No recent information could be located regarding the current membership of any of the groups claiming the name of the Mourabitoun.

The abovementioned US Library of Congress report claims that “the membership of the INM [Independent Nasserist Movement] has been overwhelmingly Muslim; 1987 reports estimated it to be about 45-percent Sunni, 45- percent Shia, and 10- percent Druze”.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, the Mourabitoun is generally regarded as a Sunni movement. A 2006 Masters thesis sourced from the Brussels Tribunal website<sup>11</sup> lists the Mourabitoun among Sunni militia groups, as do a 1988 report from the *Adelphi Series*<sup>12</sup> and a 1982 news report sourced from the State University of New York *Statesman*.<sup>13</sup>

The *Statesman* report claims that the Mourabitoun had 1500 fighters in 1982,<sup>14</sup> while a 1988 report from *Social Compass* claimed that the mainly Sunni group had 2000 fighters stationed in West Beirut during the civil war in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>15</sup>

### Influence

A June 1985 report from MERIP claims that the Murabitoun represented “a strong political current, especially among Sunnis, but [which is] now largely discredited.”<sup>16</sup> In accordance with this claim, most of the abovementioned reports state that the Mourabitoun practically disappeared after the mid-1980s conflict with Amal and the PSP.

The August 2008 report from *NOW Lebanon* quotes Hilal Kashan, a Lebanese professor of political science and public administration at the American University of Beirut, who doubts that the recent incarnations of the Mourabitoun have any political influence. Kashan claims that the ideologies espoused by the group “are not in vogue”, and that “political support for the group from Sunnis on either side of the current political spectrum is all but gone”. This report (among others<sup>17</sup>) notes that Mourabitoun flags and logos are visible in parts of Tripoli and Beirut, but Kashan states that they are “merely a

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Politics – Karami’s meetings for today’ 2009, *National News Agency*, 2 December <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/02-12-2009/E24.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 7.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Lebanon: Independent Nasserite Network’ 1987, Country-Data.com website, (Source: Country Studies Series by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress), December <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-8042.html> – Accessed 26 March 2010 – Attachment 1.

<sup>11</sup> Verhaert, I. 2006, ‘Urbicide Beirut: 1975-2006’, Brussels Tribunal website <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/pdf/urbicide.pdf> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 8.

<sup>12</sup> Dessouki, A. 1988, ‘Security in a fractured state: The conflict over Lebanon’, *Adelphi Series*, 28:230, pp. 14-20, p. 18 – Attachment 9.

<sup>13</sup> ‘News Digest – International’ 1982, *Statesman*, State University of New York website, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2 September <http://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/bitstream/1951/28391/1/Statesman,%20V.%2026,%20n.%202002.pdf> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

<sup>14</sup> ‘News Digest – International’ 1982, *Statesman*, State University of New York website, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2 September <http://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/bitstream/1951/28391/1/Statesman,%20V.%2026,%20n.%202002.pdf> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

<sup>15</sup> Chaoul, M. 1988, ‘The layout of the war in Lebanon: political and confessional aspects of a function of reduction’, *Social Compass*, 35; 607, pp. 607-624, p. 616 – Attachment 11.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, T. 1985, ‘A Lebanon Primer’, *MERIP Reports*, No. 133, June, pp. 17-19 – Attachment 12.

<sup>17</sup> Rasmussen, W. 2004, ‘Al-Hurra draws mixed reaction after 7 months on air’, University of Leeds website, (source: *Daily Star*), 6 August <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt&requesttimeout=500&folder=1259&paper=1705> – Accessed 1 April 2010 – Attachment 13.

symbol of strength around which the Sunni community can rally”, particularly following the defeat of Sunni militias by Hezbollah in Beirut in 2008.<sup>18</sup>

### **Geographical ties**

Little information was located on the Mourabitoun’s geographical ties. Most reports link the group with the Palestinian movement, although this is only within Lebanon and during the civil wars. The abovementioned August 2008 report from *NOW Lebanon* quotes Lebanese journalist Mohammad Abi-Samra, who claims that members of the Mourabitoun served as “Syrian proxies” in Beirut’s Sunni neighbourhoods during the 1980s and 90s. Abi-Samra also claims that the pro-March 8 coalition faction of the Mourabitoun is very close to “the pro-Syrian Al-Ahbash party”.<sup>19</sup>

### **Online presence**

The official website of the pro-March 14 coalition faction of the Mourabitoun is available (in Arabic) at <http://almourabitoun.net/>. The official website of the pro-March 8 coalition faction of the Mourabitoun is available (in Arabic) at <http://www.almourabitoun.com/>. There is a Mourabitoun blog website at <http://almourabitoun.net/index.html>, but it contains no content, and it is not clear who established it.

## **2. Deleted.**

## **3. Please provide information on the movement’s political allegiances, including on the movement’s ties, if any, with the Future Movement, Al Jamia Al Islamia or other Salafi groups, and any other movement, group or political party.**

As noted in Question 1 above, there are at least two political organisations in Lebanon claiming to be the Mourabitoun. One of these organisations claims to be officially unaligned, but leans towards the March 8 coalition, while the other is vocal in its support for the Future Movement and the March 14 coalition. As also noted in Question 1, Lebanese media sources link the pro-March 8 faction of the Mourabitoun with the pro-Syrian Al-Ahbash party.<sup>20</sup> No information was located on whether any of the groups claiming the name ‘Mourabitoun’ have links with *al-Jamia al-Islamia* or any other Salafi groups.

