

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide updated evidence on the conflict and whether it is limited to a particular area in Tripoli.**
- 2. What steps, if any, have the authorities undertaken with respect to the conflict?**

RESPONSE

A reading of the combined available information indicates that a number of factors affect the Alawite situation in Lebanon at the moment, including: local enmity between militias in Jabal Mohsin and Bab Tebbaneh dating back to the civil war; the Lebanese Alawite community's status as a tiny minority (around ten percent of north Lebanon population; less than one percent of whole Lebanon population) living among a significant Sunni majority (around 70 percent in north Lebanon); Syria's involvement in Lebanon and alleged relationship with and patronage of Lebanese Alawites, its withdrawal from Lebanon three years ago, its perceived status as a minority Alawite regime oppressing a Sunni majority; Lebanese Alawite leaders political alliance with Hezbollah and the opposition in an area which is reportedly 90 percent Future Movement supporters; the fear and anger engendered in the Lebanese Sunni community especially after the show of force by Hezbollah and its allies in Beirut in May 2008; the recent growth of extremist elements, foreign fighters (including Salafist jihadi groups), and weapons in and around Tripoli; increasing Sunni/Shia problems throughout the region and widespread Sunni fear of a "Shia crescent" encompassing Iran-Syria-Hezbollah. Most analyses of the Tripoli situation refer to it as part of a proxy war between a number of players in the region, namely Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and the US, with emphasis on Syria and Saudi Arabia (for background information on the Alawites and Syria, see:

Yazbeck, R. 2008, 'Return of the Pink Panthers?', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm - Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 4; also see: Schenker, D. 2008, 'Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again', *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17; for reports of extremist elements and foreign fighters in Tripoli, see: UN Security Council 2008, *Eighth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)*, S/2008/654, UNHCR Refworld, 16 October, p. 6 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49057fac2.html> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 30; for information on Salafist jihadi groups, see: Gambill, G. 2008, 'Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 1, January-March http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0801/0801_1.htm - Accessed 19 June 2008 – Attachment 27; for reports of a Middle East proxy war, see: Ibrahim, A. 2008, 'Lebanese City's Strife Reflects 2 Conflicts; Tripoli Rocked by Internal Rifts and Mideast Proxy War', *Washington Post*, 22 October – Attachment 1).

1. Please provide updated evidence on the conflict and whether it is limited to a particular area in Tripoli.

According to the available information, unrest in Tripoli continues. A 22 October 2008 *Washington Post* article states that the "situation has calmed since the signing of a reconciliation agreement in early September, but two bombings targeting the military have left at least 15 soldiers dead since that time". Although the situation is generally referred to as a Sunni/Alawite conflict, reports and analyses also note that there are other, wider factors involved. *The Washington Post* article states that "[t]he on-again, off-again battle in Tripoli pits Sunnis against Alawites, a branch of Islam whose members include the leadership of Syria, Lebanon's often meddlesome neighbor. The conflict here is fueled by Lebanon's internal divisions and a slow-burning proxy war that involves Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria". The article also quotes local residents who "are convinced that reconciliation has been so elusive in Tripoli because leaders exploit the unstable security situation for political purposes". Parliamentary elections are scheduled for next year. Noting that the Tripoli conflict is linked to wider political and religious factors, a *Bloomberg* article quotes an Alawite leader, Rifaat Ali Eid, who states: "We're the most convenient targets, the stand-in for Hezbollah," he said. "Our problem can only be solved when the Shiites and Sunnis solve theirs". There have also been unsubstantiated reports of Syria arming Alawite villages in Akkar, as reported in a 15 September 2008 *Ya Libnan* article. According to a 24 October 2008 issue of the *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Syria's president has also publicly stated that Syria was threatened by "radical fundamentalist groups in north Lebanon trying to use Syria as a passage between Lebanon and Iraq". The *Terrorism Monitor* states that after warning that "northern Lebanon has become a real base for extremism, which represents a danger to Syria", the Syrian president sent 10,000 troops to the border with north Lebanon for "internal security reasons" (Ibrahim, A. 2008, 'Lebanese City's Strife Reflects 2 Conflicts; Tripoli Rocked by Internal Rifts and Mideast Proxy War', *Washington Post*, 22 October – Attachment 1; Worth, R. 2008, 'Sectarian tensions boil in Lebanon's north Growing militancy bodes ill for vote', *International Herald Tribune*, 17 October – Attachment 2; Williams, D. 2008, 'Tripoli Turmoil Increases Risk of a Sunni-Shiite War in Lebanon', *Bloomberg*, 30 September <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=a.emfPHnt0.o&refer=europe#> –

Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 3; for reports of Syria arming Alawite villages, see: ‘Syrian commandos deploy in north Lebanon – reports’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 15 September http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/09/syrian_commando.php – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 19; Ali, F. 2008, ‘Terrorism Comes to Damascus: Syria Faces its Own Islamist Threat’, *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 6, issue 20, 24 October – Attachment 20; also see Schenker, D. 2008, ‘Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again’, *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

Alawites

Despite the media spotlight on the Tripoli conflict, few in-depth reports were found on Lebanese Alawites themselves. The most recent and detailed is an August 2008 *Mideast Monitor* article, which is included in this response as Attachment 4. It is recommended that the article be read in full, as it provides background information on Lebanese Alawites, their relations with the Syrian regime, the main Alawite political party – Arab Democratic Party (ADP) and its associated Alawite militia – the situation since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, recent events, and the uncertain future of Alawites in Lebanon. The article states that “the position of Lebanon’s tiny Alawite community has never been more precarious” (Yazbeck, R. 2008, ‘Return of the Pink Panthers?’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm - Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 4).

On 15 August 2008, Robert Fisk writes that “at least 9,000 Alawi refugees have fled their homes” in Tripoli (Fisk, R. 2008, ‘Al-Qa’ida sends its warriors from Iraq to wage “jihad” in Lebanon’, *The Independent*, 15 August <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-alqaida-sends-its-warriors-from-iraq-to-wage-jihad-in-lebanon-897557.html> – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 5).

The following three articles from the UN humanitarian news service, *IRIN*, in July/August reported on the situation for Alawites in Lebanon:

On 5 August 2008, *IRIN* reported:

They may have been uprooted “more than 40 times” over the years since Lebanon’s Civil War began in 1975, but Hussein Mohammed and his family say they have rarely felt as threatened as they do today.

“When Israel did air strikes [in 2006] they dropped leaflets warning us to leave the village. These Salafis are trying to drive us out of the country,” said Mohammed, a member of the Allawi sect, an off-shoot of Shia Islam, referring to followers of an extremist doctrine of Sunni Islam.

Since May, long-standing historical grievances between the Allawis of Tripoli’s Jebel Mohsen neighbourhood and Sunnis living in adjacent Bab al-Tabbaneh have morphed into an intractable armed conflict, spurred on by political cleavages in Beirut and a rising tide of Sunni radicalism in the country.

For Mohammed, his wife and three children it meant fleeing rockets and machine guns that have damaged their home in Jebel Mohsen, amid cries of “jihad against the infidels” from local mosques which have terrified their children and left them fearing for their future.

“Is killing women and children jihad?” asked Mohammed’s wife, Fatima Ali Hamoud, her face anxious with worry lines. Since May, at least 23 people have been killed, hundreds injured and several thousand Allawi and Sunni families displaced.

For Mohammed’s family, finding safety is just one of the challenges they face.

For while Sunni families displaced from Bab al-Tabbaneh have been hosted in state schools in Tripoli and supported with food and medicine, the sectarian nature of the conflict has meant nearly all Allawi families have fled north to Akkar, one of Lebanon’s poorest regions.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which has been leading aid efforts in the northern town of Tripoli, says that nearly two weeks after the flare-up in fighting began, no international aid agency has yet delivered relief to the hundreds of Allawi families in Akkar.

Mohammed Ali Hussein, mayor of Hisa, one of 15 predominantly Allawi villages in Akkar to where residents of Jebel Mohsen have fled since May, told IRIN he estimated around 500 Allawi families had had their homes damaged and perhaps half of all Jebel Mohsen’s 50,000 residents had been displaced.

Fleeing to Syria

Those without friends or family to stay with in Akkar have crossed the nearby border into Syria, where Allawis form a large part of the ruling classes. Those left behind find themselves in a region ill-equipped to care for them.

“A huge number of families left for Syria because we have no capacity to help them,” said Hussein. “Our municipal budget went down from US\$165 million to less than \$100m in the past four years. We have 70 percent unemployment. Since independence [in 1943] no-one has paid attention to Akkar.”

The destruction of Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp last year was also a major blow to the local economy, which relied on accessing the tax-free cheaper goods sold inside the camp.

Mohammed’s family is now staying with his brother, swelling the family to 13 people living in three rooms. “We’re missing everything: food, baby milk, medicine,” said Fatima Ali Hamoud, whose youngest daughter is eight months old.

