LEBANON'S POLITICS: THE SUNNI COMMUNITY AND HARIRI'S FUTURE CURRENT

Middle East Report N°96 – 26 May 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The June 2009 swearing in as prime minister of Saad Hariri, leader of the Sunni Future Current movement, marks a turning point, the end of a period of exceptional domestic political turbulence and regional tensions that began with the 2005 murder of his father, Rafic; led to institutional paralysis; and culminated with the violent May 2008 showdown between government and opposition. It also presents the new leader with a host of novel challenges. The man who took the helm of a once deeply divided Sunni community must discard much of what enabled his rise, if he is to succeed now that he is in power. With Hizbollah, the principal Shiite movement, he must move away from the sectarianism that has become Lebanon's political stock-and-trade. The Future Current should initiate the process of becoming a more genuine, institutionalised party, breaking from the clientelism that will otherwise inhibit the prime minister's transition from community leader to statesman. And Hariri must continue to navigate the difficult normalisation with Syria, overcoming deep mistrust among his constituency toward Damascus.

Upon his father's assassination, Saad inherited an almost impossible task. Rafic Hariri was larger than life: at once successful businessman, diplomat, politician and statesman. As Lebanon awoke from years of a bloody civil war, he strove to be the nation's saviour. He was not without his critics or his failings. Many chastised his propensity to mingle private dealings and public affairs. But few challenged his leadership qualities or his ability to rise – for the most part – above confessional politics and to juggle contradictory international relations.

In death as in life, Rafic was an outsized character whose influence extended far beyond Lebanon's borders. Syria, widely viewed as responsible for the murder, faced intense international pressure. Unprecedented demonstrations forced the withdrawal of its troops after an almost 30-year presence. His death stirred deep, lingering Sunni resentments and anxieties: anger at Syria's heavy-handed domination and unease stemming from a sense of vulnerability. The result was a massive, overwhelming instinct of communal solidarity among Sunnis, who rallied around Rafic's son and dramatically shifted national, regional and international alliances. The community joined forces with its historical foes, anti-Syrian Christian parties. It turned against a traditional ally, Damascus, now seeing its struggle with Syria as a conflict between two incompatible visions for the country. And, for the first time in its history, it turned toward the West, partners in a perceived life-or-death battle against Syria, Hizbollah and Iran.

Of all, the most striking transformation in Sunni attitudes since 2005 has been the exacerbation of sectarian feelings and hostility toward Shiites, nurtured by deepened regional sectarian divisions following the fall of the Iraqi regime. Tensions existed in the past, but for the most part they had remained dormant or, if expressed, quickly contained. There were several turning points: Hariri's assassination; subsequent expressions of pro-Syrian sentiment by Hizbollah and Amal; the 2006 war with Israel, which many Sunnis blamed on Hizbollah and which highlighted the Shiite movement's troublesome military might; and, finally, Hizbollah's swift May 2008 takeover of the capital, which Sunnis suffered as a humiliating defeat.

The net effect was to solidify the Future Current's hegemony over the Sunni community and Hariri's control over the Future Current. Stunned by Hizbollah's decision to turn its weapons inwards, Sunnis rallied as one behind the movement. Dissent was tantamount to betrayal. In June 2009, the Future Current – buoyed by a large Sunni turnout – triumphed in the parliamentary elections. The vote, a reflection of a powerful communal solidarity, signalled Hariri's emergence as the virtually unchallenged Sunni leader.

But the Future Current's clear victory also contributed to important domestic and regional changes. Syrian acceptance of the results and Hariri's selection as prime minister removed important impediments to a Saudi-Syrian rapprochement, which had begun earlier that year. Riyadh encouraged normalisation of ties between Syria and

Lebanon, notably by pressing Saad Hariri to visit Damascus – a trip brimming with emotional and political significance. Once selected as prime minister, Saad reached out to the opposition, which responded in kind. He now leads a national unity government whose ability to function will depend on consensus.

Ruling successfully will require that he takes this evolution a step further. More will be needed to reverse sectarianism and deepen the process of Syrian-Lebanese normalisation. Hariri will have to relinquish his de facto position as Sunni leader and devolve that role to a more institutionalised Future Current – in effect turning it into a party with clear and accountable decision-making mechanisms, an identifiable political platform and professional cadres – as well as to reformed and strengthened religious bodies better able to manage the community and prevent a radical drift. In the same vein, he gradually will need to break with the type of community-based, patron-client style of politics that, over the past five years, the Future Current has more fully embraced.

Competition from Sunni rivals and loss of hegemonic control almost certainly will be one consequence, but – assuming a lessening of confessional tensions – it also is an inevitable one. If the goal is to stabilise Lebanon, promote its welfare and avoid any sectarian backsliding, it is a price Saad Hariri will have to pay. It also would be the best way for him to honour the most promising elements of his father's legacy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Saad Hariri, who inherited from his father the mantle of leader of the country and of the Sunni community, faces an unenviable task. His first challenge is to reverse the sectarian-based identification and mobilisation which served him so well in recent years – and culminated in his decisive triumph in the 7 June 2009 legislative elections – but no longer can constitute his principal political asset. Insofar as he heads a national unity government, the prime minister can rule efficiently only if he minimises heretofore dominant confessional and political fault-lines. It will not be easy. Defiance and rejection of the Shiite Hizbollah movement, Syria and Iran played a critical part in his political ascent, providing him with powerful domestic and international backing. Moreover, the underlying local and regional factors that fuel these sentiments remain largely unresolved, making it difficult for Hariri to moderate his Sunni base or bring along his foreign backers.