## **4. Is the movement afforded any weight by other groups in the context of Lebanon’s political/sectarian tensions? How is the movement viewed by Hezbollah and its allies?**

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<sup>18</sup> Nash, M. 2008, ‘They’re back?’, *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

<sup>19</sup> Nash, M. 2008, ‘They’re back?’, *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 3

<sup>20</sup> Nash, M. 2008, ‘They’re back?’, *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

For reports on the pro-March 14 alliance faction of the Mourabitoun expressing support for the Future Movement and attacking opposition figures, see: ‘Al-Mourabitoun: Aoun’s defense strategy is heretic’, Future Movement Official site, (source: *National News Agency*), 20 November [http://www.almustaqbal.org/news\\_details.php?id=MTAyNDA=&keywords=Mourabitoun](http://www.almustaqbal.org/news_details.php?id=MTAyNDA=&keywords=Mourabitoun) – Accessed 30 March 2010 – Attachment 14; ‘Politics – Nasserites’ war of words with Aounists’ 2009, *National News Agency*, 23 November <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/23-11-2009/E26.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 15; ‘Politics – Dirgham: Berri manoeuvres on eliminating sectarianism’ 2009, *National News Agency*, 29 November <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/29-11-2009/E11.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 16; and: ‘Politics – Mourabitoun For Potent Government First’ 2009, *National News Agency*, 5 July <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/05-07-2009/E9.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010 – Attachment 17.

No information was located on how the Mourabitoun is viewed by Hezbollah. Nonetheless, given that the Shia Hezbollah maintains a powerful and well-equipped militia and the Mourabitoun were a high-profile mainly Sunni militia group, relations between the groups are unlikely to have been cordial. Nonetheless, none of the groups claiming the name of 'Mourabitoun' have much of a profile politically or militarily at present, making it unlikely that they would be accorded much weight by Hezbollah and their allies, or other political parties and groups in Lebanon.

**5. Did Al-Mourabetoun play any role in the 2008 clashes between Hezbollah/Alawis and Sunnis of Future Movement?**

No sources were located which state that Al-Mourabitoun played any role in the 2008 violence between Alawis and Sunnis or between Hezbollah and Sunnis.

**6. [Deleted]**

**Attachments**

1. 'Lebanon: Independent Nasserite Network' 1987, Country-Data.com website, (Source: Country Studies Series by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress), December <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-8042.html> – Accessed 26 March 2010.
2. Stork, J. 1985, 'The War of the Camps, The War of the Hostages', *MERIP Reports*, No. 133, June, pp. 3-7.
3. Nash, M. 2008, 'They're back?', *NOW Lebanon*, 20 August <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=55545#> – Accessed 30 March 2010.
4. Blanford, N. 2007, 'Lebanon's arms race', *NOW Lebanon*, 8 November <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=18908#> – Accessed 30 March 2010.
5. United Nations Security Council 2005, *Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)*, United Nations website, 19 October, p. 61 <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/563/67/PDF/N0556367.pdf?OpenElement> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
6. Mroueh, K. & Sabbagh, S. 1979, 'Lebanon is Where the US and Israel will Settle Accounts with the Palestinians', *MERIP Reports*, No. 77, May, pp. 12-15, 26.
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8. Verhaert, I. 2006, 'Urbicide Beirut: 1975-2006', Brussels Tribunal website <http://www.brusseltribunal.org/pdf/urbicide.pdf> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
9. Dessouki, A. 1988, 'Security in a fractured state: The conflict over Lebanon', *Adelphi Series*, 28:230, pp. 14-20.

10. 'News Digest – International' 1982, *Statesman*, State University of New York website, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2 September  
<http://dSPACE.sunyconnect.suny.edu/bitstream/1951/28391/1/Statesman,%20V.%2026,%20n.%2002.pdf> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
11. Chaoul, M. 1988, 'The layout of the war in Lebanon: political and confessional aspects of a function of reduction', *Social Compass*, 35; 607, pp. 607-624.
12. Russell, T. 1985, 'A Lebanon Primer', *MERIP Reports*, No. 133, June, pp. 17-19.
13. Rasmussen, W. 2004, 'Al-Hurra draws mixed reaction after 7 months on air', University of Leeds website, (source: *Daily Star*), 6 August  
<http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt&requesttimeout=500&folder=1259&paper=1705> – Accessed 1 April 2010.
14. 'Al-Mourabitoun: Aoun's defense strategy is heretic', Future Movement Official site, (source: *National News Agency*), 20 November  
[http://www.almustaqbal.org/news\\_details.php?id=MTAyNDA=&keywords=Mourabitoun](http://www.almustaqbal.org/news_details.php?id=MTAyNDA=&keywords=Mourabitoun) – Accessed 30 March 2010.
15. 'Politics – Nasserites' war of words with Aounists' 2009, *National News Agency*, 23 November  
<http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/23-11-2009/E26.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
16. 'Politics – Dirgham: Berri manoeuvres on eliminating sectarianism' 2009, *National News Agency*, 29 November  
<http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/29-11-2009/E11.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
17. 'Politics – Mourabitoun For Potent Government First' 2009, *National News Agency*, 5 July  
<http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/archive/05-07-2009/E9.html> – Accessed 31 March 2010.
18. [Deleted]
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