UNICEF last week asked the mayors of the 15 Allawi villages to provide figures on the number of displaced families and their needs, but the agency has yet to receive a reply.

Failure of farming

The economic decline and political mismanagement in Akkar is clearly illustrated by the failure of farming in a region rich in fertile soil and irrigation.

Mohammed Mahmoud, a rugged Allawi with the distinctive blue eyes of his community, used to work the land growing potatoes, the majority of which would usually be purchased by the state-run agricultural wholesaler.

But in recent seasons the state-run firm has been buying less and at lower prices. Where a kilogram of potatoes could once be sold for 33 US cents or more, today, farmers in Hisa say, they go for six US cents, or are sold as livestock feed.

Mahmoud gave up farming with debts hanging over him of \$15,000, but found money to pay

them off and support his family by smuggling diesel fuel from Syria, where it is heavily subsidised, into Lebanon, where it can be sold for nearly triple the price.

“I’ve now paid off most of my debts and have decided to move my family to Syria,” said Mahmoud. “I want to enrol the children in Syrian schools. It’s much cheaper to live there and we can be treated just the same as everybody else” (‘Displaced Allawis find little relief in impoverished north’ 2008, Refworld, source: *IRIN*, 5 August <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/489c1be4c.html> - Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 6).

A 31 July 2008 *IRIN* article also describes the conflict and the lack of help received by Alawite families caught up in the conflict (‘Displaced families struggle on both sides of sectarian divide’ 2008, Refworld, source: *IRIN*, 31 July <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4896c47526.html> - Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 7).

Also see: ‘The rocket came through the window at dawn’ 2008, Refworld, source: *IRIN*, 29 July <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4896c4745.html> - Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 8.

Previous research responses provide information on Alawites:

- RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33578*, 2 September – Attachment 9 (update on Sunni/Alawite clashes in Tripoli);
- RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33563*, 21 July – Attachment 10 (Alawite population anywhere other than Tripoli);
- RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33419*, 27 June – Attachment 11 (clashes in Tripoli following May 2008 unrest);
- RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN31663*, 3 May – Attachment 12 (information on Alawites in Lebanon).

Chronological sequence of some main events from August to November

August

A bomb explosion which killed a number of people on 13 August 2008 occurred in central Tripoli. *Stratfor* states:

An explosive device detonated Aug. 13 on a bus in a busy part of the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, killing at least 18 people and wounding at least 40 others. Initial reports say between seven and 11 soldiers were among the dead.

The bombing was most likely the work of Saudi-backed Salafist militants, who are trying to resist a coming Syrian-backed crackdown against them. As the crackdown intensifies, the Salafists will likely ratchet up their attacks — and tensions will rise between Damascus and Riyadh (‘Lebanon: A Bus Bombing in Tripoli and a Message for Beirut’ 2008, *Stratfor*, 13 August http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/lebanon_bus_bombing_tripoli_and_message_beirut – Accessed 2 September 2008 – Attachment 13).

Mid-August 2008 media articles reported that Hezbollah was trying to broker an agreement with Salafist groups in Tripoli to end the violence. The deal was criticized by many as an

attempt by Hezbollah to encroach on Hariri's electoral base in Tripoli. The agreement was frozen by Salafists not long after (Khouri, R. 2008, 'Absent the state, watch new pacts arise', *Daily Star*, 20 August

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=5&article_id=95197# – Accessed 20 August 2008 – Attachment 14; Bluhm, M. 2008, 'Hizbullah 'botched' bid to win over Sunnis; Analysts say attempted accord could hurt aoun', *Daily Star*, 21 August – Attachment 15).

In late August an imam was killed after fighting erupted between Sunnis and Alawites in the village of Sheikhlar in the northern region of Akkar (Blanford, N. 2008, 'Lebanese sects aim to end clashes', *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 September

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0912/p06s02-wome.html> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 16).

September

In early September, a reconciliation agreement was brokered by Saad Hariri between Alawite and Sunni leaders in Tripoli (Schenker, D. 2008, 'Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again', *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

In September, two people were killed when rival Maronite Christian groups clashed in a village close to Tripoli (Abdullah, A. 2008, 'Two die in clashes between Marada, Lebanese Forces', *Daily Star*, 18 September

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=96112 – Accessed 23 September 2008 – Attachment 18).

In mid September, there were reports of rumours that Syria had sent 10,000 troops to the border and were arming Alawite villages (Williams, D. 2008, 'Tripoli Turmoil Increases Risk of a Sunni-Shiite War in Lebanon', *Bloomberg*, 30 September

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=a.emfPHnt0.o&refer=europe#> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 3; 'Syrian commandos deploy in north Lebanon – reports' 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 15 September

http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/09/syrian_commando.php – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 19).

On 27 September 2008, an explosion in Damascus killed 17, reportedly including a high-ranking Syrian official (Ali, F. 2008, 'Terrorism Comes to Damascus: Syria Faces its Own Islamist Threat', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 6, issue 20, 24 October – Attachment 20).

On 29 September 2008, at least five people were killed in a suspected car bomb attack on a military bus carrying soldiers in Tripoli (Schenker, D. 2008, 'Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again', *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

October

On 10 October 2008, a *Reuters* article states "Grenade blasts echo nightly across a sectarian frontline in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli despite a month-old reconciliation pact". A 17 October 2008 *International Herald Tribune* article states that the streets of Tripoli resemble a

battleground. Robert Fisk says the same thing a few months earlier in a 15 August 2008 article in *The Independent*, stating that the “truth is that Tripoli has slunk back into the civil war” (Lyon, A. 2008, ‘Feature – Tensions simmer in troubled Lebanese city’, ReliefWeb, source: *Reuters*, 10 October <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MCOT-7KAC82?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=lb> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 21; Worth, R. 2008, ‘Sectarian tensions boil in Lebanon’s north Growing militancy bodes ill for vote’, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 October – Attachment 2; Fisk, R. 2008, ‘Al-Qa’ida sends its warriors from Iraq to wage “jihad” in Lebanon’, *The Independent*, 15 August <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-alcqaida-sends-its-warriors-from-iraq-to-wage-jihad-in-lebanon-897557.html> – Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 5).

On 13 October 2008 “members of the terrorist group allegedly involved in the recent bombings targeting the army in northern Lebanon were arrested, according to a statement released by the Lebanese army” (Alami, M. 2008, ‘Lebanon: Agreement Brings Peace To Tripoli, For Now’, *Inter Press Service*, 4 November – Attachment 23).

In October, diplomatic relations established between Damascus and Beirut for the first time in 60 years (Ibrahim, A. 2008, ‘Lebanese City’s Strife Reflects 2 Conflicts; Tripoli Rocked by Internal Rifts and Mideast Proxy War’, *Washington Post*, 22 October – Attachment 1).

November

Most recently, on 21 November 2008, *Ya Libnan* reports:

3 Lebanese soldiers were wounded at a Lebanese army checkpoint in the northern city of Tripoli. This happened after a Renault 18 car failed to heed orders to stop at the military checkpoint. The Lebanese troops opened fire as the car failed to heed orders to stop, wounding one person, the state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported.

Soon after the shootout, which took place around 6:30am in Tripoli’s Bab al-Tabanneh neighborhood, angry protestors set the Renault on fire.

They also blocked the main Tripoli-Akkar highway with burning tires, NNA said.

Another crowd, meanwhile, opened fire on the army checkpoint, prompting troops to return fire.

A man identified as Ahmed al-Zoubi was killed in the shootout and several people were wounded, including a man by the name of Abu Da’aas.

The bottom line is that one person was killed and 9 were wounded, including the 3 soldiers (‘Friday News Briefs’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 21 November http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/11/friday_news_bri_24.php – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 22).

Recent articles and reports at length

The following articles, dating from September to November, report on the conflict. They are presented in reverse chronological order.

4 November 2008, *Inter Press Service*:

Following the recent political reconciliation between warring politicians, the army has made headway toward establishing stability in Tripoli by infiltrating a terrorist cell accused of orchestrating attacks against the Lebanese army.

Prior to the agreement, Tripoli, a large harbor city sitting on Lebanon's northern shore, had fallen prey to a series of deadly security threats.

In the presence of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, leaders of Tripoli's various factions last month agreed to a reconciliation agreement at the residence of Sheikh Malek Chaar, mufti of Tripoli and North Lebanon. The document's ratification put an end to four months of spiraling violence between the Alawite minority living in the Baal Mohsen area, also known as Jabal Mohsen, and Sunni communities from the adjacent impoverished neighborhood of Bab el-Tebbaneh. The Alawites are a Shia sect.

