

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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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.

Questions

- 1. Please provide updated information on the activities of Hezbollah in North Lebanon and around Kobhit.**
- 2. Is there any information on the relationship between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in north Lebanon, particularly in Kobhit?**
- 3. Is there any evidence of forced asset acquisition by Hezbollah in the north of Lebanon?**
- 4. Please provide information on Wajih El Bahraini and Mahmoud Mourad.**
- 5. Please provide information concerning the availability and effectiveness of state protection.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide updated information on the activities of Hezbollah in North Lebanon and around Kobhit.**
- 3. Is there any evidence of forced asset acquisition by Hezbollah in the north of Lebanon?**

The sources consulted indicate that the Shi'ite militia Hezbollah is reportedly expanding its areas of operation in the south of Lebanon and is acquiring land in that region. However, there is no indication in any of the sources consulted that Hezbollah is operating in North Lebanon, which is a predominantly Sunni area, or acquiring assets there.

The attached section of a map of Lebanon shows North Lebanon. The villages of Qabaait and Habchit are marked, and around them (Geoprojects 1993, *Map of Lebanon*, All Prints Distributors and Publishers, Beirut – Attachment 1).

An *Encarta* map of Lebanon shows “Qabi’t” and “Habshit” in relation to Tripoli, which is the main city in North Lebanon, and to “Al Hirmil”(“Qabi’t, Lebanon” 1999, *Microsoft Encarta* – Attachment 2).

Another map, from a recent book on Hezbollah by A.R. Norton, is of interest. It shows the areas where Lebanon’s major religious groups predominate. It does not show Kobhit or

Habchit, but does indicate that the area east of Tripoli is predominantly Sunni (Norton, Augustus Richard 2007, 'Prologue: Map 1', *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton University Press – Attachment 3).

A *Reuters* report on the 2005 parliamentary elections is of interest as it provides an estimate of the religious breakdown of North Lebanon. It states that of 690,000 eligible voters in the area, 55 percent are Muslims, consisting of 51 percent Sunni and 4 percent Alawite; and 45 percent are Christians. The distribution of parliamentary seats, according to Lebanon's confessional political system, is loosely based on these figures, with 15 allocated to Christians and 13 to Muslims ('Factbox – Electoral facts about north Lebanon' 2005, *Reuters News*, 19 June – Attachment 4).

Areas of recent Hezbollah activity

Several reports were found which refer to Hezbollah re-arming and moving its operations into new areas of southern Lebanon. However, no reports were found that mentioned activities by Hezbollah in North Lebanon, and an external expert who was consulted (see below) stated that he knew of no Hezbollah activity in North Lebanon, and that it was unlikely as this was a predominantly Sunni area.

An April 2007 report by Nicholas Blanford for *Jane's Intelligence Review* looks in detail at Hezbollah's recent movements:

With little chance of trafficking through the Lebanese-Syria border being stymied in the short term, Hizbullah's rearmament campaign is likely to continue apace. On the ground in southern Lebanon, the group's military preparations appear to be focused on three main geographical areas: **to the south of the Shia market town of Nabatieh where the Litani River flows just 3 km from the border with Israel; in mountains around the Shia village of Rihan, 17 km north of the border; and in the Shia-populated Western Bekaa district either side of the Litani River, just north of the UNIFIL [United Nations International Force in Lebanon] zone.** The Nabatieh-Rihan-Western Bekaa axis was the source of most of the long-range rocket fire north of the Litani during the 2006 war.

Of the three areas, the most noticeable activity is around Rihan, specifically the area east and south of the village where valleys and surrounding hills have been closed off to the general public with armed Hizbullah fighters guarding the entrances. The area was a Hizbullah-controlled zone before the 2006 war. Since then, there has been greater movement of personnel and traffic into these areas and additional tracts of land have been placed off-limits. In a visit in March, *Jane's* saw the entrances of two Hizbullah positions, both guarded by uniformed fighters carrying Kalashnikov rifles and walkie-talkies. One recently installed barrier along a track leading into a valley was manned by a Hizbullah fighter positioned in a small hut containing a field telephone. A chain suspended from two concrete blocks spanned the track, barring passage, with a sign warning that "access to this area is forbidden. Hizbullah". More Hizbullah fighters could be seen on a nearby hill.

These deployments are not particularly covert. UNIFIL troops patrolling the southern side of the Litani River have noticed the steady build-up on the northern bank. One UNIFIL officer tells *Jane's*: "We can see them building new positions. There are a lot of trucks coming into the area as well."