Hariri's difficult internal and external repositioning is compounded – and this represents his second major challenge – by the fact that both arenas remain highly fluid and unsettled. Lebanon's incipient normalisation with Damascus is a gamble, necessary yet risky nonetheless. Hostility toward Syria among the country's Sunni community convinced of the regime's role in Rafic Hariri's assassination and chafing after decades of Syrian domination, still runs deep; several of Lebanon's foreign supporters are uneasy about Damascus's regional posture; and the two countries almost certainly will face tremendous obstacles in their quest for more balanced relations. Resumption of Israeli-Lebanese hostilities – a possibility not to be discounted – almost certainly would revive the contentious issue of Hizbollah's weapons which has been set aside since the new Lebanese government's inauguration.

Hariri's third challenge is that he leads a unity government which, in many ways, is unprecedented and thus whose sustainability is unknown. Historically, Lebanon has tended to be ruled by broad coalitions. But these have involved lopsided power-sharing arrangements in which some political parties in effect were in control at the expense of others. In contrast, the current government faithfully reflects the actual balance of power. The outcome of a prolonged political impasse and institutional paralysis, the cabinet must prove it can produce something quite different. In other words, even assuming foreign actors refrain from destructive interference, the dysfunctional political system could well generate sufficient crises and deadlocks on basic issues of governance to render Hariri's self-proclaimed priority – the country's economic recovery – a pipe dream.

Lastly, the Future Current – whose influence and prominence grew under circumstances of exceptional communal mobilisation – is facing the re-emergence of a traditionally more fragmented, diverse Sunni landscape. Local leaders and Islamist movements seek to reassert their authority, question Hariri's leadership or resist his domination. A more pluralistic, diverse Sunni community would not necessarily be a bad thing, arguably signalling the transition toward a more peaceful, less polarised form of politics. But it also could vastly complicate the prime minister's task.[1]

[1] For additional analysis of Lebanon's politics, see Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°87, *Lebanon's Elections: Avoiding a New Cycle of Confrontation*, 4 June 2009; N°78, *The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians' Central Role*, 15 July 2008; N°69, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, 10 October 2007; and Middle East Briefing N°23, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, 15 May 2008.

II. THE SUNNI COMMUNITY IN THE AGE OF THE FUTURE CURRENT

A. RAFIC HARIRI: THE GENESIS OF A CURRENT AND A PROJECT

Rafic Hariri was larger than life, a figure with few equivalents on either the Lebanese or regional scenes.[2] He possessed an acute sense of politics, rooted in his underprivileged and highly politicised childhood in Sidon.[3] He was exceptionally savvy in business, amassing a colossal fortune in Saudi Arabia in the construction and public works sectors; by the 1970s, he had become one of the royal family's most important and trusted businessmen.[4] And he was a gifted diplomat, fostering and maintaining a wide range of often contradictory relationships, assuming the role of mediator or facilitator in several intricate negotiations.

By the late 1970s, at the height of the Lebanese civil war, he turned his attention more fully to his home country, putting those three attributes to good use. His vast wealth funded an array of charitable activities targeting mainly Sunnis but benefiting other communities as well.[5] These helped make up for the state's deficiencies and gave him an important social base in this predominantly clientelist system.[6] He set up an independent network which provided education, healthcare, jobs, food and financial aid, even as he gradually co-opted pre-existing structures.[7] Unlike virtually every other Lebanese leader, Rafic was not in a position simply to convert his pedigree into political power; instead, he worked hard to build his influence by setting up a remarkable system of social redistribution.

Hariri simultaneously developed ties with key decision-makers in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia,[8] but also Syria,[9] France[10] and the U.S.[11] Between 1983 and 1984, during mediation efforts in Geneva and Lausanne, he was Riyadh's official envoy to Lebanon. To this day, many Lebanese leaders give him credit for contributing to the 1989 Taef agreements, which led to the end of the civil war the following year.[12]

By then, Hariri had established himself as an important Sunni leader: he had helped the community acquire a more equitable share of power through the Taef accords and, because so many Sunni figures had died during the war, he filled the vacuum. An observer of the Sunni scene said:

> Many Sunni representatives were killed during the war, among them sheikh Sobhi Saleh; Nazem al-Qadri [a member of parliament]; prime minister Rachid Karameh; and mufti Hassan Khaled. These murders left Sunnis to themselves, unprotected, more fragmented, marginalised and exposed than other, more structured communities. Sunnis largely were excluded from political life, for example during the 1985 tripar-

[2] Rafic Hariri's official biography is available at www.rhariri.com/general.aspx?pagecontent=biography.

[3] On this period of his life, see Nicolas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon*, (London, 2009).

[4] Marwan Iskandar, *Rafic Hariri and the fate of Lebanon*, (London, 2006); Georges Farchakh, *Alfadel Chalaq: My Experience with Hariri*, (Beirut, 2006).

[5] Georges Farchakh, *Alfadel Chalaq*, op. cit., pp. 210-221.

[6] Hariri established his first association in Lebanon in 1979, then known as the Islamic Association for Culture and Education. It has since been renamed the Hariri Foundation. It is best known for providing scholarships to over 30,000 students during the war.

[7] Non-governmental associations and social organisations are of particular importance to the Sunni community, as one activist explained. "Rafic Hariri had a perfect grasp of Beirut's Sunni residents. They have very negative memories of political parties and militias. They see social organisations and associations in a different light. That's where elites are formed, that's where they begin to acquire political power". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 11 March 2008. Among the pre-existing groups which Hariri progressively took over is the Federation of Beirut's Family Associations. Founded in 1960, it was revived in 1997 by Hariri in order to mobilise voters in the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections. It represented at the time some 20 per cent of Beirut's potential voters. Crisis Group interview, Walid Kebbé, former Rafic Hariri advisor, Beirut, 26 April 2010. Another example is the Islamic Association of Makassed, the first Sunni charitable association, established in 1878 by a group of local notables. Dedicated to the community's cultural, social and economic development, it built schools, orphanages and hospitals. In 1997, Hariri began to fund several of its institutions, cf. www.hariri foundation.org.lb/adopt.htm; he also forgave much of the debt it owed to the Mediterranean Bank, which he owned. *Sharq al-Awsat*, 25 October 2003. In so doing, he earned the association's, its members' and its beneficiaries' political loyalty. Crisis Group interview, Walid Kebbé, Beirut, March 2008. The same pattern was replicated with several Beirut and Saida-based associations. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, social activists and NGOs workers, Beirut and Saïda, March 2008-July 2009.