The agreement was signed by Sunni and Future movement leader Saad Hariri, son of slain premier Rafik Hariri who was killed in a bomb blast in 2005 that is largely attributed to Syria. It was endorsed by pro-Syrian Alawite leader Rifaat Al-Assad and his son, Ali Eid. Siniora declared while signing the document that "Tripoli should be a demilitarized city, free of gunmen and any military presence."

He went on to underline that the army and security forces have been ordered to enforce law and order. Hariri also attempted to reassure the public by pledging that the state will meet the needs of victims of the violence.

An army source, who chose to remain anonymous when interviewed by IPS because of the sensitivity of the issue, admitted "power struggles among the different factions in the north have temporarily ebbed since the reconciliation." But he said that while money flowing into Tripoli will help relieve pressure in the shanty towns sprawling around the city, the issue of weapons, which abound in the northern capital, remains unresolved. The source said the Alawites are still in possession of large stockpiles of weapons received from Syria, while weapons are also found in many Sunni households.

The fractured Lebanese government has yet to address the issue of weapons, and restoring the peace in Tripoli has proved a complex exercise in cooperation. The Lebanese pro-Western and Arab parliamentary majority – comprised of the Future movement, the Druze Progressive Socialist party as well as the Christian Phalangists and Lebanese Forces – has been engaged in intense rivalry since the death of Rafik Hariri with the pro-Iranian and Syrian minority dominated by the Shia Hezbollah and Amal parties, which are allied to the Christian Free Patriotic movement.

In spite of both blocs forming a unity government in July, and Tripoli's allegiance to the majority leadership, the dissention between the two factions, though condemned officially by all sides, has translated into intermittent eruptions of violence in the northern city. The area was shaken by two terrorist attacks that targeted the army on Aug. 13 and Sep. 29, resulting in 21 deaths.

"There was a definite breakdown of power in the North, with every small faction taking over a neighborhood and imposing its own law, with individual feuds being exploited by various political factions and taking on a sectarian dimension," the army source said.

However, political factions seem to have finally reached a consensus. "The resulting collaboration between the various intelligence services has allowed the crackdown on a terrorist cell accused of the bombings, which, according to information provided to me, was operating independently," said Future movement MP Moustapha Allouch.

Islamist factions close to the minority added, however, that fear of possible Syrian intervention in the north under the banner of support to the Alawite community, or a possible quelling of the Salafist movements (a radical faction of Islam) as well as pressure from foreign countries allowed for the crackdown. Syria, Lebanon's immediate neighbor to the north, ruled by an Alawite minority, has historically suppressed Islamic movements, and Tripoli is known to be home to various fundamentalist factions.

On Oct. 13, members of the terrorist group allegedly involved in the recent bombings targeting the army in northern Lebanon were arrested, according to a statement released by the Lebanese army.

"Tensions have been defused to a certain extent since the intervention of the High Relief Commission (HCR), which is handling the compensation of victims of violence in Tripoli and has beefed up its staff working on the relief effort from four to 10 committees. However, the lengthy process has frustrated some citizens," Allouch said.

The MP pointed out that the fragile reconciliation process could still be jeopardized by the activity of foreign intelligence services -- namely, Syria. But for now, the decrease in the number of men in fatigues roaming the streets is a refreshing sight (Alami, M. 2008, 'Lebanon: Agreement Brings Peace To Tripoli, For Now', *Inter Press Service*, 4 November – Attachment 23).

22 October 2008, *Washington Post*:

Despite two decades of lost battles, Samir Hassan sees no alternative to more fighting.

Hassan, a 39-year-old Sunni resident of this northern Lebanese port city, recently picked up his gun to lead a group of street fighters. "When you are torn between your wanting to live and your feeling that you are in real danger, you choose to defend yourself, even if you know you could die, and even when you know your death would be gratuitous," he said.

The on-again, off-again battle in Tripoli pits Sunnis against Alawites, a branch of Islam whose members include the leadership of Syria, Lebanon's often meddling neighbor. The conflict here is fueled by Lebanon's internal divisions and a slow-burning proxy war that involves Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

The situation has calmed since the signing of a reconciliation agreement in early September, but two bombings targeting the military have left at least 15 soldiers dead since that time. "I don't think they have solved the real problem; we're hiding the guns for now, but they will be out in a second when [the two sides] disagree again," said Hassan, a part-time soccer coach. More than 20 people died in street clashes in late spring and early summer.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said last month that any progress in Lebanon is meaningless before the "eradication of extremists and Salafis moving freely in northern Lebanon." Salafis are Muslims who espouse, sometimes violently, a strict interpretation of Islam that they say is rooted in the era of the prophet Muhammad.

The Syrian government has increased the number of troops it has deployed along its border with Lebanon, a step that some interpreted as a sign of Syrian concern that its Alawite supporters in Tripoli could face attacks by Sunni extremists. Hassan and other residents say the role of Islamist fighters in Tripoli is being exaggerated to justify further violence.

The strife in Tripoli is also an expression of the uncertainty that Lebanese feel about their future and the ascendancy of the Shiite Hezbollah movement, which is backed by Syria and Iran.

After a power play that involved sending fighters into predominantly Sunni West Beirut in May, Hezbollah and allied groups wrested political concessions from Lebanon's Western-backed government, including veto power in a new cabinet and the passage of an electoral law that could give Hezbollah a majority in elections next summer.

"What happened in Beirut scared us," Hassan said.

"Hezbollah is trying to control Lebanon in general and to marginalize the Sunnis in particular," said Daii al-Islam al-Shahal, the Tripoli-based founder of the Salafi Jihad movement in Lebanon.

The Alawites sound no less beleaguered. "We're a minority, we're surrounded by Sunnis from all sides; it is not in our best interest to fight, but we will until the last man if we have to," said Rifaat Eid, the military chief of the Alawite Arab Democratic Party .

Some Lebanese politicians worry that Syria may intervene again in Lebanese affairs, but Syrian officials say the extra troops are in place only to combat smuggling. Last week, Assad issued a decree authorizing the government to establish formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon for the first time since the two countries became independent 60 years ago.

Officials in Tripoli disagree over the size of militant Islamist groups here and their links to international organizations.

In 2007, the Lebanese army battled Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni group with alleged ties to al-Qaeda, for three months at a Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli. Last week, security authorities arrested a cell whose members are linked to the group.

But Islamist groups in Tripoli are as diversified in names and ideologies as they are in affiliations and sources of funding.

Most at some point have been suppressed by Lebanese authorities. Many are funded by Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries, and many others are said to have links with Syrian intelligence.

"I get my funding from many countries in the Gulf, but this money, I use to spread the ideology, not to buy weapons. We are not a militia," Shahal said. Many of Shahal's supporters were arrested in 2000 following clashes with the Lebanese army in the Dinnieh area, where the Salafis had set up a training camp tied to al-Qaeda, according to Lebanese security sources.

Shahal denies charges that his supporters were planning to impose strict Islamic rule in Lebanon and says that they "were wrong" to set up the camp. "They should have been more patient," he said, complaining about political and economic deprivation in the area.

Hassan's Bab al-Tebbaneh neighborhood and the surrounding communities are impoverished places, full of unemployed young men. The Abou Ali River, which separates Bab al-Tebbaneh from the wealthier parts of Tripoli, is filled with garbage and dead animals. Giant, glossy posters of rival politicians covering houses and small buildings seem to be the only new feature in a dusty region that is still in ruins from Lebanon's civil war, which ended in 1990.

The animosity between the residents of Bab al-Tebbaneh and their Alawite neighbors in the Jabal Mohsen area goes back to the beginning of the civil war, when Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat took refuge in Bab al-Tebbaneh and bombed the pro-Syrian Alawites.

When the Syrians took over the city following a battle, they killed local leaders; many in Bab al-Tebbaneh hold them responsible for a 1986 massacre that left more than 600 people dead. The Syrians deny any role in the killings.

Many residents in Bab al-Tebbaneh say they are convinced that reconciliation has been so elusive in Tripoli because leaders exploit the unstable security situation for political purposes. Some of the fighters here say they are determined to defend their neighborhoods against this manipulation.

One Wednesday in late June, the usually busy streets of Bab al-Tebbaneh were deserted -- except for the so-called Syria road, which has become the demarcation line between Bab al-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen.

Big truck wheels closed the entrance to Abou Abdallah Aswad's coffee shop, where he sat sipping fresh coffee and holding his Kalashnikov. Guns rested on the table in front of him and in the arms of dozens of men tired from a night of fighting.

On the street, Hassan stood with his men. All of them, young and old, were armed. Their looks reflected different affiliations. Among them were Salafis, wearing beards, kaftans and short pants; others wore black headbands and army pants, and some of the younger men were in baggy jeans, with big chains around their necks.

Hassan said that he has seen his neighborhood move from one stage of destitution to another since his childhood and that he had taken up his gun in its defense several times: first as a leftist teenager in the 1970s, then as a radical Islamist in the 1980s. Most of his 20s, he said, were spent in Syrian prisons, but since his release in 2000, he has become more involved in social work and now coaches a soccer team.