This activity is similar to the construction and movement in the six years between the IDF withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000 and the outbreak of war in July 2006. During

that period, dozens, possibly hundreds, of disguised bunkers, ranging from expanded natural caves to sprawling underground complexes with reinforced concrete walls and roofs, lighting and air conditioning, were constructed in southern Lebanon adjacent to the Blue Line. In one case, a bunker complex 40 m underground and covering an area of 2 km² was built within 300 m of a UNIFIL observation post and an Israeli army position on the Blue Line, but its existence remained hidden until IDF soldiers discovered and destroyed it days after the 14 August 2006 ceasefire.

More than six months after the war, UNIFIL peacekeepers are still uncovering Hizbullah firing positions and bunkers on a weekly basis. Timur Goksel, former UNIFIL senior advisor, tells *Jane's*: "They let us see certain things like their observation posts along the border fence, but all the time they were building an underground city in the south that we never knew existed."

There are numerous sand and gravel quarries in Hizbullah's 'security pockets' around Rihan that may provide cover for constructing bunkers and firing positions or repairing and expanding those damaged by Israeli air strikes during the war. Evidence is circumstantial, although at least two of these quarries were subjected to multiple IAF cluster bomb strikes during the 2006 war, suggesting they were the source of rocket fire.

Hizbullah's grip on the Rihan district is being reinforced by the purchase of large tracts of land in the area from Christian and Druze landowners. New houses and shops, and in one location a new community, are being built on the bought land and sold to Shia newcomers. The mountains around Rihan, wedged between the Shia area of Nabatieh and the Shia villages of the Western Bekaa, are home to small Christian- and Druze-populated hamlets and farmsteads. The reason for buying the land, which has been under way for about a year, appears to be the building of a bridge connecting the Shia areas to the east and west, a contiguous Shia belt that would shield Hizbullah from prying eyes. The few Christians left in Qotrani are selling their land and leaving. The same is true in neighbouring Sraireh, a Druze village.

There is a less visible presence of Hizbullah activity in the Nabatieh and Western Bekaa areas, more heavily populated and publicly accessible than the Rihan district (Blanford, Nicholas 2007, 'Call to arms – Hizbullah's efforts to renew weapons supplies', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 18 April – Attachment 5).

A March 2007 report by the United Nations Security Council examines the current security situation in Lebanon, and contains references to recent activities by Hezbollah in the south:

23. Given the considerable military presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations Force south of the Litani River, senior commanders of both forces believe it would be very difficult for unauthorized armed personnel to establish any new military capacity in that area. At the same time, unarmed personnel, suspected of being affiliated to Hizbullah, have been observed monitoring UNIFIL activities at various points throughout its area of operations, at times taking photographs and filming.

24. There have, however, been a number of reports of activities conducted by armed elements north of the Litani River, outside the UNIFIL area of operations. The reports have not been denied by either the Government of Lebanon or Hizbullah. **Armed elements, suspected of being members of Hizbullah, have been observed constructing new facilities in the Bourrhaz region, just north of the Litani River...** (United Nations Security Council 2007, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)*, 14 March

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/49FC18717CE9>

The assessment of Hizbollah by *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism* was updated in October 2006 after the war with Israel, and contains some relevant material. The sections on personnel and recruitment make it clear that the group is situated in the Shi'a areas and is dependent on part-time fighters from surrounding villages:

Personnel and recruitment

Estimates of IR's strength have varied widely. The IR centres on a core of full-time guerrilla fighters numbering around 600-800. These fighters are typically aged in their late-20s to early-30s, many of them combat veterans of the IR resistance campaign against the IDF in the 1990s. The fighters are often schooled in different disciplines, such as sniping, firing anti-tank missiles, surveillance and communications, and bomb-making. **There are perhaps 5,000 to 7,000 part-time fighters, acting essentially as a reserve force or village guards.** Many of them are combat veterans of the 1990s and are proficient in the handling of rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and Katyusha rockets. The part-time cadre comprised the bulk of IR's fighting force in the July-August 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah, deployed in and around their villages in south Lebanon. In the event of a national emergency, Hizbollah can theoretically draw upon its entire membership which could be as many as 25,000. Every Hizbollah member is obliged to undergo a basic military training course, conducted on an ad hoc basis in the eastern Bekaa with IR instructors, although specialist training is carried out in Iran.

Area of operation

Hizbollah's main areas of operation are in the Shia-dominated districts of the Bekaa valley, the southern suburbs of Beirut and southern Lebanon. It has offices and training facilities in Iran and possibly Sudan.

Hizbollah has training facilities on the Isla de Margarita off the northern coast of Venezuela and is believed to maintain presence in the tri-border area around the towns of Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, Foz de Iguazu in Brazil and Puerto Iguazu in Argentina. Although the strength of the organisation in the area has been in decline since the mid-1990s. Regional intelligence suggests that the perpetrators of the 1992 attack on the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 attack on the Jewish Cultural Centre in Buenos Aires were harboured amongst the large Lebanese community in this region ('Hizbollah' 2006, *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, 27 October – Attachment 7).