[8] He is said to have build particularly strong ties to Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, the then-Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., and Saoud al-Faysal, the foreign minister. See Marwan Iskandar, *Rafic Hariri*, op. cit., p. 51.

[9] Hariri reportedly was close to Abdul Halim Khaddam, Syria's former foreign minister and vice president, and Hikmat Chebabi, the former army chief of staff. Ibid, p. 50. Beginning in the early 1980s, Hariri also is said to have forged close relations to Syria's then-president, Hafez al-Assad. See Ghassan Charbel, *The Palace Malediction*, (Beirut, 2008), p. 223.

[10] Hariri and Jacques Chirac developed a tight friendship while the latter was mayor of Paris.

[11] Marwan Iskandar, *Rafic Hariri*, op. cit., pp. 52-62.

[12] Crisis Group interviews, Lebanese officials, Beirut, Tripoli, Saïda and Bekaa, 2008-2009. Iskandar, asserted that the Taef accords were written by Hariri, op. cit., p. 51.

tite agreement.[13] With Rafic Hariri, the community could recover part of its former glory.[14]

Despite being accused by some Christians of favouring Sunni interests,[15] Hariri presented himself, and to an extent was perceived, as above confessional politics. Tellingly, although he developed ties with various Islamist movements, many among them criticised him for not helping them enough or not displaying sufficient sectarian loyalty.[16] Rather, he strove to be seen as a statesman and saviour of a nation bloodied by a long civil war and devastated by skyrocketing inflation, collapsing living standards and public services and the Lebanese pound's devaluation.[17] The first post-war government proved disastrous, coming to an end as a result of public riots. In its stead, Hariri promoted an ambitious reconstruction agenda, backed by his personal fortune and international contacts.[18] He became prime minister in 1992.[19]

Very quickly, he set out to redress the economy. He helped stabilise the currency, liberalise the economy, stimulate foreign investment, rebuild state institutions and rehabilitate public infrastructure. He went further, seeking to restore Lebanon's position on the Arab and international scenes and, unveiling a project that was little short of grandiose, turn Beirut into a major regional capital. One of his close associates said, "his dream was for Lebanon once again to be the region's beating heart, a bridge between East and West, a haven for Arab capital. He wanted to revive Lebanon's image as the Middle East's Switzerland".[20]

Hariri faced three important obstacles. First, insofar as the vision was very much his own, the line separating public policy from personal interests had a tendency to blur.[21] As a result, he stood accused of promoting his own business at the expense of the broader good, in particular when private companies he owned either in part or in full undertook colossal public works – not always in full transparency.[22] This was coupled with a broader and oftentimes vehement critique of his economic policy: a laissez-faire approach and a monetarist policy aiming at exchange rate stabilisation that some viewed as overly costly in social terms[23] and massive public expenses that saddled the country with heavy debts.[24]

Secondly, his project depended to a large extent on a peaceful regional context and in particular avoidance of renewed Arab-Israeli warfare. This was critical in ensuring that Lebanon attracted investments, businessmen and tourists.[25] In the early 1990s, this seemed possible. The

[13] The three-way agreement was reached with Syrian support by Walid Jumblatt, the Druze leader; Nabih Berri, head of the Shiite Amal movement; and Elie Hobeika, head of one of the Lebanese Forces' branches. It sought, but failed, to end the civil war.

[14] Crisis Group interview, Abdel Ghani Imad, director, Cultural Centre for Dialogue and Studies, Tripoli, 7 April 2009.

[15] Crisis Group Report, *The New Lebanese Equation*, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

[16] An Islamist intellectual with ties to the Jamaa Islamiyya, said: "That is the reason why he did not achieve with Sunnis what Hizbollah did with Shiites: a unified communal base". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, July 2006. Islamist activists claimed he did not provide adequate political support to those who were victims of detention, persecution and torture at the hands of Lebanon's and Syria's security services. Crisis Group interviews, salafi sheikhs, Jamaa Islamiyya officials, Islamist activists, Beirut, Tripoli, Saïda and Békaa, May 2006-September 2009.

[17] Boutros Labaki, "L'Economie politique des 'guerres pour les autres' (1975-1990). Les pertes", in F. Kiwan (ed.), *Le Liban aujourd'hui*, (Paris, 1994).

[18] Hariri was instrumental in convening three international conferences aimed at providing Lebanon with financial support and debt relief: the Friends of Lebanon Donor Conference**,** in Washington in 1996 and the Paris I and Paris II conferences in 2001 and 2002. See www.rhariri.com/french.aspx?ID=466.

[19] Analysts believe that his victory was due to the fact that he alone was seen by both parliament and Damascus as capable of redressing the Lebanese pound. See Ghassan Charbel, *The Palace Malediction*, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[20] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, April 2009.

[21] According to a close associate, Hariri began preparing his project to rebuild Beirut as early as 1982. Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 7 April 2008.

[22] In 1994, Samir Kassir, a well-known and respected journalist, wrote: "The conflicts of interest prompted by the presence, at the head of the government, of a businessman with a hand in so many diverse activities (construction and public works sectors, banks, insurance, media, real estate, etc) are familiar. Nothing illustrates these better than the company entrusted with rebuilding Beirut's city centre (SOLIDERE), of which M. Hariri is the largest shareholder". Samir Kassir, "Au Liban, un pouvoir sans responsabilité, des querelles sans enjeux", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1994. Kassir, a fierce critic of Syria's policies in Lebanon, was assassinated on 2 June 2005.