"The only cause I fight for is to defend myself, my family and my neighborhood," he said (Ibrahim, A. 2008, 'Lebanese City's Strife Reflects 2 Conflicts; Tripoli Rocked by Internal Rifts and Mideast Proxy War', *Washington Post*, 22 October – Attachment 1).

17 October 2008, *International Herald Tribune*:

The crumbling streets of this ancient northern city are starting to resemble a battleground.

A string of bombings over the past two months has left at least 20 people dead, most of them Lebanese Army soldiers, and scores of wounded. Hard-line Sunni Islamist leaders have gained new followers here, fueling sectarian violence that has scarred the city and its economy. Already, the president of neighboring Syria has warned that northern Lebanon has become "a real source of extremism and a danger to Syria."

But this being Lebanon, it is not clear what part of all this is terrorism and what is just election-year politics – or which of those is more dangerous.

Many Lebanese political leaders say Syria and its allies here – including the Shiite militant group Hezbollah, which has little power in northern Lebanon – are trying to win votes in the coming parliamentary elections by smearing their opponents with the image of Al Qaeda. Some openly accuse Syria of orchestrating the bombings.

"The north is the victim of terrorism, not the source of it," said Ahmad Fatfat, a member of Parliament from the northern region of Dounieh. "Someone is trying to send a message to the people, to make them believe the Sunnis of the north are the real danger in Lebanon."

The absence of clear evidence makes such arguments inevitable. Even when the Lebanese authorities make an arrest – as they did on Sunday, accusing a jihadist cell of carrying out the bombings in Tripoli – basic questions persist because foreign powers have so often used such groups as proxies inside Lebanon in the past.

One thing is clear: Much is riding on the elections, scheduled for next spring. Hezbollah and its allies stand to gain a parliamentary majority for the first time. That would be another striking setback for American policy in the region and would probably make Israel view all of Lebanon, not just Hezbollah, as its enemy in future wars.

At the same time, behind the accusations and counteraccusations about the bombings lies an indisputable fact: Sectarian tensions have grown worse in the north, feeding extremist sentiment and prompting more citizens to arm themselves.

The vast bulk of the population is Sunni Arab and supports Saad Hariri, the parliamentary leader of the Western-allied government majority that opposes Hezbollah. Sunnis were deeply angered in May, when Hezbollah briefly took over the capital and destroyed the offices of Hariri's political movement and its media outlets.

After Hezbollah's takeover, a low-level war broke out in Tripoli between two adjacent neighborhoods of the city, one Sunni, the other Alawite, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and allied with Syria. The fighting ended last month with a truce, but some violence has continued, and army officials say they expect more attacks.

At the same time, hard-line religion has spread among Tripoli's large population of jobless young men, many of them disenchanted with Hariri's secular leadership. The spread of Salafism, a puritanical current within Islam, has become commonplace in the Lebanese press.

"A lot of young people have joined the Salafists since May," said Fakher al-Ayoubi, a journalist from Tripoli and an expert on Islamist movements in the north.

"Some of them don't even know how to pray, but they like the idea of fighting the Alawites and Hezbollah."

There are dozens of militant factions in Tripoli alone, and many have gained new weapons since the neighborhood fighting began in May.

The presence of the Palestinian camps, where Qaeda-style radicalism is known to flourish and where Lebanese security forces are barred from entering, makes it even harder to keep track of militants.

These germs of militancy have burst into violence before. During the summer of 2007, the Lebanese Army battled fighters from the militant group Fatah al Islam, which is aligned with Al Qaeda, in the Nahr al Bared Palestinian refugee camp. Many believe that the recent attacks on the army are revenge for the 2007 fighting, in which the camp was nearly leveled.

But Islamists in Tripoli say they believe that Syria fostered Fatah al Islam, and they bristle at the suggestion that Lebanese Sunnis would think of attacking the army. There are few families here without a relative in the army, whose troops in the north are themselves mostly Sunni.

"We don't want anyone to attack the army; they are our brothers," said Bilal Daqmaq, a cleric who openly says he admires Osama bin Laden and who served as a mediator between the army and Fatah al Islam during the 2007 battle. "What Fatah al Islam did was criminal and wrong."

Like many other Islamists here, Daqmaq said he also believed that Syria was behind the recent attacks on the army. He said the leader of Fatah al Islam, Shaker al-Absi, had told him that Syria pushed him into a confrontation with the Lebanese government last year. It is well known that Absi, who remains at large, was released from a Syrian prison before becoming the leader of Fatah al Islam, though Syria denies that it had anything to do with him afterward.

Daqmaq and others like him say they have nothing to gain from sowing chaos in their own backyard, or from provoking confrontations with better-armed neighbors.

Since Hezbollah seized control of Beirut in May, Lebanon has formed a caretaker government, ending its long political crisis, and there have been several high-profile efforts to mend frayed relations between some of the major political parties. Even the Salafists announced an accord with Hezbollah in September, though it quickly collapsed.

But several Islamist leaders here said they were stockpiling weapons to be used for protection against Hezbollah or Syria. Their fears are not irrational: In the mid-1980s Syria invaded northern Lebanon and killed or imprisoned hundreds of Islamists.

Although Syria withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, it retained armed allies here – including the Alawite community in Tripoli – and a network of agents in the Lebanese security services.

The conflict here sometimes resembles a proxy war, with the Sunnis in the north drawing support, directly or indirectly, from Saudi Arabia, which is locked in a bitter diplomatic feud with Syria.

“It’s as if there were fire underground here all the time, and in May, it suddenly burst up onto the surface,” said Arabi, a 30-year-old Sunni man who fought in the Sunni-**Alawite** battles that raged in Tripoli through the spring and summer, and who goes by one name. His father was killed by the Syrians in 1986, and he believes that his destiny is to continue that struggle, he said.

Whether the fire will burst up from underground again remains to be seen. But the current atmosphere bodes poorly for peaceful elections.

Last month, thousands of Syrian soldiers deployed near the border with northern Lebanon. Syria said they were there to fight cross-border smuggling. In Lebanon, their presence was widely viewed as an effort at intimidation and reasserting control.

Many here say that effort is likely to backfire, further provoking the extremism Syria would like to control. “In the past, Syria has killed many people here under the pretext of fighting terrorism,” said Daqmaq, the cleric. “But the difference now is that there is a big lion called Al Qaeda, and the Syrians fear it” (Worth, R. 2008, ‘Sectarian tensions boil in Lebanon’s north Growing militancy bodes ill for vote’, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 October – Attachment 2).

10 October 2008, *Reuters*:

Grenade blasts echo nightly across a sectarian frontline in Lebanon’s northern city of Tripoli despite a month-old reconciliation pact.

Two bomb attacks that killed 17 soldiers and five civilians in August and September have also fuelled tensions in Lebanon’s second biggest city, a Sunni Muslim stronghold where Islamist groups are active -- and perhaps some hardcore militants.

“There is old blood between us. There’s no solution. It’s us or them,” growled Abu Bilal, an imposing man in a black T-shirt, who sat smoking with half a dozen young men and watching the dilapidated backstreets of Bab Tebbaneh, a Sunni bastion.

He boasted of the weaponry -- assault rifles, machineguns mortars and rocket-propelled grenades -- that he said his group had bought from arms dealers with locally raised funds.

Just up the hill in the rival Alawite district of Jebel Mohsen, Fuad Mutwari, a trader, said the reconciliation sealed on Sept. 8 after four months of sporadic street fighting would not bring lasting peace unless both sides were disarmed.

“They got weapons from Egypt, hidden under mangos. And we got arms from Syria too,” he said. “You know how it is.”

Buildings in both areas are scarred by bullet holes and rocket impacts. Some Alawite-owned shops in Bab Tebbaneh are blackened with fire after their Sunni neighbours torched them.

People on both sides link their troubles to Lebanon’s broader struggle pitting an alliance led by Hezbollah, a Shi’ite group backed by Iran and Syria, against Sunni, Druze and Christian factions supported by the West and its Arab allies.

Muslim clerics say Tripoli’s conflicts are political, not religious, but sectarian hatreds simmer at street level, despite sporadic efforts by Lebanon’s politicians to calm them.

“Hezbollah’s weapons are supposed to be against Israel, but they turned them on us in Beirut,” said Walid Faraj, 40, alluding to Hezbollah’s brief seizure of Beirut in May. “Of course Hezbollah is trying to crush the Sunnis.”

Lebanese army troops separate the combatants along a main road dividing the two communities, which fought fierce battles in the 1980s during Lebanon’s 15-year civil war.

BLOODSTAINED MEMORIES

People in Bab Tebbaneh readily recall the bloodshed of 1985 when Syrian troops and their Lebanese allies assaulted Sunni Islamist militants who had created a mini-state in Tripoli.