A March 2007 report by the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre mentions that "Hezbollah is vigorously rebuilding its military infrastructure in south Lebanon in both populated and unpopulated areas" but that because of the deployment of the Lebanese army as well as the "massive UNIFIL deployments" it was difficult for Hezbollah to "treat the area as its own" and it had been forced to change its methods. The only references to the north of the country in the report are to the Bekaa Valley, which is a Shia area to the east of Habchit and Khobit ('The implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 after six months: Interim report' 2007, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at Israel Intelligence' Heritage & Commemoration Center, 4 March http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/res_1701e0307.htm – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 8).

In the absence of any information on the presence of Hezbollah in North Lebanon among the sources examined, two external experts were consulted on this subject. On 28 May 2007

emails were sent to Michael Young, a senior journalist who writes for the Lebanese *Daily Star* and other publications; and Professor Charles Harb of the American University of Beirut, who has contributed articles on Lebanon to journals such as the *Guardian*. They were both asked whether there were reports of Hezbollah activity and forced land acquisition around Qabaaait and Habchit; and about relations between Sunni and Shi's Muslims in the north (RRT Country Research 2007, Email to Michael Young: 'Refugee Review Tribunal request for information', 28 May – Attachment 9; RRT Country Research 2007, Email to Charles Harb: 'Refugee Review Tribunal request for information', 28 May – Attachment 10).

Professor Harb replied as follows:

The email content is quite surprising.

Let me answer the questions you raise:

1. Are there any reports of Hezbollah activity around the villages of Qabaaait and Habchit in North Lebanon?

None to my knowledge. These are heavily Sunni areas, where Hezbollah does not have a popular base.

2. Are there any reports of forced acquisition of land or assets by Hezbollah in the north of Lebanon?

There are no reports of forced land acquisition or assets by Hezbollah in the north of Lebanon. There are no such reports in the south either! There were reports of land purchasing in some areas in the south, but were exaggerated by media reports and politicians for specific and immediate political purposes.

3. In general, what are relations like between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the north of the country?

It is important to look at the geographical distribution of the population. The north of Lebanon (including the areas from which the person claims to be) are heavily Sunni areas with conservative leanings. Insinuations of Hezbollah activities in these areas are not credible and make no sense. Hermel area (Baalbeck, Bekaa) are Shia dominated. But these are located in the Bekaa province, not in the North province. In the north province you find little Shia presence; the most significant is in the Jbeil area (Christian north) where they have one depute.

Asylum to escape Hezbollah from the North of Lebanon is not a credible claim (Harb, Charles 2007, Email to RRT Country Research: 'Re: Refugee Review Tribunal request for information', 29 May – Attachment 11).

A reply was also received from Michael Young. He stated that he knew little about the situation in North Lebanon, but supplied the telephone number for an MP from North Lebanon named Mosbah Ahdab. Attempts to contact Mr Ahdab have so far been unsuccessful, but further attempts can be made if the Member wishes (Young, Michael 2007, Email to RRT Country Research: 'Re: Refugee Review Tribunal request for information', 29 May – Attachment 12).

Two maps are attached which give some indication of the areas where Hezbollah has recently been acquiring land, and the relative position of this area to Habchit and Khobit. The first map is a detail of an area of southern Lebanon, with Nabatiyet and Rihane marked, which are mentioned in the *Jane's* article at Attachment 5 as being areas of recent Hezbollah activity; also marked is the town of Jezzine, as a reference point. The second map is an *Encarta* map of the whole of Lebanon, with two general areas marked: the area south of Jezzine in southern Lebanon, and the area east of Tripoli in the north (Geoprojects 1993, *Map of Lebanon*, All Prints Distributors and Publishers, Beirut – Attachment 13; 'Qabi't, Lebanon' 1999, *Microsoft Encarta* – Attachment 14).

Another map is also of interest. From a July 2006 report by Walid Phares on Hezbollah's recent war with Israel, it shows the main areas of Hezbollah influence in Lebanon. The northernmost area shown is the northern area of the Bekaa valley (Phares, Walid 2006, 'Hizbollah's Iranian war in Lebanon' 2006, Counterterrorism Blog, 22 July http://counterterrorismblog.org/2006/07/hizbollahs_iranian_war_in_leba.php – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 15).

Two reports on recent events in North Lebanon may also be relevant. During the past two weeks, fighting has broken out in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al Bared in Northern Tripoli [please see Question 5 for further details on the security situation in the north].