[23] Former Prime Minister Salim Al-Hoss once famously described Hariri's economic policy as putting "building before human beings". See Marwan Iskandar, op. cit., p.89.

[24] According to a former finance minister, "the public debt, which represented only 45 per cent of the domestic gross product at the end of the war (1975-1990) reached 200 per cent in 2005-2006. Debt service, mostly domestically financed, is draining public finances and leaving very little room for substantial economic and social reforms". Georges Corm, "Les causes de la crise libanaise: l'Europe contribue-t-elle à la solution?", document presented to the meeting of the European Parliament's Commission on Politics, Security and Human Rights, 26 November 2007, at www.iemed.org/documents/novesrealitats/Alcoverro/a1.pdf.

[25] For Hariri, "Lebanon truly seeks peace. It is our only possible choice. It is our strategic choice because it is in Lebanon's interest". www.liberation.fr/monde/0104224947-hariri-la-paix-ne-se-coupe-pas-en-morceaux-le-premier-ministre-libanais-exclut-un-accord-separe-avec-israel. Hariri reportedly was counting on

civil war had come to a close, the Israeli-Arab peace process was launched, both Iraq and Iran appeared to be contained, and three-way coordination between Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria had significantly improved. In 1996, Hariri drew on his broad regional and international network to help end Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon.[26]

In 2000, however, whatever prospects existed had darkened substantially with the collapse of Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising, followed by the elections of George W. Bush in the U.S. and Ariel Sharon in Israel, neither of whom appeared particularly keen to relaunch peace talks.

Finally, Hariri's gambit hinged on Syria's goodwill, whose presence in and influence over Lebanon were enormous, intrusive and internationally sanctioned. The very fact of his prime ministership reflected an understanding between Damascus and Riyadh which recognised the primacy of Syrian interests in Lebanon, while giving Saudi Arabia a role through Rafic Hariri.

In and of itself, Hariri's economic policy hardly was inimical to Syrian interests. Feverish reconstruction in Lebanon helped its neighbour, many of whose underqualified workers found ready employment.[27] Lebanon's re-emergence as a commercial, banking and consumption centre revived the traditional division of labour between a more liberal Lebanon and more socialist Syria. Importantly, it also fuelled corruption involving elites in both countries and, in so doing, made it easier for Damascus to exercise control over Beirut's political class. At the outset at least, Hariri tried hard to accommodate his neighbour. In one of his close advisers' words, "he was a reformist who strove for a compromise with Syria. He did not want a confrontation".[28]

Tensions between Hariri and Syria began to surface in 1998. These likely were caused by several interrelated factors. To begin, Hariri had acquired an extraordinary stature as de facto head of state,[29] bringing together broad Sunni support, a national vision and powerful international backing. In this, he stood in stark contrast to his nation's traditional leaders, almost invariably feudal chiefs narrowly tied to their community interests, bitterly divided and thus – from Syria's standpoint – easy to manipulate. Eager to cut him back to size, Damascus took advantage of the increasing difficulties encountered by Hariri's economic project.[30] The political transition in Damascus also played a part; Hafez al-Assad, sick and in his final years, almost certainly was seeking to consolidate his regime's position in Lebanon prior to handing power over to his son, Bashar.

The most tangible phase of the crisis occurred in November 1998, when Syria orchestrated the election to the presidency of Emile Lahoud, former army chief of staff. Lahoud immediately positioned himself in opposition to Hariri; his inaugural address pointedly stressed "the preeminence of the rule of law, the strengthening of governmental institutions, the requirement for transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs and the promotion of social justice and equality", all of which were intended as indirect attacks on the outgoing prime minister.[31] Ultimately, Hariri ruled himself out[32] and the cabinet, led by Salim al-Hoss, was almost entirely reshuffled.

peace between Israel and Syria as the way to lessen the latter's control over Lebanon. See Nicolas Blanford, op. cit., pp. 71-72

[26] www.rhariri.com/general.aspx?pagecontent=biography.

[27] John Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage. Syria Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, (Stanford, 2009).

[28] Crisis Group interview, Nouhad al-Machnouk, Future Current member of parliament, Beirut, 2 January 2010.

[29] Alongside his large-scale economic and social activities, Hariri had established a media empire. He acquired Radio-Orient, bought shares in the daily newspaper *An-Nahar* and founded both the Future Television and the daily *al-Mustaqbal*. He used them to promote his policies and, above all, to counter his opponents' attacks. See Iskandar, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[30] Iskandar wrote: "Public debt was increasing at a fast pace from less than $2 billion in 1992 to $17 billion [in 1998]. The budget deficit in 1997 had reached a record of 59 per cent and growth rates had fallen from 14 per cent in 1993 to 3 per cent in 1998. At the beginning of the summer of 1998, Lebanon seemed badly in need of a change in its political climate and leadership". Ibid, p. 91.

[31] Excerpts available at www.finance.gov.lb/NR/rdonlyres/7C38A8A7-E998-40AB-9179-F12EAD2CCA18/0/CountryProfile2004.pdf. Between 1998 and 2000, Lahoud led a campaign against the former prime minister. He claimed to want to cleanse the state of corruption inherited from Hariri. High-profile trials of several of Hariri's close colleagues were held, including the future prime minister, Fouad Siniora. See Blanford, op. cit., pp. 77-78; Iskandar, op.cit., pp. 96-98.

