



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Lebanon

Lebanon – LBN40151 – Future Movement
– Former Armed Services – Fatah al-Islam

14 May 2012

1. Can you please advise whether there is any recent evidence of the targeting of supporters of the Future Movement in northern Lebanon or in the rest of the country?

No recent information was located indicating that supporters of the Future Movement are being specifically targeted for harm in Lebanon. The current turmoil in Syria, however, could see the anti-Syrian Future Movement at risk as a result of possible conflict with supporters of the al Assad regime in Lebanon. According to an August 2011 report by the Jamestown Foundation:

As the turmoil affecting Syria persists with no apparent end in sight, fears about the potential impact of the crisis on Syria's neighbors remain at the fore. Among all of its neighbors, the complexity that defines Syria's relationship with Lebanon and the characteristics of Lebanese society and politics - linked inextricably in so many respects to Syria - leave Lebanon especially vulnerable to a spillover of violence and instability from Syria, which continues to enjoy tremendous influence in Lebanon even after withdrawing its troops from the country in 2005.

...

The most alarming repercussions of the crisis in Syria for Lebanon to date occurred on June 17 in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli. Anti-Syrian demonstrations organized by Sunnis there degenerated into armed clashes between Sunni militias and gunmen from Tripoli's minority Alawite community. It remains unclear which side initiated the violence that left six men dead and several others wounded. Members of both factions accuse each other of shooting first (al-Jazeera [Doha], June 17). The clashes occurred during a protest staged by an estimated 600 Sunnis in support of Syria's opposition forces (al-Jazeera, June 17). Tripoli's predominantly Sunni community is aligned with Lebanon's March 14 Alliance, a U.S. and Saudi Arabian-backed bloc featuring Sa'ad Hariri's Future Movement. The March 14 Alliance opposes Syria and its Lebanese allies, namely the ruling March 8 Alliance that includes Hezbollah and its benefactor, Iran. In contrast, Tripoli's Alawite minority is allied with the March 8 Alliance and looks to Syria for support. Alawites, a tiny minority in Lebanon who number between 50,000 to 60,000 members and are largely clustered in Tripoli and its environs, are a Muslim sect viewed as heretical by many Muslims.¹

In June 2011, *The Daily Star* reported that "[l]ess than two weeks after bloody clashes in Tripoli left eight people dead, the northern city's Future bloc lawmakers have pressed their demand for Tripoli to be declared an arms-free city during meetings with President Michel Sleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati". The clashes occurred between "gunmen from the mainly Sunni Bab al-Tabbaneh district and fighters from the predominately Alawite Jabal Mohsen neighbourhood on 17 June shortly after supporters of anti-regime protests in Syria staged a demonstration in Bab al-Tabbaneh". According to the report, the two districts "often

¹ Jamestown Foundation 2011, *Syrian Unrest Raises Sectarian Tensions in Lebanon*, UNHCR Refworld website, 4 August <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e3b95352.html>> Accessed 20 March 2012

clash, by Friday's incident came amid heightened tension over the widening popular uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad".²

In March 2011, Future Movement leader and then-Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri reportedly said that "Hezbollah's fierce campaign against the UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon... amounted to a direct invitation for sectarian incitement". Hariri's comments came as "his Future Movement and its allies in the March 14 coalition" prepared for a rally to mark six years since the movement was established in the wake of his father's assassination. The rally was intended to be "a show of force as the political confrontation between the March 14 coalition and the Hezbollah-led March 8 alliance heats up" ahead of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon's expected indictment of Hezbollah members implicated in Rafiq Hariri's assassination.³

2. Please advise whether there is recent evidence of former members of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) being targeted for harm in Lebanon because of their activities while in military service. In particular, is there any evidence of members of the LAF who have fought against Fatah al Islam (FAI) or in and around the Palestinian refugee camps during 2006 and 2007 (or at any other time) being targeted for harm because of these activities?

No recent information was located indicating that former members of the Lebanese Armed Forces are being targeted because of their activities while in military service. It is noteworthy that while Fatah al-Islam is thought to remain active, reports indicate that its capacity was greatly diminished following the conflict with the Lebanese Armed Forces in the Palestinian refugee camps in 2007.^{4 5 6}

According to Stanford University in 2012, Fatah al-Islam last claimed responsibility for an attack in 2008, in Abdeh, Northern Province. One Lebanese soldier was reportedly killed in the attack. Stanford University further noted that while "Fatah al-Islam was highly active in 2008, the Lebanese military successes in capturing group members have weakened the organization...[w]hile factions of Fatah al-Islam remain, it is unclear what plans they are implementing today, especially after a large portion of their leadership has been destroyed".⁷ In December 2011, *The Daily Star* reported that the "remnants" of Fatah al-Islam were suspected to have been responsible for the assassination of the bodyguard of a senior Fatah⁸ commander in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp. According to the commander, 60 members of both Fatah al-Islam and allied Salafist militant group Jund al-Sham were estimated to be