A May 2007 article by Dr Walid Phares claims that Al Qaeda is presently engaged in opening up a new front in northern Lebanon using the Islamist group Fatah al Islam, which is a breakaway Palestinian group. He claims that "Fatah al Islam aims at creating an 'Emirate'...in the Sunni areas of Lebanon, and is planning on conducting operations similar to the ones in the Sunni Triangle of Iraq". Of the relationship between this group and Hezbollah, Dr Phares states that both are linked to Syria, and that for the time being both have "converging goals" in that they both aim to bring down the democratically elected Seniora Government, after which they may then turn to fighting each other for control (Phares, Walid 2007, 'Al Qaeda's new front in Lebanon', Counterterrorism Blog, 21 May http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/05/al_qaedas_new_front_in_lebanon.php – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 16).

Another May 2007 article is of interest as it quotes the head of Hezbollah, Sayyed Nasrallah, on the current violence in the north. He appears to be giving verbal support to the Lebanese army which is fighting against the Fatah al Islam militants:

Sayyed Nasrallah said that what is taking place north of Lebanon is not isolated from the general atmosphere and political wrangling, not to forget security perils Lebanon is facing at this stage.

"The Nahr al-Bared question is a very delicate, complicated and dangerous one. It is interrelated with the questions of Lebanon, Palestine, the region, the American, the camps, the settlement of the Palestinians and the war on terror," he added.

His eminence warned that Lebanon is today facing a real problem and that everyone is looking how to salvage this country.

"The Lebanese army is the guardian of security, stability and national unity in this country. We should all regard this army as the only institution left capable of preserving security and stability in this country, with all due respect to other security services. We condemn any attack against the Lebanese army or the Lebanese security services, regardless of the

attackers. This is a red line that should be observed and passing it should not be tolerated. On the other hand, those who attacked the army should be brought to justice and have a fair trial. Storming into the Nahr al-Bared camp is a dangerous approach. It brings back some painful memories from the past (the war of refugee camps) A government should act as a government, that is to arrest people and bring them to justice, but not to launch a Bush-style war on terror and kill people on the streets.”

Sayed Nasrallah said that “we should be aware of the American hand in the incident in northern Lebanon. “There should be an investigation over the cause of the incident, how did it start and who to the decision. The Americans have built an air bridge to send military supplies to the Lebanese Army upon Saniora’s request. This is dangerous. They say that during the war, the government had asked Washington to interfere to stop the war, however, the United States refused. Instead it asked the Israelis to proceed. Where were the arms when Lebanese army soldiers were killed when Israel was bombing their positions and vehicles?”

This vigilant care for the Lebanese army today should be questioned by the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Arabs and everyone” (Shmaysani, Mohamed 2007, Al-Manar TV website, 26 May <http://www.manartv.com.lb/NewsSite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=17777&language=en> – Accessed 28 May 2007 – Attachment 17).

A 2004 RRT Research Response examined the question of whether Hezbollah operated in the north of the country, and found no evidence. It contains some useful background material on the command structure and activities of the group (RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response LBN16386*, 9 January – Attachment 38).

2. Is there any information on the relationship between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims in north Lebanon, particularly in Kobhit?

Relations between Sunni and Shi’a in Lebanon generally

The 2006 US Department of State report on religious freedom in Lebanon states that in Lebanon as a whole, relations between the various confessional groups are “generally amicable”:

The country, founded as a modern state in 1943, has an area of 4,035 square miles and a population of four million. Because parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. However, according to three reputable demographic studies conducted over the past two years, 28-35 percent of the population was Sunni Muslim, 28-35 percent Shi’a Muslim, 25-39 percent Christian, and 5-6 percent Druze. Over the past sixty years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly through emigration of large numbers of the Christian Maronite community. There were also very small numbers of the Jews, Baha’is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus....

...The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were periodic reports of tension between religious groups during the reporting period, which may be attributed to political differences and the fact that citizens still struggled with the legacy of a fifteen-year civil war that was fought largely along religious lines (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report 2006: Lebanon*, 15 September – Attachment 18).

A December 2006 research response looked at the question of whether Hezbollah ever targeted Sunnis simply because they are Sunnis. Drawing on a range of sources including the International Crisis Group, *The Economist* and the *BBC*, it contains several relevant points:

- No information was found that indicated that Hezbollah targeted Sunnis for their religious beliefs.
- Since Hezbollah entered mainstream politics, it has adopted a more inclusive platform, and has sought to appeal to Sunnis as well as Shi'a.
- The recent friction in Lebanon has not been based on sectarianism, but rather on opposition or support of the democratically elected government. According to a December 2006 *Economist* report, most of the Shi'a oppose the Siniora government and most of the Sunnis support it; while the Christians are divided.
- The leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, has often warned the Shi'a not to fight against the Sunnis or the Christians in Lebanon, and has recently pledged loyalty to the Lebanese tradition of religious tolerance.
- However, in the light of actions by Hezbollah, such as drawing Lebanon into war with Israel without consulting the government, his statements are not trusted by many Sunnis and Christians (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response LBN31032*, 21 December – Attachment 19).