[32] Syria played a decisive part in government formation. It imposed certain ministers, negotiated the allocation of posts with the various parties and ensured that no opponent of the regime entered the cabinet. Rafic Hariri, who formed three governments between 1992 and 1998, enjoyed greater flexibility than most in this respect, due mainly to his economic influence and strong international ties. Once Lahoud became president, this began to change. The new president took several steps that seemed deliberately intended to weaken and even humiliate Hariri – questioning whether the president was obliged to respect the deputies' prime ministerial preferences (in this case, most backed Hariri); delaying the prime minister's appointment; and getting a number of parliamentarians to delegate their choice to Lahoud. When Hariri was asked to form the government, he refused to do so "under these conditions". See *The Economist*, 3 December 1998;

Tensions reached a new level when, after his triumph in the 2000 parliamentary elections, Hariri regained the prime ministership. This led to a stormy relationship with the president, reflected in sustained domestic paralysis and growing Syrian intrusion.[33] Israel's 2000 withdrawal from South Lebanon simultaneously encouraged greater Lebanese opposition to Syria's military presence and Hizbollah's armed status,[34] both of which were chiefly justified by the continued occupation. Anti-Syrian criticism ceased being a principally Christian affair,[35] as others – notably Walid Jumblatt, head of the Druze community – joined their voices. The Syrian regime faced the U.S. invasion of Iraq as well as heightened pressure from Washington and Paris – hence its almost obsessive desire to consolidate its hold over its neighbour.[36] In 2003, Hariri, under pressure, formed a more pro-Syrian government.[37] Then, a year later, parliament extended Lahoud's mandate by three years, in violation of the constitution. In American and French eyes, Syria had crossed a redline; in Hariri's, this was a turning point that pushed him to resign the premiership and join the Lebanese opposition.[38] Shortly thereafter, on 14 February 2005, he was killed in a massive explosion. Although the attack was claimed by an obscure jihadi group, suspicions immediately zeroed in on Syria, which denied any role. Until then, the young Saad Hariri, who was 35 at the time and resided in Saudi Arabia, had shown virtually no interest in or predisposition for politics. His oratory, political and leadership skills largely were untested.[39] When his father died, he appeared to assume the succession reluctantly, with more than an afterthought. Far from seizing power as his community's representative, he inherited it by virtue of his lineage, Saudi Arabia's support,[40] the trauma caused by Rafic Hariri's murder and the vacuum it left behind. At the same time, he inherited his father's political legacy in a dramatically transformed domestic and international context.

B. SAAD HARIRI AND THE SUNNI COMMUNITY'S REPOSITIONING

In a mirror image of his life, Rafic Hariri's murder was multidimensional, its ramifications extending far beyond his nation's boundaries.[41] Syria, widely viewed as responsible, faced intense and immediate international pressure. Massive, unprecedented demonstrations in Lebanon led to the withdrawal of its troops after an almost 30-year presence. The event had sectarian implications: Rafic Hariri's death awoke deep, lingering fears among the Sunni community which quickly rallied around his son, Saad, and shifted its national, regional and wider international alliances.

1. Breaking with Syria

In the years following the civil war, Lebanon's Sunnis entertained ambivalent relations with Syria. They are best understood by comparing them to the approaches of other communities. Christians believed they lost most from the Taef agreement and, more generally, the civil war.

Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 19 February 2001; Nicolas Blanford, op.cit., p. 70.

[33] In particular, the Lebanese and Syrian security services strengthened their political control. Security forces harshly repressed several student demonstrations against Syria's presence and arrested many anti-Syrian critics. According to former parliament members, Hariri advisors and journalists, ministers' activities were tightly controlled by the security apparatus. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, March 2008-May 2010. In addition, Lebanese authorities censured several international media outlets critical of Syria. In September 2002, a television station owned by Gabriel Murr, a parliament member and strong critic of Syrian policies, was shut down by court order, and in November, the Constitutional Council invalidated his election. See *L'Orient le jour*, at www.lorientlejour.com/data/attach_784299884_1232536106.pdf; see also, *Le Monde*, 15 August 2001; and www.le-liban.com/liban/rubrique/la-censure-au-liban, 21 August 2001.

[34] Hizbollah is the only Lebanese movement that did not disarm in the wake of the civil war.

[35] Crisis Group Report, *The New Lebanese Equation*, op. cit., p. 2-3.

[36] Crisis Group Middle East Report N°39, *Syria after Lebanon, Lebanon after Syria*, 12 April 2005.

[37] Among the ministers were Assem Qanso, a member of Lebanon's Baath Party, and Assad Hardan, from the Nationalist Socialist Syrian Party. See Nicolas Blanford, op. cit., p.87. At the time, Lahoud called for a new government "better able to confront the challenges" triggered by the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and U.S. pressure on Syria. *Al-Hayat*, 12 April 2003. Given Syria's role at the time, Hariri was not in a position to oppose this decision. Crisis Group interview, former Hariri advisor, Beirut, 26 April 2010.

[38] Hariri repeatedly signalled his objection to the extension of Lahoud's mandate. See Nicolas Blanford, op. cit., p. 92. He described it as "a coup against Lebanon's democratic system". See www.elwatan.com/Le-pere-de-la-reconstruction-de. On 1 October 2004, a car bomb seriously wounded Marwan Hamadeh, a Druze minister close to Jumblatt, whose parliamentary bloc voted against the extension. Jumblatt associates openly accused Syria. Hariri ultimately voted in favour of the extension, though he simultaneously presented the government's resignation, declined to submit his candidacy for prime minister and formally joined opposition ranks. Nicolas Blanford, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

[39] Saad Hariri was the head of his father's Saudi based construction company, Saudi Oger. See http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/lebanon/2009/06/200962713213871468.html.

[40] Crisis Group interviews, March 14 and Future movement officials, Beirut and Tripoli, 2006-2009.