Their Alawite neighbours, whose sect is an offshoot of Shi’ism, say they feel threatened by an Islamist revival in this city of 600,000, where they form a minority of some 40,000.

“We don’t want war, so it would be best if the Syrians came back because no one controlled Lebanon like they did,” said Suleiman Khanat, a cafe owner sitting with Mutwari and a group of sharply dressed young men with gelled hair and tattooed arms.

Jebel Mohsen is the fiefdom of a party with close links to Syria, whose president, Bashar al-Assad, is himself an Alawite.

Assad said last month he was worried by “extremist forces” in Tripoli and raised fears of Syrian intervention by sending extra troops to the border with north Lebanon.

Syria also accused Islamists from a nearby Arab country of being behind a suicide bombing that killed 17 people in Damascus on Sept. 27, but did not say whether they had come from Lebanon.

Syrian officials say the army deployment on the border -- which prompted a U.S. warning against any Syrian move into Lebanon -- is to combat smuggling, especially of diesel.

The Syrians controlled Lebanon for 29 years until forced out after the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, but insist they have no desire to return.

Diplomats in the region say Syria has deployed only a few hundred lightly armed troops near the Lebanese border.

A senior political source in Beirut said Assad's action targeted Lebanese Sunnis who depend on the contraband trade -- and are loyal to Saad al-Hariri, son of the slain premier and leader of Lebanon's anti-Syrian majority alliance.

With parliamentary elections due in Lebanon next May, many people in Tripoli fear more violence as local and national factions -- and their foreign backers -- jockey for advantage.

"We've had enough," said Haitham Dandashi, 62, a shopkeeper in Bab Tebbaneh. "I have 12 children and I'm fed up with wondering whether they'll come home safe from school."

At an Alawite-owned pharmacy nearby, Ali Shamsin, 37, said he was desperate to leave Bab Tebbaneh, where he said gangs levied protection money and hoodlums demanded drugs.

"The situation is still scary. I close at 3 p.m. instead of at 10 or 11 at night like before," he said.

On the edge of Jebel Mohsen, the Mahfouz family lives in a small, exposed hillside house. Its top floor was destroyed in the civil war and the one below was damaged two months ago.

"Someone threw a grenade near here last night," said Fida Mahfouz, a 50-year-old woman with curly black hair, whose brother was killed on an upper floor by a sniper in 1982.

"We have no weapons in the house -- only the knife I chop parsley with," she smiled. "But where else can we go?" (Lyon, A. 2008, 'Feature – Tensions simmer in troubled Lebanese city', ReliefWeb, source: *Reuters*, 10 October

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MCOT-7KAC82?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=lb> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 21).

2 October 2008, Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

This past Monday, a Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) transport was targeted by a car bomb that killed five soldiers and wounded twenty-five others. The strike was the third on the LAF since June and occurred in increasingly violent northern Lebanon. In fact, violence in and around Tripoli, the largest city in the north, is now becoming routine. This explosive situation threatens the country's already fragile stability, while providing Syria with an opportunity to loosen the pro-Western ruling coalition's tenuous hold on power.

Recent Violence

In May, the Lebanese government made the unprecedented decision to curtail Hizballah's control over Beirut airport and to dismantle the Shiite militia's telecommunications network. Hizballah, a Syrian- and Iranian-backed militia, demanded that the government reverse the decision. When it refused, the organization mobilized its forces to take control of Beirut.

Sunni-Alawite fighting. Images of Hizballah manhandling March 14-aligned Sunni Muslims in the capital enraged Lebanon's Sunnis, sparking reprisal attacks against the Shiite organization's Syrian-backed allies in the Alawite community in the north. The Syrian government is dominated by that country's Alawite minority and has close ties with the community in Lebanon. Sunni Muslims, some of whom are religiously conservative Salafists

-- reportedly backed by Saudi Arabia, where Salafism is the government-sanctioned school of Islam -- attacked the headquarters of the Syrian Socialist Party and other opposition strongholds in and around Tripoli. (In this complicated situation, still other Sunni militants are supported by Syria.) After nine people were killed on June 23, the LAF was deployed to quell the hostilities. Fighting was temporarily halted, but the LAF had to be redeployed in July when violence resumed.

On August 13, a bus bomb in Tripoli killed fifteen people, including ten LAF soldiers. On September 8, political leaders from northern Lebanon signed an agreement -- brokered by March 14 leader Saad Hariri -- which brought a respite from the violence until this week's attack.

Lebanese Forces-Marada killings. A few weeks after the August 13 attack, members of the March 14--allied Christian Lebanese Forces (LF) clashed with pro-Syrian Christian Marada party members near Tripoli. Skirmishes centered on an LF rally slated to be held adjacent to Marada party headquarters; in the resulting violence, Yousef Franjiyeh, head of the party's office in Bsarma, was killed. At a press conference on September 17, Marada party head Suleiman Franjiyeh accused LF leader Samir Geagea and LF parliament member Farid Habib of complicity in the killing and demanded to hear results of the investigation "within fifteen days."

Heightened Concerns about Syria

The fighting in northern Lebanon raises concerns that the conflict may escalate and broaden, bringing Lebanon once again to the brink of civil war. For March 14, reports that the Alawite Syrian regime was arming its Lebanese co-religionists resembled the events of May 2007 when the Syrian-backed al-Qaeda affiliate, Fatah Islam, beheaded twenty-five LAF officers, touching off a four-month battle in the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli. More troubling, however, were statements from Damascus that continued fighting in north Lebanon threatened Syrian interests. Lebanese officials were particularly incensed by Syrian president Bashar al-Asad's comments on September 4 about the "fragile" security situation in the north, which he attributed to "foreign-backed [Saudi] extremism." As March 14 leader Walid Jumblatt described, "al-Asad is linking Syrian security and the situation in north Lebanon. He has used it as a new pretext to interfere in Lebanese affairs."

On September 22, the eve of Lebanese president Michel Suleiman's visit to Washington, several Lebanese networks reported Syrian troops massing on the border, a move portrayed as a measure to defend Syria against Lebanese Salafists. Less than a week later, on September 27, in the most brazen terrorist attack on Syrian soil since the 1980s, a massive car bomb exploded in Damascus.

Predictably, the Syrian government has attributed the Damascus attack to "Sunni fundamentalists" -- i.e., al-Qaeda. Given the opaque nature of Syria, the Asad regime's longstanding support for terrorists, and the government's propensity for killing its own citizens, this attribution is far from certain. For instance, the Syrians are suspected in several local political murders, including former Syrian viceroy of Lebanon Ghazi Kenaan. He is believed to have been killed because he knew too much about the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri -- a crime for which Syria is the leading suspect -- and, more recently, the killing of Muhammad Suleiman, who was in charge of Syria's nuclear program.

At the same time, it would not be surprising if Sunni fundamentalists were able to carry out operations in Syria. Since 2003, the Asad regime has assisted al-Qaeda members by facilitating their travel across Syrian territory into Iraq and, according to U.S. Central Command, has allowed the organization to train on its territory. It has also facilitated the

movement of Sunni militants into Lebanon and reportedly Jordan. Through these actions, Damascus has permitted Salafist presence on its territory, leaving itself vulnerable to attacks.

Little Prospect for Progress in the National Dialogue

On September 16, Lebanese leaders convened for a national dialogue session at Baabda presidential palace, under the auspices of President Suleiman. The top item on the agenda was the national defense strategy, i.e., what role Hizballah's military force should play in Lebanon. The issue has been at the top of a long list of controversial topics since Hizballah unilaterally launched a cross-border raid in July 2006, bringing Lebanon into war with Israel.

More recently, the issue of a national defense strategy regained prominence due to what appeared to be a case of mistaken identity. On August 28, a Hizballah fighter in south Lebanon opened fire on an LAF helicopter, killing the pilot. The killer, who said he believed the helicopter was Israeli, was turned over by Hizballah to Lebanese authorities. During an early-September television appearance, Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah called the incident "regrettable" -- while noting that the shooter was behaving "naturally or instinctively" -- and issued condolences to the family of the LAF "martyr."

The helicopter incident and Hizballah's 2006 raid into Israel highlight the necessity for a national defense strategy. Beirut does not exert sovereignty over Lebanon, nor will it until Hizballah's weapons are brought under the authority of the state. During his inaugural speech on May 26, Suleiman laid out a formula making the LAF the primary defender of Lebanon, but also noting that the army would "benefit from the capabilities of the resistance in the service of the national defense strategy." It is unclear, however, how the president intends to make this contorted plan a reality. Regardless, given Hizballah's longstanding aversion to relinquishing any operational freedom to the state, there is little indication that the dialogue on national defense will produce a solution under which the Lebanese government controls the country -- in fact as well as in name.