A September 2006 report by Alfred Prados for the US Library of Congress contains information on religious and other factors in Lebanese politics. The report indicates that there are many other variables besides religion which determine political alliances in Lebanon; an important factor being support or opposition to the Syrian presence in the country:

Lebanese political parties have developed along religious, geographical, ethnic, and ideological lines and are often associated with prestigious families. Christian groups, especially Maronites, tend to be strong advocates of Lebanese independence and opposed to Syrian and other external influences. Christian parties include the Phalange led by the Gemayel family, and smaller parties led by the Chamoun, Frangieh, and Iddi families. Sunni Muslim parties, historically more Arab nationalist in orientation, include the Independent Nasirite group and a new group, the Futures Party, that has coalesced around anti-Syrian supporters of the recently assassinated Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Shi'ite parties include the more moderate Amal under Nabih Berri and the more radical Hezbollah (see below), former rivals but now at least temporarily allied; Druze are largely associated with the Progressive Socialist Party led by the leftist yet feudally based Jumblatt family, now somewhat tenuously aligned with the Futures Party. A religiously mixed group, the Syrian National Social Party (SNSP), favors a union of Syria, Lebanon, and possibly other nearby states. Several of these parties and groupings formerly maintained militias, notably the Lebanese Forces, which were affiliated with the Christian Phalange Party, and the Shi'ite Muslim Hezbollah, which has both a political and a military wing. Most of the militias were disbanded after the civil war, but Hezbollah's militia continues to function (Prados, Alfred B. 2006, *CRS Report for Congress: Lebanon*, 27 September, The Library of Congress, p.CRS-3 – Attachment 20).

Relations between Sunni and Shi'a in North Lebanon

As previously stated, Professor Charles Harb commented on relations between Sunni and Shi'a in the north as follows:

It is important to look at the geographical distribution of the population. **The north of Lebanon (including the areas from which the person claims to be) are heavily Sunni**

areas with conservative leanings. Insinuations of Hezbollah activities in these areas are not credible and make no sense. Hermel area (Baalbeck, Bekaa) are Shia dominated. But these are located in the Bekaa province, not in the North province. **In the north province you find little Shia presence;** the most significant is in the Jbeil area (Christian north) where they have one depute (Harb, Charles 2007, Email to RRT Country Research: 'Re: Refugee Review Tribunal request for information', 29 May – Attachment 11).

Professor Harb's comments are confirmed by a map of the distribution of religious groups in Lebanon, which shows that the area of Habchit and Khobit is predominantly Sunni Muslim; and by a *Reuters* report on the 2005 parliamentary elections which states that of 690,000 eligible voters in the northern area, 55 percent are Muslims, consisting of 51 percent Sunni and 4 percent Alawite; and 45 percent are Christians (Norton, Augustus Richard 2007, 'Prologue: Map 1', *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton University Press – Attachment 3; 'Factbox – Electoral facts about north Lebanon' 2005, *Reuters News*, 19 June – Attachment 4).

4. Please provide information on Wajih El Bahraini and Mahmoud Mourad.

Mahmoud Mourad

Little information was found among the sources consulted on Mahmoud Mourad [also spelt Morad and Murad]. The reports found indicate that he is currently one of the Sunni Members of Parliament for the Akkar region of North Lebanon, and that he supports the Future Parliamentary Bloc which *opposes* Syrian influence in Lebanon.

A list of members of the Lebanese Parliament after the 2005 elections, recently accessed from an Embassy of Lebanon in Washington website, states that there are 7 MPs from the Akkar division of North Lebanon: three Sunnis, two Greek Orthodox, one Maronite and one Alawite. One of the Sunnis is **Mahmoud Morad** (Lebanon Parliament 2005-2009 Legislature' (undated), Embassy of Lebanon in Washington D.C. website http://www.lebanonembassyus.org/country_lebanon/parlam.html – Accessed 10 May 2007 – Attachment 21).

An April 2007 press release by the Future Parliamentary Bloc states that **Mahmoud Murad** was among a group of delegates from Akkar, including heads of municipalities and MPs, which visited MP Saad Hariri and expressed their support. Saad Hariri is the head of the Future Parliamentary Bloc, and is the son of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, who was assassinated in 2005 ('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 22).

The official website of Rafik Hariri at <http://www.rhariri.com/> contains updated information on his son Saad Hariri and the policies of Future Parliamentary Bloc, which according to the above report is supported by Mahmoud Murad. These policies include calling on the UN to conduct a fair investigation into the assassination of Rafik Hariri, whom many believe was killed by agents of Syria; and the liberation of Lebanon from Syrian influence.

A recent World Food Program map of Lebanon includes an insert in the top left corner showing the district boundaries in Lebanon. Aakar district is the most northern district (WFP Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch 2006, *Lebanon: Situation Overview*, 22 August

http://www.hewsweb.org/epweb/mapsrepository/maps/01265_20060825_LBN_A2_ODAP_LEBANON_OPERATIONAL_OVERVIEW_22_08_06.pdf - Accessed 5 June 2007 – Attachment 32).