[41] See Crisis Group Report, *Syria after Lebanon, Lebanon after Syria*, op. cit.

They blamed Syria for their political marginalisation and emerged as its staunchest critic. The ensuing repression by Syrian and Lebanese security services left the community more disorganised, disoriented and bitter.[42] Shiite movements, by contrast, strongly benefited from Syria's presence. It solidified the gains registered in Taef; shored up Amal's position;[43] and allowed Hizbollah to pursue its struggle against Israel even as Damascus tightly controlled how it was waged. Syria's interaction with Shiites at times was heavy-handed and provoked genuine resentment, but overlapping political interests smoothed the relationship.[44]

For Sunnis, the situation was more ambiguous. A number of local leaders, including Omar Karameh in Tripoli and Abdel Rahim Mrad in the Bekaa Valley, became Syria's unconditional allies. At the other end of the spectrum were (relatively minor) pockets of resistance, chiefly among Islamist activists who, in turn, were severely hit by the Syrian-Lebanese security services.[45] In Northern Lebanon, principally Tripoli, Syria's presence was tantamount to an occupation, a reflection of Damascus's alarm at the prospect of an Islamist movement that eventually could cross into its own territory.[46]

Sectarian perceptions were more complex still. In the eyes of many Lebanese Sunnis, Syria's Alawite-dominated regime and its uneasy relations with its own Sunni majority explained Damascus's attempts to keep the community in check and prevent any expression of an independent identity.[47] Syria's support for Alawite communities in Tripoli and Akkar – whose members number in the tens of thousands[48] – added to the suspicion.[49] Sunnis likewise saw Rafic Hariri's political path through a confessional lens, interpreting setbacks and attempts to sideline him as assaults on the community.

The perception sharpened markedly with the benefit of hindsight; since 2005, Rafic's past treatment by Syria has been decried as persecution and described as "a humiliation".[50] A leader of the Jamaa Islamiyya, the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, said, "the Syrian era was very negative for the Sunnis, who were oppressed and weakened for the benefit of the Shiites".[51] Although the situation was more ambiguous and nuanced,[52] such widespread notions are an index of how profoundly events in 2005 affected Sunnis, altered their outlook and turned latent, scattered hostility into a powerful, collective and quasi-unanimous rejection of Syria.

The intensity of the Sunnis' reaction and their stunning communal mobilisation cannot be explained solely by anger at Syrian practices or loyalty toward Rafic. As a journalist put it, "the reservoir of bad memories associated with Syria, both during and after the war",[53] is not a strictly Sunni characteristic. Nor did the slain prime minister enjoy unanimous support among his co-religionists.[54]

[42] Crisis Group Report, *The New Lebanese Equation*, op. cit., pp. 2-4.

[43] Syria's presence contributed heavily to the selection of Amal's leader as speaker of parliament, a post Nabih Berri has held since 1992.

[44] Crisis Group Report, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

[45] Lebanese officials claim that hundreds of Islamists were arrested between 1999 and 2003. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, 2008-2009.

[46] In the wake of Syria's 1982 bloody repression of Islamists in Hama, Lebanon's Al-Tawhid Islamist movement provided shelter and protection to Syrian Muslim Brotherhood members. Crisis Group interview, former Al-Tawhid member, Tripoli, March 2008.

[47] A parliamentarian from the Akkar region echoed the views of many co-religionists: "The Syrian regime is controlled by a confessional minority. It fears Lebanon's Sunnis ever since it repressed its own Muslim Brothers in the early 1980s, because of familial relations between members of the community in both countries. Just as in Syria, Lebanon's Sunnis are repressed by Asad's regime at every level. Syria has done everything within its power to prevent the emergence of a strong Sunni leader". Crisis Group interview, Khaled Daher, Future Current parliament member, Beirut, 19 August 2009.

[48] *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 27 June 2008.

[49] In 1985, Syrian forces entered Tripoli and waged a bloody fight against the Islamic Unification Movement (*al-Tawhid*). Syrian troops and their local Alawite allies killed hundreds of its members. Over time, Syria's presence strengthened the position of the previously marginalised Alawite community. Prior to 1992, for example, none of its members had been elected to parliament.

[50] Crisis Group interview, Nouhad al-Machnouk, Future Current member of parliament, Beirut, 20 January 2010.

[51] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 April 2009.

[52] Relations between the two sides historically have alternated between alliance and enmity. At the twilight of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims as a whole tended to strongly oppose the creation of an independent Lebanon, arguing against Greater Syria's ethno-sectarian breakup and calling for union with Syria. See Fawaz Trabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, (Beirut, 2008), pp. 135-138**.** During the civil war, Syria alternately backed and fought Palestinian forces, which were allied with the Sunnis. Syrian forces violently clashed with Lebanese Sunni militias, notably al-Mourabitoun and the Movement of Islamic Unification, before gaining their allegiance.

[53] Crisis Group interview, Ahmad al-Zu'bi, *Al-Mustaqbal* journalist, Beirut, 21 January 2010.