Conclusion

For the immediate future, violence in the north and against the LAF will continue to challenge the country's stability. The national dialogue may serve to calm some prevailing local tensions, but it is unlikely to resolve key points of contention between the March 14 coalition and the Hizballah-led opposition. Meanwhile, if the Asad regime remains true to form, Damascus will leverage the situation to weaken its pro-West enemies in Beirut. The Sunni problem in north Lebanon, which has been fueled at least in part by Syria, undermines the central Sunni component of the March 14 coalition to the benefit of Hizballah. As the spring 2009 Lebanese elections approach, it is a trend that does not bode well for Washington and its allies in Beirut (Schenker, D. 2008, 'Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again', *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

30 September 2008, *Bloomberg*:

A wave of sectarian strife is besetting Lebanon's second-largest city, raising the risk of another nationwide civil war as rivalry between Muslim Sunnis and Shiites spreads across the Middle East.

Yesterday's military-bus bombing in Tripoli, which killed at least five and wounded 24, followed an upsurge in violence in the city that has claimed 40 lives in four months.

There's "a fierce power struggle" between Sunnis and Shiites in Tripoli, said Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, author of "Hizbullah: Politics and Religion," a history of the militant Shiite movement. "The situation has already been seen to be dangerous and is getting more so."

Tripoli's troubles began in May, when the city's majority Sunnis took up arms against the Alawites, a minority Shiite offshoot allied with Hezbollah, Lebanon's dominant party and militia.

Violence has persisted since the signing of an Alawite-Sunni cease-fire on Sept. 9, which followed failed efforts for a broader "non-aggression pact" between the city's Sunnis and Hezbollah. No group claimed responsibility for the bus bombing.

The Sunnis' attacks in Tripoli were retaliation against the Shiite takeover of western parts of Lebanon's capital, Beirut, four months ago. Hezbollah pulled out of the area after winning effective veto power over the cabinet of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, a Sunni.

Disproportionate Power

The Shiites' actions in Beirut were aimed at securing more proportional political influence. They make up 45 percent of the population, Sunnis 30 percent and Christians 25 percent. Yet the country's political system gives all three roughly equal power, guaranteeing each a top post -- prime minister for the Sunnis, president for the Maronite Christians and parliament speaker for the Shiites.

Sunnis regard Shiites as deserters of true Islam because they revere Ali, a cousin of the prophet Mohammed -- a rivalry that goes back 1,400 years.

Last week on satellite television, a leading Sunni preacher, Egyptian-born Youssef Qaradawy, denounced an "invasion" by Shiite "heretics" of "Sunni lands." Since December, the oil-rich Persian Gulf state of Bahrain, a Sunni-ruled kingdom, has been periodically hit by protests from the majority Shiite population over joblessness and lack of government representation. Minority Shiites in Kuwait have also demonstrated for equal rights.

On Sept. 22, New York-based Human Rights Watch criticized Saudi Arabia for treating the Ismaelis, part of the country's Shiite minority, as "second-class citizens."

'Real' and 'Growing'

"Sunni-Shiite rivalry is real and it's growing," wrote Mark N. Katz, a politics professor at George Mason University in Virginia, in the Sept. 27 issue of Middle East Times.

Shiite-governed Iran backs Hezbollah, as does Syria, which is controlled by the Alawites. On Sept. 23, the Lebanese army warned that Syria was massing 10,000 troops on the border north of Tripoli, raising concerns it would intervene on behalf of the city's Alawites. Syrian officials said the soldiers were just hunting smugglers.

Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war primarily pitted Christians against Sunnis. The Sunni-Shiite antipathy plays into global rivalries. The U.S. supports the Siniora government and regards Hezbollah as a terrorist organization at the service of Syria and Iran. U.S. allies Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt have warned of the spread of Iran's influence through Shiite surrogates.

Diversion From Israel

For Hezbollah, Sunni antagonism is a diversion from preparations for possible armed conflict with Israel, with which its militia fought a 33-day war in 2006.

“We need good relations with all Lebanese in order to concentrate on resistance” to the Jewish state, said Imad Awada, a Hezbollah spokesman in the town of Nabatiyeh.

Hezbollah’s lead opponents in Tripoli, population 220,000, came from the Salafis, a branch of Sunni Islam akin to Osama Bin Laden’s Wahhabi sect. Salafi preacher Bilal Baroudi said the ultimate solution is simple: disarm Hezbollah.

“We are not going to do what the people in Beirut did: stay inside and let Hezbollah take over,” he said during an interview at a Tripoli mosque. “They are working for Iran, not Lebanon.” He said Sunnis should form their own militia.

Such calls put the Siniora government in an awkward position, because it wants all militias banned. Government supporters also fear that Sunni resentment is bolstering the Salafis, whose brand of Islam includes limits on others’ religious practices and on women and sometimes violent attacks on perceived heretics. Salafis represent about 10 percent of Tripoli’s Sunnis.

‘Anti-Hezbollah Banner’

“People feel defenseless, and so the Salafis end up speaking for them,” said Misbaah Al-Ahdab, 32, a parliament representative from Tripoli. “If I had it my way, we would not have anything to do with the Salafis, but they are carrying the anti-Hezbollah banner.”

Atop Jebel Mohsen, an Alawite ghetto on a Tripoli hill, bullet holes in walls of tall buildings and fire-gutted apartments revive memories of the civil war.

Asking Sunnis below for directions to the area invites hostile looks, drawn knives and even a pulled pistol. Tripoli’s Alawites, numbering about 15,000, say they are caught in the middle because there are few mainstream Shiites in Tripoli to attack.

Rifaat Ali Eid, 30, leader of an Alawite party, said that throughout the summer, workers from Jebel Mohsen could not go to jobs in the city. His militia brought them food purchased with donations from abroad, he said, showing off a check for \$50,000 that he indicated came from Australia.

“We’re the most convenient targets, the stand-in for Hezbollah,” he said. “Our problem can only be solved when the Shiites and Sunnis solve theirs” (Williams, D. 2008, ‘Tripoli Turmoil Increases Risk of a Sunni-Shiite War in Lebanon’, *Bloomberg*, 30 September <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=a.emfPHnt0.o&refer=europe#> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 3).

In mid-September there were reports that Syria was arming and/or operating out of Alawite villages in north Lebanon. A 15 September 2008 *Ya Libnan* article quotes an Israeli website stating that “Two Syrian commando battalions have crossed into Lebanon during the last 48 hours and taken up positions in seven Alawite-controlled villages in north Lebanon”.

However, the article states that Lebanese military sources denied the reports were true. The article states:

Lebanese sources have also confirmed that Syrian commandos have crossed the border and began operating around the Lebanese village of Hekr Al Dahr near the Mediterranean Sea. The sources said the commandos were supported by Syrian helicopters and main battle tanks along the Lebanese border.

Just over one week ago International Analyst Network, a web site that deals with Counter-terrorism, has reported that “‘hundreds’ of Syrian commandos, preceded by ‘dozens’ of

Syrian intelligence operatives, have crossed into northern Lebanon near the Lebanese village of Hekr el Dahr and that Syrian helicopters had been observed operating on the Syrian side of the border, and tanks and artillery pieces have been spotted and reported” (“Syrian commandos deploy in north Lebanon – reports’ 2008, *Ya Libnan*, 15 September http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/09/syrian_commando.php – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 19).

Earlier allegations of Syrian intelligence officers arming Alawite villages in Lebanon were also reported in June 2008. In a June article in *The National*, Nicholas Blanford writes:

Media reports in Lebanon last week claimed that Syrian intelligence officers have been infiltrating the Alawite villages distributing money and weapons. Although the reports have yet to be verified, tensions have been building in Akkar and some analysts said that it will be the next region to see outbreaks of violence. In the cramped, rubbish-strewn streets of Tebbaneh, at the foot of Jabal Mohsen, residents are bracing for more violence (Blanford, N. 2008, ‘Explosion heightens tensions in Lebanon’, *The National*, 28 June <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080628/FOREIGN/353382802/1043> – Accessed 21 July 2008 – Attachment 24).

In late August an imam was killed during fighting in a northern Lebanon village between local Alawites and Sunnis. A September 2008 *Christian Science Monitor* article describes the incident. The article also reports on the then recently signed reconciliation deal. The article states:

The dispute began over a tiny single-room mosque. The local Alawites controlled it, but the village’s Sunnis claimed it as their own. Late last month, the struggle turned violent, pitting neighbor against neighbor and leaving a religious cleric dead. Order was only restored after the forceful intervention of Lebanese troops.

The recent violence and continuing friction in this remote village beside Lebanon’s northern border with Syria underline the challenges facing a widely hailed reconciliation deal reached this week by feuding political leaders that is supposed to ease sectarian tensions between rival factions in northern Lebanon.

“This reconciliation effort will go nowhere because pressure has been building in the north for months,” says Walid Abbas, a resident of Sheikhlar.