Wajih El Bahraini

The sources consulted indicate that Wajih El Bahraini, also spelt Wajih Baarini, was a Sunni MP for the Akkar region *prior* to the 2005 elections. He was generally regarded as pro-Syrian. He no longer appears to be in parliament, and the most recent report found mentions his involvement in the meeting of Sunni religious body.

A March 2005 opinion piece on a Lebanese political weblog lists the Lebanese MPs of that time and whether they are pro- or anti-Syrian. By pro-Syrian it means that they “have no problem with Syria’s current involvement in the country” either because they have been “bought and paid for by Syria” or because of “socioeconomic and clan ties”. For the Akkar region it states:

Issam Fares (Greek Orthodox) **Pro-Syria**
Jamal Ismail (Sunni) **Pro-Syria**
Wajih Baarini (Sunni) Pro-Syria
Mikhael Daher (Maronite) **Opposition**
Mohammad Yahya (Sunni) **Pro-Syria**
Karim Racy (Greek Orthodox) **Pro-Syria**
Abderrahmane Abderrahmane (Alawite) **Pro-Syria** (Lebanese members of Parliament’2005, Lebanese Political Journal weblog, 15 March <http://lebop.blogspot.com/2005/03/lebanese-members-of-parliament.html> – Accessed 4 June 2007 – Attachment 23).

A 2001 article from the *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* describes “Akkar MP Wajih Baarini” as “very close to the Syrians” (Nassif, Daniel & Gambill, Gary C. 2001, ‘Syria’s Campaign to Silence Lebanese Muslims’, *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.3, No.4, April http://www.meib.org/articles/0104_11.htm – Accessed 4 June 2007 – Attachment 24).

A 1998 news item mentions that Wajih Baarini had recently returned from a meeting in Damascus with Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam. Baarini reported Khaddam’s wish for “solidarity and cooperation between all the leaders” in Lebanon (‘Khaddam stresses cooperation and solidarity among Lebanese leaders’ 1998, [News@Lebanon.com](http://www.lebanon.com/news/local/1998/8/10.htm) website, 10 August <http://www.lebanon.com/news/local/1998/8/10.htm> – Accessed 4 June 2007 – Attachment 25).

A recent report dating from November 2006 refers to Wajih Baarini as a “former MP”. It states that he attended a national gathering of the Dar al-Fatwa, described as “the Sunni community’s highest body” and apparently non-political. Interestingly, there were also delegates to the body from Hariri’s Future Movement (‘National Gathering Sunnis say Dar al-Fatwa is “for all Lebanese”‘ 2006, *Daily Star*, 2 November, World Council for the Cedar’s Revolution website, <http://cedarsrevolution.googlepages.com/latestnews> – Accessed 4 June 2007 – Attachment 26).

5. Please provide information concerning the availability and effectiveness of state protection.

The answer to this question is divided into two sections on Lebanon generally and North Lebanon in particular.

Security and State protection in Lebanon

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

- The ability of someone in to seek assistance from local police is affected at present by the general political and security instability in the country.
- The Internal Security Services (ISF) is the name of the police force in Lebanon. Its ability to carry out its responsibilities is restricted due to limited resources.
- The security services were thrown into turmoil by Syria's withdrawal from the country in 2005, since Syria had largely controlled them.
- The security services were judged by a UN report to have failed to provide Lebanese citizens with an acceptable level of security and had this contributed to a culture of impunity and intimidation.
- There was a pervasive lack of faith in the justice system, which was believed to be riddled with cronyism and corruption.
- People were increasingly seeking protection from their own sectarian communities (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN31663*, 3 May – Attachment 27).

Question 6 of another recent RRT Response looks at the availability of police protection. Of interest is material from a 2003 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response which states that in some circumstances, the Lebanese authorities might turn a blind eye to arrests and detentions carried out by Hizbollah members (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response LBN31040*, 15 December – Attachment 28).