[54] According to an activist in Tripoli and Akkar – today considered Future Current strongholds – "far from being perceived as a Sunni leader for northern residents, Rafic Hariri was above all a wealthy man responsible for their misery. For his part, Fouad Siniora was the finance minister who made them pay taxes". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 17 April 2009. A former aide to Rafic Hariri said, "the Future Current did not have the kind of influence in Sunni areas that it enjoys today. It was not widely

Rather, Saad won virtually all parliamentary seats in Sunni-majority districts because his father's death brought to the surface a multitude of converging resentments, discomforts and anxieties: resentment at Syria's ability to thwart Hariri's project; discomfort at the lack of any credible alternative; and anxiety stemming from a more general sense of vulnerability. The end result was a massive, overpowering instinct of communal solidarity. Tellingly, conveying their sense of collective trauma, many Sunnis compare Hariri's murder to an "earthquake" or to a conspiracy specifically targeting their community.[55]

This provoked two types of distinct albeit related reactions. On the one hand, Sunni expectations of Saad differed markedly from those attached to his father. The son was almost unanimously endorsed by his community, charged with the task of closing Sunni ranks, guaranteeing their safety and obtaining revenge. On the other hand, Syria's widely assumed guilt prompted the community's stark political realignment and led to new, unorthodox alliances.[56]

2. Turning inward

Historically, Sunnis have tended to identify with the Arab nationalist movement and to seek support in the wider Sunni Arab world, an outlook manifested in the decision to side with the Palestinians during the civil war. Rafic Hariri's more specifically Lebanese project appealed to many, and the collapse of Arab nationalism further eroded the pan-Arab ideal. Still, the desire to belong to a wider Islamic, Arab environment lingered. As a Sunni resident of Bab Tebbaneh said, "to us, Lebanon remains an artificial construct with which we simply could not identify".[57]

Rafic Hariri's assassination and the ensuing crisis with Syria accelerated the Sunnis' change in outlook.[58] Many simply turned inward. Their demand for a Syrian withdrawal echoed that of their Christian counterparts, who had long opposed their neighbour's dominance; like them, the Sunni community rallied behind the call for Lebanon's freedom, sovereignty and independence. Shared hostility toward Syria enabled a historically anomalous alliance between the Future Current, Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces and Amine Gemayel's Kataeb. A former adviser to Rafic Hariri described this as a "wholesale shift on our community's part. It is an unnatural alliance, and the fact that the Sunni base accepts it is extraordinary".[59]

One of the more evocative symbols of this change was the Future Current's decision – and, subsequently, that of Saad Hariri's parliamentary bloc – to choose as its slogan "Lebanon First", leading a journalist with close ties to the Lebanese Forces to say, "the Sunnis have *Lebanised* themselves".[60] Another observer remarked: "That someone from Bab-Tebbaneh could say 'Lebanon First' is hard to believe. The identity of this neighbourhood's residents largely … was shaped in opposition to the very idea of the Lebanese state".[61]

To some, including a number of Future Current sympathisers, giving priority to Lebanon was tantamount to turning one's back on the country's Arab character.[62] In response, the movement made clear that its newfound slogan was not meant to contradict the nation's Arab identity.[63]

3. Turning toward the West

For the most part, Lebanon's Sunnis have tended to contest Western regional policies. They opposed the French mandate and Israel's creation; identified with the Arab nationalist movement; and, during the civil war, sided with the Palestinians.[64] Like much of regional public opinion,

represented in the Bekaa, northern villages or Tripoli". Crisis Group interview, Mohamad Kichli, Beirut, 7 April 2008.

[55] Crisis Group interviews, Lebanese officials, sheikhs and activists, Tripoli and Beirut, May 2008-April 2009.

[56] "Hariri's assassination liberated Sunnis from fear of the Syrian regime". Crisis Group interview, Khaled Daher, Future Current parliamentarian, Beirut, 19 August 2009.

[57] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, May 2006.

[58] There were other reasons, of course. These include the feeling that Lebanon had paid a heavy price for defending the Palestinian cause, see Section II.B.4, and the inability of Islamist currents to become mass movements, see Section III.

[59] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 22 March 2008. During the civil war, Sunnis accused the same Christian movements – which were fighting the Palestinians – of "isolationism". Crisis Group interviews, 14 March officials, Future Current officials, Sheikhs and Islamist militants, Beirut, Tripoli and Saïda, May 2006-February 2010.

[60] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 20 May 2010.

[61] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 17 April 2010. Michel Seurat, a French researcher kidnapped in Beirut in 1985, wrote: "rejection of the state [is] a fundamental component of Bab Tebbbaneh's personality". Michel Seurat, *l'Etat de barbarie*, (Paris, 1989), p. 155.

[62] Crisis Group interviews, Future Movement officials, Beirut, Tripoli and Saïda, April 2009-February 2010. One of the movement's parliamentarians said: "What does 'Lebanon First' mean? It's meaningless. Lebanon cannot divorce itself from its surrounding". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, January 2010. Walid Joumblatt was equally sketpical: "Lebanon First? But Lebanon has no meaning without its Arab character, without Palestine and without Arab unity .... Unfortunately we have reverted back to neighbourhoods, to fanaticism, to sectarianism .... We were not brought up on the basis of 'Lebanon First' but on the basis of Arabism, of a wide horizon to which Lebanon belongs". See www.almanar.com.lb/Newssite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=93015&language=ar.

[63] See www.almustaqbal.org/article_details.php?id=MTYzMQ==&c=Nzc=.

[64] Lebanon's 1920 creation by Western powers, chiefly mandatory France, addressed Christian concerns. Most Muslims op-

they grew increasingly hostile to the U.S., viewed as blindly supporting Israel and unsympathetic to Arab aspirations. Their hostility was magnified as the U.S. emerged as the sole superpower in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise.[65] Anti-American sentiment deepened further in reaction to President George W. Bush's "war against terrorism", perceived by many as a struggle against Islam.[66]

The situation changed with the 2005 assassination of Rafic Hariri. Intensified and more overt Sunni hostility toward Syria coincided with a sharp turn in U.S. policy which heightened its own calls for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, imposed sanctions on Damascus and hinted at possible regime change. Domestically, the community entered into what a former Hariri aide dubbed an "unholy alliance"[67] with its historical foes, anti-Syrian Christian parties.