The agreement, signed Monday by top leaders in the north Lebanon city of Tripoli, is being treated as an opportunity to end months of sporadic clashes between local Alawite and Sunni groups in the area, which has left more than 20 people dead and dozens wounded. But political and sectarian divisions remain deep here, stirred further by allegations of meddling between regional rivals Syria and Saudi Arabia.

“Despite this deal, the differences are still there, and they are big differences. There is no guarantee that it will work as it depends on the will of the sponsors of the local Lebanese groups – Syria and Saudi Arabia,” says Sarkis Naoum, a columnist for Lebanon’s *An Nahar* newspaper.

The reconciliation deal comes as Lebanon’s political bosses, with an eye on what promises to be knife-edge parliamentary elections next May, attempt to shore up grass-roots support and weigh the possibility of new political alliances.

But the political climate remains volatile. On Wednesday night, Sheikh Saleh Aridi, a senior aide to Talal Arslan, the leading Druze opposition figure, was killed in a car bombing in the mountains overlooking Beirut. His murder, the first of an opposition figure since 2005, came

amid speculation of a potential electoral partnership between the pro-Syrian Mr. Arslan and his traditional Druze rival, Walid Jumblatt, an outspoken critic of Damascus.

The assassination has cast a shadow over the Tripoli cease-fire agreement, which was reached following a reconciliation meeting between Saad Hariri, leader of the Sunni Future Movement, and Ali Eid, head of the Arab Democratic Party which represents Lebanon's Alawite community.

Alawites are a splinter of Shiite Islam and number around 100,000 in Lebanon, living in the hill-top Jabal Mohsen district of Tripoli and a cluster of villages along Lebanon's northern border with Syria. The community is a close ally of the Alawite-dominated regime in Syria. Saudi Arabia backs the Future Movement.

The six-point reconciliation package calls for the removal of armed men from the streets of Tripoli and pledges economic revival programs for the impoverished area. "Tripoli must be disarmed. Weapons do not protect anyone," said Prime Minister Fouad Siniora at Monday's signing ceremony.

But few residents of Sheikhlar, 40 miles northeast of Tripoli, believe that the reconciliation deal will resolve deep-rooted suspicions between Sunni and Alawite communities in north Lebanon. Those tensions have their origin in the years of Damascus's hegemony over Lebanon, when the pro-Syrian Alawites, originally treated poorly by the larger Sunni population, prospered while local Sunni Islamists were persecuted.

The dispute in Sheikhlar centered on the religious affiliation of a tiny mosque of whitewashed walls surmounted by a green dome. Local residents said the mosque originally belonged to the village's Sunni community but was taken over by the Alawites in the late-1970s when Syria was in control of the area.

With Syria having withdrawn its troops from Lebanon in 2005, the Dar al-Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni religious institution, recently decreed that the mosque should be restored to the Sunni community. Local Alawites refused to turn the building over, and some militants barricaded themselves inside. A tense standoff ensued.

A local Alawite parliamentarian is alleged to have brought a carload of weapons to the militants inside the mosque, a claim not denied by Rifaat Eid, son of Alawite leader Ali Eid. "We are a minority and we need weapons before we need food," he says.

The climax came when Sheikh Ezzedine Qassem, the Sunni imam of neighboring Aidamoun village, was shot dead outside the mosque, allegedly by an Alawite sniper, while trying to mediate an end to the crisis. "After the sheikh was killed, all the people in the village grabbed their weapons and ran toward the mosque," says Mohammed Ali, a Sunni resident.

The Army, which had deployed to the village to impose order, traded gunfire with the vengeful Sunnis, to prevent them attacking the Alawites in the mosque. One soldier was wounded and several Sunni militants were arrested, provoking anger from residents. "The people here are upset with the way the security forces took control of the situation. We feel that they sided with the Alawites against us," says Mustafa Abbas, a Sunni resident of Aidamoun.

The Alawite defenders in the mosque abandoned it and fled across the Kabir River, a few hundred yards north, which marks part of Lebanon's border with Syria.

With the mosque now sealed off and protected by Lebanese soldiers, the violent dispute remains a raw wound for local Sunnis, who demand justice for the slain cleric. Meanwhile,

the nervous Greek Orthodox inhabitants, the largest sect among Sheikhlar's population of under 1,000, are keeping a low profile, anxious for the future.

"We have always lived together in peace here. We work together peacefully. Sunnis marry Alawites and Christians marry Sunnis. We do not need this kind of schism in our village," says Rifaat Mackoul, the Greek Orthodox mayor of Sheikhlar (Blanford, N. 2008, 'Lebanese sects aim to end clashes', *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 September <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0912/p06s02-wome.html> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 16).

10 September 2008, *NOW Lebanon*:

International players continue to arm their local proxies in the city

The agreement reached Monday night under the auspices of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora between MP Saad Hariri's Future Movement and former opposition leaders, including Alawi former MP Ali Eid, on ending the recurrent violence in Tripoli may bring a glimmer of hope to the impoverished northern city and the surrounding regions.

However, underneath the celebrations of reconciliation and promises of economic development, various power struggles are going on in the northern capital, which paint a grimmer picture of the city's future.

Plagued by poverty and with a vulnerable population, the city is susceptible to the interference of its dominating neighbor to the north, Syria, and the Gulf countries and Iran to the east, all regional powers that are connected in one way or another with various Tripoli factions.

Sunni Islamic parties in the city, including Salafists, have branched out into numerous splinter factions. The Tawhid party is divided into two parts, one led by Sheikh Bilal Shaaban, a close ally of Hezbollah who is said to be financed by Iran, while the other is headed by Sheikh Hashem Minkara, a staunch Syria supporter.

Towering over Tripoli's southern flank is the Abi Samra quarter, known as a bastion of Salafism. Men in beards and long white dishdashas stroll around the squares dotting the neighborhood that provide a rare few patches of green. Around the areas where radical factions have their headquarters, armed men, the body guards of Islamic leaders such as Bilal Shaaban, position themselves at intersections, seemingly oblivious to the army tanks stationed a few meters away.

The Lebanese Salafist movement is dominated by Sheikh Dai al-Islam Chahhal, son of Sheikh Salem Chahhal, who founded Lebanese Salafism in the 1970s. The movement is also comprised of other minority figures, such as Hassan Chahhal, famous for his recent, although brief, memorandum of understanding with Hezbollah. Siraj Mounir al-Boukhari and Safwan Zohbi are also Salafist players in the city.

Islamic cleric Sheikh Omar Bakri told *NOW Lebanon* that "due to its financial connection with Gulf countries, the Salafist community in Tripoli acutely reflects the various alliances and dissensions emerging among regional powers. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, he continued, seem to be jockeying for position, building mosques and supporting the various Islamic charities in the city.

According to a source from the Salafist community, the various Islamic factions also maintain excellent rapports with high-ranking officers from the army and ISF, which he confirmed

often supply them with weapons. “Everyone in the Islamic community has obtained a cover from either a security force or a political block,” he added.

A changing field

After Hezbollah’s attempted military coup in May, “a radicalization of popular sentiment has certainly been observed in Tripoli,” said Future Movement and Tripoli MP Mustapha Allouch. This led to the increase of radicalism, he continued, which exacerbated the long-standing feud between Jabal Mohsen, an Alawi stronghold, and neighboring Sunni Bab al-Tabbaneh, two communities that have been butting heads since the 1986 massacre by Syrians of at least 300 Tripoli inhabitants.

“I do not know who my enemy is, who am I fighting, and what I am fighting for,” Rifaat Ali Eid, son of Alawi MP Ali Eid, told NOW Lebanon. “This is the way Lebanese politics go: I am currently allied to the son of my father’s former adversary,” he added, referring to his association with Sheikh Bilal Shaaban.

Eid accused members of the opposition in Tripoli of having participated in the battles against Jabal Mohsen in order “to garner wider support in the upcoming parliamentary elections.”

“The power structure in the northern capital seems to be slowly breaking down, with each area progressively being taken over by a local war lord or gang leader,” said an army officer who wished to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the topic.

The officer said the state is losing its grip on the city because of the limited army intelligence and the army’s replacement by the ISF in the last few years, as well as the security forces’ neutrality in the absence of an official decision to end the conflict. “Elite forces, which are comprised of the army’s most skilled and trained soldiers, were recently replaced by the army’s 10th Brigade, as the task of keeping order without intervening had become quite demoralizing for troops known for their prowess in Nahr al-Bared,” he said, referring to the army’s 15-week battle with Palestinian militants in the northern refugee camp in 2007.

The source also said that regional powers are distributing weapons to their supporters via political figureheads. He noted that the Alawis are in possession of massive stockpiles of weapons, provided by the Syrians, information that Rifaat Ali Eid confirmed. Sources in the majority also reported rumors of truckloads of weapons being transferred to Jabal Mohsen in refrigerated trucks.