A September 2006 *Operational Guidance Note* on Lebanon by the UK Home Office examines state protection in relation to particular categories of asylum claims: Paragraph 3.5.6 looks at protection for former members of the South Lebanon Army; Para. 3.7.6 for those fearing harm from Amal; Para. 3.8.10 for those fearing domestic violence; Para.3.9.11 for Palestinians; Para.3.10.8 for Palestinians in fear of the Lebanese authorities; Para.3.11.8 for Palestinians in camps who feared Islamic extremists; and Para. 3.12.4 for Palestinians who had collaborated. The most relevant section to this request is perhaps Paragraph 3.6.8 which deals with protection for members of left wing parties fearing Hizbollah:

The security forces consist of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) under the Ministry of Defence, which may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; the Internal Security Forces (ISF) under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), which enforce laws, conduct searches and arrests, and refer cases to the judiciary; and the State Security Apparatus, which reports to the prime minister and the SG under the MOI, both of which collect information on groups deemed a possible threat to state security.⁴⁷ In 2000, following the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) withdrawal from the south, the Government deployed more than 1,000 police and soldiers to the former Israeli security zone. However, the Government has not attempted to disarm Hizbollah, nor have the country's armed forces taken sole and effective control over the entire area... **Outside the South of Lebanon there is no evidence that in general members of these parties could not approach the Lebanese authorities for protection**

therefore in the remainder of the country there is a sufficiency of protection (UK Home Office 2006, *operational Guidance Note: Lebanon*, 20 September – Attachment 29).

A 2003 advice from DFAT provided advice on protection that might be available to a person in danger from Amal (a separate Shi'ite organization from Hezbollah) and indicates that at the time of writing the Lebanese police controlled much of Beirut, except for the southern suburbs which were controlled by Hezbollah at that time:

f) Protection available in Beirut to a person pursued by Amal

7. The Lebanese police force now have control over all of Beirut, except for the southern suburbs, and could be approached for assistance although they might not take action if they viewed the threat as lacking credibility. The applicant would also be at risk if those pursuing her had high level contacts that would permit them to evade the law.

8. Hizbollah has the capacity to provide protection in the southern suburbs, as it operates restricted zones which people can not enter without authorisation. This protection would not, however, be given automatically. Hizbollah would have to see some party interest in expending its resources in this way (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2003, *DFAT Report 00236: RRT Information Request LBN15857*, 15 May – Attachment 30).

A March 2007 report by the United Nations Security Council examines the current security situation in Lebanon, particularly in the south. Of the Lebanese Armed Forces, it comments that at present it is operating at full capacity and is under some strain:

18. The Lebanese Armed Forces, which are estimated to total some 55,000 military personnel, have, according to resolution 1701 (2006), a significant number of essential tasks to carry out, including the maintenance of peace and security in southern Lebanon in cooperation with UNIFIL, and helping to secure the country's land and maritime borders. However, **the country's ongoing political crisis has also required the Lebanese Armed Forces to deploy in Beirut and in other areas of the country to ensure internal security. These additional tasks have put considerable strain on the Forces, whose entire army corps is currently deployed**, and have sometimes limited their ability to carry out the tasks required under resolution 1701 (2006).

19. It has become clear in recent weeks that the Lebanese Armed Forces are facing considerable capacity problems, which have had an impact on their ability to respond quickly to some UNIFIL requests, including coordinated search operations. UNIFIL has received a number of requests for equipment from the Lebanese Armed Forces, including, for example, night-vision goggles, which the mission is not currently able to provide. Representatives of both the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations have been approaching potential donors on this issue. I note that several interested partners have already made some contributions and I would urge others to come forward and assist the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) (United Nations Security Council 2007, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)*, 14 March [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/49FC18717CE9B65EC12572A500808558-Full_Report.pdf/\\$File/Full_Report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/49FC18717CE9B65EC12572A500808558-Full_Report.pdf/$File/Full_Report.pdf) – Accessed 29 March 2007 – Attachment 6).

North Lebanon

The material above indicates that apart from the areas which are controlled by Hezbollah, there is some protection available from security forces in Lebanon, including North Lebanon; but that their efficiency is restricted due to limited resources, corruption and the pervasive instability in the country.

The two reports which follow are of some relevance as background material, as they examine the current security situation in North Lebanon, particularly Tripoli, where there have been clashes during the last two weeks between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and an Islamic Palestinian Group.

A recent article by Michael Young, who writes for the Lebanese *Daily Star* and (in this case) *Reason Magazine*, sees the chronic instability in Lebanon as a result of Syrian interference. The most recent manifestation of this has been the violence in the north:

Rare are those today in the United States who look at Lebanon and remember that bracing year [2005, the year of the “Cedar Revolution”]. That’s not surprising given the **heavy fighting this week in the north of the country between the Lebanese army and a group calling itself Fatah al-Islam**, the detonation of bombs in Beirut on Sunday and Monday and in a mountain resort on Wednesday, and a persistent domestic political crisis as the pro-Syrian opposition continues to demand the resignation of the Lebanese government, which is backed by the parliamentary majority hostile to Syria. Lebanon’s reputation is again that of a place cursed by chronic instability.