² 'Tripoli's Future MPs urge arms-free city in talks with Mikati, Sleiman' 2011, *The Daily Star*, 27 June <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Jun-27/Tripolis-Future-MPs-urge-arms-free-city-in-talks-with-Mikati-Sleiman.ashx?searchText=alawite#axzz1RU3tu2I4>> Accessed 19 July 2011

³ 'Lebanese caretaker PM says Hezbollah seeking to militarize Shi'is' 2011, *BBC Monitoring Service*, source: *The Daily Star*, 10 March

⁴ 'Killing of Fatah al-Islam leader deals severe blow to aspiring al-Qaeda proxy in Lebanon' 2010, *Al Shorfa*, 2 September <http://www.al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2010/09/02/feature-01> Accessed 28 September 2010

⁵ 'Islamist Groups in Lebanon' 2007, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 11, Issue 4, December <<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2007/issue4/jv11no4a3.asp>> Accessed 10 January 2008

⁶ Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, *Lebanon's Sunni Islamists – A Growing Force*, Carnegie Middle East Center, Number 6, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January, pp.18-19 <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC6_abdellatif_lebanon_final.pdf> Accessed 28 June 2011

⁷ Stanford University 2012, 'Profile: Fatah al-Islam', 10 February <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/17>> Accessed 24 February 2012

⁸ Fatah, as opposed to Fatah al-Islam, is a Palestinian political party, and the largest faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

sheltering in Taamir, adjacent to Ain al-Hilweh. A Fatah al-Islam spokesperson reportedly dismissed accusations that “the movement was responsible for the recent deterioration of the security situation in the camp”.⁹

It is well documented that serving members of the Lebanese military are targeted by militants, as are those serving in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In October 2011, *The Daily Star* reported that ten individuals were convicted of crimes “that included operating a terror cell and targeting the Lebanese Army and U.N. peacekeepers in south Lebanon”. According to the report, five Lebanese and five Palestinian men “possessed weapons and homemade explosives that they threw in the streets in an attempt to kill UNIFIL peacekeepers” in the late 1990s. Charges against Abdel-Rahman Awad, a former leader of Fatah al-Islam, were reportedly dropped after he was killed in a “shootout with the Lebanese Army in August 2010”.¹⁰ In a report on a December 2011 bombing attack against UNIFIL troops, *The Daily Star* noted that there had been “292 fatalities of peacekeepers serving with UNIFIL since its establishment in 1978”.¹¹

In March 2012, *The Daily Star* reported that the Lebanese Army “arrested seven people, including two soldiers, suspected of being part of a Sunni Islamist network which had planned to carry out attacks on military targets”. According to the report, it was not clear whether the suspects were members of Fatah al-Islam.¹² In April 2012, two Fatah al-Islam militants who were reportedly “accused of targeting the Lebanese Army as well as allegedly taking up arms against the Syrian regime” were killed in Syria. The two individuals had reportedly been “involved in attacks against the Lebanese Army in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared during the three-month conflict in 2007”.¹³

⁹ ‘Tensions high in Ain al-Hilweh after shooting’ 2011, *The Daily Star*, 19 December <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Dec-19/157288-tensions-high-in-ain-al-hilweh-after-shooting.ashx#axzz1tqv2u58g>> Accessed 7 May 2012

¹⁰ ‘10 men convicted of targeting Lebanese Army and UNIFIL’ 2011, *The Daily Star*, 12 October <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Oct-12/151062-10-men-convicted-of-targeting-lebanese-army-and-unifil.ashx#axzz1tqv2u58g>> Accessed 7 May 2012

¹¹ ‘No leads yet in probe into UNIFIL bombing’ 2011, *The Daily Star*, 12 December <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Dec-12/156609-no-leads-yet-in-probe-into-unifil-bombing.ashx#axzz1tqv2u58g>> Accessed 7 May 2012

¹² ‘Lebanon arrests seven suspected of planning attack’ 2012, *The Daily Star*, 13 March <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Mar-13/166538-lebanon-arrests-seven-suspected-of-planning-attack.ashx#axzz1tqv2u58g>> Accessed 7 May 2011

¹³ ‘Fatah al-Islam militants killed in Syria’ 2012, *The Daily Star*, 24 April <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Apr-24/171191-fatah-al-islam-militants-killed-in-syria.ashx#axzz1tqv2u58g>> Accessed 7 May 2012

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