While the Tripoli Memorandum signed on Monday night gave hope that the security services, especially the army and the ISF, would play an “active and essential role” in preserving the stability and civil peace in the city, it remains to be seen if the document is strong enough to end a long-running feud that is fuelled by powerful and often belligerent outside forces (Alami, M. 2008, ‘Behind the scenes in Tripoli’, Reform Party of Syria website, source: NOW, 10 September http://www.reformsyria.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1252:1176-autosave&catid=83:middle-east&Itemid=200 – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 25).

Salafists

A number of analysts agree that Salafists have become a significant political force in Lebanon especially since Syria’s withdrawal. According to a 17 November 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article, the “puritanical Salafist version of Islam” is becoming part of the mainstream (Daraghi, B. 2008, ‘In Lebanon, puritanical Sunnis and a reputed playboy team up in politics’, *Los Angeles Times*, 17 November

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-salafists17-2008nov17,0,5268378.story> – Accessed 5 December 2008 – Attachment 26).

The *International Herald Tribune* article quoted above notes that a lot of young people have joined the Salafists since May, mainly to fight the Alawites and Hezbollah:

“A lot of young people have joined the Salafists since May,” said Fakher al-Ayoubi, a journalist from Tripoli and an expert on Islamist movements in the north.

“Some of them don’t even know how to pray, but they like the idea of fighting the Alawites and Hezbollah.”

There are dozens of militant factions in Tripoli alone, and many have gained new weapons since the neighborhood fighting began in May.

The presence of the Palestinian camps, where Qaeda-style radicalism is known to flourish and where Lebanese security forces are barred from entering, makes it even harder to keep track of militants (Worth, R. 2008, ‘Sectarian tensions boil in Lebanon’s north Growing militancy bodes ill for vote’, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 October – Attachment 2).

For information on Salafist jihadist groups and Tripoli, see:

Gambill, G. 2008, ‘Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 1, January-March http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0801/0801_1.htm - Accessed 19 June 2008 – Attachment 27;

Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, ‘Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists – A Growing Force’, *Carnegie Papers*, no. 6, January – Attachment 28;

Saab, B. & Ranstorp, M. 2007, ‘Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, no. 30, pp. 825-855. Sourced from Center for Democracy in Lebanon website [http://www.democracyinlebanon.com/Documents/CDL-World/SalafistJihadism\(SaabandRanstorp07\).pdf](http://www.democracyinlebanon.com/Documents/CDL-World/SalafistJihadism(SaabandRanstorp07).pdf) – Accessed 5 December 2008 – Attachment 29.

2. What steps, if any, have the authorities undertaken with respect to the conflict?

The Lebanese Army was deployed in force in June 2008 in an effort to quell the violence. Since then, the army itself has been targeted in Tripoli. A 6 October 2008 article states:

After nine people were killed on June 23, the LAF was deployed to quell the hostilities. Fighting was temporarily halted, but the LAF had to be redeployed in July when violence resumed.

On August 13, a bus bomb in Tripoli killed fifteen people, including ten LAF soldiers. On September 8, political leaders from northern Lebanon signed an agreement – brokered by March 14 leader Saad Hariri – which brought a respite from the violence until this week’s attack (Schenker, D. 2008, ‘Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again’, *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

A 10 September 2008 article, written not long after the reconciliation agreement was signed, states:

“The power structure in the northern capital seems to be slowly breaking down, with each area progressively being taken over by a local war lord or gang leader,” said an army officer who wished to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the topic.

The officer said the state is losing its grip on the city because of the limited army intelligence and the army’s replacement by the ISF in the last few years, as well as the security forces’ neutrality in the absence of an official decision to end the conflict. “Elite forces, which are comprised of the army’s most skilled and trained soldiers, were recently replaced by the army’s 10th Brigade, as the task of keeping order without intervening had become quite demoralizing for troops known for their prowess in Nahr al-Bared,” he said, referring to the army’s 15-week battle with Palestinian militants in the northern refugee camp in 2007.

The source also said that regional powers are distributing weapons to their supporters via political figureheads. He noted that the Alawis are in possession of massive stockpiles of weapons, provided by the Syrians, information that Rifaat Ali Eid confirmed. Sources in the majority also reported rumors of truckloads of weapons being transferred to Jabal Mohsen in refrigerated trucks.

While the Tripoli Memorandum signed on Monday night gave hope that the security services, especially the army and the ISF, would play an “active and essential role” in preserving the stability and civil peace in the city, it remains to be seen if the document is strong enough to end a long-running feud that is fuelled by powerful and often belligerent outside forces (Alami, M. 2008, ‘Behind the scenes in Tripoli’, Reform Party of Syria website, source: *NOW*, 10 September http://www.reformsyria.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1252:1176-autosave&catid=83:middle-east&Itemid=200 – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 25).

In the latest report on the implementation of Security Council 1559, which calls for free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon without interference from foreign groups and for the disbanding of all militia, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes that the country “was taken to the brink of civil war and back”. According to this, troops have been temporarily deployed from southern Lebanon to address security concerns elsewhere, including Tripoli. He states that he is “gravely concerned by the emergence and apparent strengthening of extremist elements and foreign fighters based largely in and around Tripoli”, which constitute a challenge to the Government’s authority:

29. The continued existence and activities of militias as well as the allegations of widespread rearming and paramilitary training by groups on all sides of Lebanon’s political spectrum constitute a challenge for the exclusive military authority of the Government of Lebanon.

30. I am gravely concerned by the emergence and apparent strengthening of extremist elements and foreign fighters based largely in and around Tripoli. This phenomenon is but another challenge to the consolidation of the Government’s authority (UN Security Council 2008, *Eighth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)*, S/2008/654, UNHCR Refworld, 16 October, p. 6 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49057fac2.html> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 30).

The report also details the Secretary-General’s concerns about the “growing pattern of attacks against [Lebanon’s] armed forces”. There have been a number of attacks on the army in

Tripoli by unknown actors, reportedly Sunni Islamist extremist groups. The groups are being financed and armed by unknown players. Last year the army spent almost four months battling one of these groups (Fatah al-Islam) in the Palestinian camp, Nahr al-Barid, near Tripoli (UN Security Council 2008, *Eighth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)*, S/2008/654, UNHCR Refworld, 16 October, p. 6 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49057fac2.html> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 30).

On 13 October 2008 “members of the terrorist group allegedly involved in the recent bombings targeting the army in northern Lebanon were arrested, according to a statement released by the Lebanese army” (Alami, M. 2008, ‘Lebanon: Agreement Brings Peace To Tripoli, For Now’, *Inter Press Service*, 4 November – Attachment 23).

Local power-plays are also a factor in the response of “the authorities” to the situation. In August 2008, media articles reported that Hezbollah was attempting to sign a memorandum of understanding with Salafist groups in the north, which banned and denounced “all forms of sectarian incitement and ‘any aggression by a Muslim faction on another Muslim faction’”. The deal caused a lot of criticism, and was soon shelved. According to a 21 August 2008 article, the attempted deal was a botched “effort by Hizbullah to encroach on Hariri’s electoral base around Tripoli, a number of analysts told *The Daily Star* on Wednesday” (Khouri, R. 2008, ‘Absent the state, watch new pacts arise’, *Daily Star*, 20 August http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=5&article_id=95197# – Accessed 20 August 2008 – Attachment 14; Bluhm, M. 2008, ‘Hizbullah ‘botched’ bid to win over Sunnis; Analysts say attempted accord could hurt aoun’, *Daily Star*, 21 August – Attachment 15).

As noted above, a deal was brokered by Hariri himself only a few weeks later, in early September (Schenker, D. 2008, ‘Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again’, *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

Syria reportedly responded to the build-up of conflict and the bombing in Damascus by amassing 10,000 troops on the border. In some articles, such as a 30 September 2008 *Bloomberg* article, it is reported that there are concerns that Syria will intervene “on behalf of the city’s Alawites”. Others claim that Syria is using the fragile security situation in the north “as a new pretext to interfere in Lebanese affairs”, as MP Walid Jumblatt is quoted as saying in an October 2008 *PolicyWatch* article (Williams, D. 2008, ‘Tripoli Turmoil Increases Risk of a Sunni-Shiite War in Lebanon’, *Bloomberg*, 30 September <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=a.emfPHnt0.o&refer=europe#> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 3; Schenker, D. 2008, ‘Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again’, *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17).

As detailed in the *IRIN* articles quoted in the previous question, unlike Sunni families caught in the conflict, Alawite families have reportedly received little or no state assistance. Many have fled to Syria (‘Displaced Allawis find little relief in impoverished north’ 2008, Refworld, source: *IRIN*, 5 August <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/489c1be4c.html> - Accessed 1 September 2008 – Attachment 6).

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