The interpretation is tendentious. Instability does not just materialize from the ether. It’s always a mistake to oversimplify Lebanese politics, but it would be fair to say that what is under threat today is Lebanon’s liberal future. And that future is threatened mainly by Syria, which never accepted its forced withdrawal from Lebanon in 2003, after the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister, Rafiq Hariri. The fighting in the north, the bomb blasts, and the political crisis are almost certainly the direct results of Syrian policy, despite what Damascus and its proliferating promoters are saying in Washington, as they try to peddle the idea that Syria holds a key to stability in Iraq. The explicit or implicit message of many of those worthies is that the U.S. is better off dealing with Syria over Iraq, even if it means surrendering to the Syrian regime “influence” in Lebanon.

However, the Syrians don’t “do” influence. What they understand is unquestioned domination. On top of that, today they see an existential threat to their regime from the creation by the United Nations of a tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri killing. Syria is the only serious suspect in the crime, something that has been indirectly affirmed by U.N. investigators. The regime of President Bashar Assad fears that any accusation directed against it could be a fatal blow. The mixed Lebanese-international tribunal was to have been set up through constitutional Lebanese channels, but Syria’s allies in Beirut blocked the process. In the coming weeks, unless developments in Lebanon encourage Russia and China to undermine the effort, the Security Council will establish the tribunal under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter.

That’s why the bombs continue to go off, and why there is fighting in north Lebanon. **The international media have underlined that Fatah al-Islam is a group with ties to Al-Qaeda. That may be the case when it comes to specific militants, but the top leadership is most likely acting today on behalf of the Syrian security services, which have allowed the group access to Lebanon through Syria’s borders. The group claims to be an Islamist offshoot of a pro-Syrian Palestinian group called Fatah al-Intifada. For many observers, however, that rift was probably contrived by Syria to provide it with deniability as it uses the group to destabilize Lebanon.** Fatah al-Islam may indeed include

Islamists, its funding may come from sources not necessarily Syrian, it may operate in collaboration with rather than as an extension of the Syrians, and its advanced weaponry may have been bought on the market, but its decision to launch attacks against the Lebanese army on Sunday was also very clearly a Syrian effort to show both Lebanon and the international community that a Chapter VII tribunal would have nefarious consequences (Young, Michael 2007, 'Liberal Lebanon: Worth saving, or the hell with it?', Reason Online website, 24 May <http://www.reason.com/news/show/120358.html> – Accessed 28 May 2007 – Attachment 31).

A news report from *The Scotsman* describes the events that sparked the recent fighting in Tripoli:

The clashes in the camp began early yesterday morning shortly after police raided a militant-occupied flat on Mitein Street, a major thoroughfare in Tripoli.

Authorities said police were looking for suspects in a bank robbery a day earlier in Amyoun, a town south-east of Tripoli, in which gunmen made off with £63,000 in cash.

The armed militants resisted arrest and a gunbattle ensued. It spread to surrounding streets and continued through the afternoon. Witnesses said the militants then seized Lebanese army positions at the entrance to the refugee camp, capturing two armoured cars. The gunmen also opened fire on roads leading to the city and ambushed a military unit, killing two soldiers, security officials said.

By midmorning, the army had brought reinforcements and was firing on Fatah Islam positions.

There have been long-standing tensions between some Lebanese citizens and the tens of thousands of Palestinians who took refuge from fighting in Israel over the decades (Siddiq, N. & Mroue, Bassem 2007, 'Nearly 50 killed as Lebanese army fires on Palestinian refugee camp', *The Scotsman*, 21 May <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=785372007> – Accessed 5 June 2007 – Attachment 33).

A further selection of news reports on North Lebanon from the past few months provides background material on the recent security situation in the area.

A December 2006 report describes the arrest of seven members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party by Lebanese security forces in the North Lebanon district of Koura, which is south of Tripoli. They were in possession of bomb-making materials (Ghazali, Rym 2006, 'Lebanese police arrest 7 members of pro-Syrian party', *Daily Star*, 22 December – Attachment 34).

An October 2006 report states that roads and bridges in the north were bombed during the war with Israel to prevent them being used as supply routes. An August 2006 report mentions that the town of Qab'it was one of the areas targeted because it was on the road linking "Akkar area with Al-Dinniyah" (Ghazali, Rym 2006, 'On route to North a telltale sign of war: gridlock', *Daily Star*, 11 October – Attachment 35; 'Hezbollah says at least six killed in Israeli raid' 2006, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 6 August – Attachment 36).

Another August 2006 report states that Lebanese soldiers were deploying to the north-east of the country to intercept supplies of weapons to Hezbollah, but were more likely to come across the smuggling of consumer goods (Wright, Jonathan 2006, 'Smugglers in north Lebanon trade cement, not arms', *Reuters News*, 23 August – Attachment 37).

Question 6 of a recent RRT Research Response looks at whether the Akkar region of North Lebanon was under the protection of the Syrian security authorities or influence. It quotes material that indicates that when the last Syrian troops left northern Lebanon, nine Syrian intelligence officers remained, including one in Akkar (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN1663*, 3 May – Attachment 27).

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