The Future Current invoked two rationales to justify its stark international and domestic realignment. The West and particularly the U.S. were seen as indispensable partners in what was emerging as an uneven, life-or-death battle against Syria and its allies, Hizbollah and Iran. Only the U.S. appeared to be in a position to achieve Syria's military withdrawal, the end of its hegemony over Lebanon and the trial of Hariri's murderers – not to mention, conceivably, its regime's overthrow.[68] March 14 leaders openly courted Western support and publicly staged meetings with Western officials as demonstrations of power.[69] For some time, the strategy paid off. Not only did Syrian troops withdraw, but also the March 14 coalition remained in power despite relentless efforts by the Syrian-backed March 8 opposition to bring it down and impose a unity government.[70]

The Future Current also saw its struggle with Syria as an existential conflict between two incompatible visions for the country. Under this view, the Syrian regime was structurally tied to policies inimical to Lebanese stability and well-being. It inevitably would continue to use Lebanon as an arena for its proxy war against Israel, plunder its economy and subjugate its people. Western powers, in contrast, were perceived as backing Lebanon's sovereignty, opposing Hizbollah's armed status[71] and embracing a more prosperous, peaceful and modern social model that clashed with Hizbollah's "resistance culture".

The Future Current's international repositioning provoked mixed reactions among its base. Although criticism of Syria and its allies resonated widely, the defence of Western and particularly American policy was a harder sell. Many Future Current followers, while grateful for Washington's support, nonetheless accused the U.S. of pursuing a foreign policy hostile to both Arab and Muslim interests.[72] A Future Current member put it as follows: "We need the Americans against Syria and Hizbollah, but when it comes to Iraq or Palestine, we remain profoundly anti-American".[73] That said, opposition to the

posed the creation of Greater Lebanon which they saw as a Christian entity enjoying French support. Over subsequent decades, Moslems and Christians often clashed over issues related to Lebanon's regional and international positioning.

[65] Voir Mohammad-Reza Djalili, "Images de l'Amérique vues du monde de l'islam", *Quaderni*, Année 2003, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 265-278, at www.persee.fr.

[66] See Josiane Feghali and Simon Haddad, "Les Libanais haïssent-ils l'Amérique?", *Outre-Terre*, no. 5, April 2003, at www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre-2003-4-page-233.htm. Rafic Hariri, who had close ties to the U.S., was clearly ill at ease in the wake of the Iraqi invasion. Visiting Moscow after the outbreak of the 2003 war, he stated: "Iraq needs democracy, but it cannot be forcefully imposed …. Whatever the war's ultimate outcome, it will swell the ranks of desperate people who embrace radical positions". See www.libanvision.com/guerre-irak.htm. The Sunni reaction to the invasion was not monolithic. While many expressed outrage, others nurtured the hope that the events, and Washington's stated commitment to democracy in the region, could put pressure on Syria, leading to changes in the regime or its withdrawal from Lebanon. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, October 2003.

[67] Crisis Group interview, a close friend and collaborator of Rafic Hariri, Beirut, 7 April 2008.

[68] Crisis Group Middle East Report N°48, *Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm*, 5 December 2005, p. 12

[69] For an explanation of the meaning of the names of the March 14 and March 8 movements, see Section II.B.4 below.

[70] Ibid. Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°20, *Lebanon at a Tripwire*, 21 December 2006; Crisis Group Report, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, op. cit., pp. 14-17.

[71] Since 2005, the Future Current's position regarding Hizbollah's weapons has fluctuated. Many leaders believe the end of Hizbollah's armed status depends entirely on resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, particularly during periods of internal crisis, officials have also described the Shiite organisation as an armed militia and its weapons as "illegal". Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, Beirut and Tripoli, January 2007-May 2008. See also Saad Hariri's statement in *Al-Mustaqbal*, 18 April 2007.

[72] As Crisis Group earlier wrote, Sunnis generally reacted angrily to Israel's bombing of Lebanon during the 2006 war; during that period, deep-seated hostility toward Israel and the U.S. – at other times eclipsed by antagonism toward Syria and Hizbollah – resurfaced. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°57, *Israel/Palestine/Lebanon: Climbing Out of the Abyss*, 25 July 2006, pp. 14-15. Many Sunni sheikhs and residents, supporters of the Future Current and opposed to Hizbollah, nonetheless expressed deep hostility towards U.S. policy in the region. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, Saïda, Tripoli and Bekaa, January 2007-March 2008.

[73] Crisis Group interview, former left-wing activist, Tripoli, 9 May 2009. Several Sunni activists and sheikhs expressed this

West gradually ebbed as the crisis with Syria and Hizbollah intensified.[74] Hariri's handful of Sunni opponents sought to take advantage of the Future Current's stance, criticising it for betraying the Palestinian cause, Arabism or even Islamic values.[75] But the criticism had little resonance; if anything, it led Sunnis to close ranks behind the Future Current and its leaders.

4. Joining the "moderate" axis

The Sunni community's break with Syria pushed it to join the so-called "moderate axis", a term coined to describe Washington's Arab allies – principally Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority – as opposed to the "resistance front" encompassing Syria, Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah. Polarisation between the two camps gradually intensified during this period as a result of several developments.

Bush administration policies played an important part. The U.S.'s binary vision of the region – "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"[76] – and its strong opposition to the Syrian regime helped push Damascus more firmly into Iran's corner and contributed to its deepening ties to Lebanese and Palestinian militant groups. Developments, including U.S. disengagement from the Arab-Israeli peace process and its invasion of Iraq, simultaneously strengthened those organizations even as Iran fortified its own position. In contrast, America's traditional allies found it increasingly difficult to justify their relationship with a U.S. administration widely perceived by Arab public opinion as hostile.

At the same time, tensions between Damascus on the one hand and Riyadh and Cairo on the other were growing concerning key regional issues. Syria's militant rhetoric on the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the Iraq war and – at times implicitly, at others explicitly – criticism of Egypt's and Saudi Arabia's more conciliatory postures; its close ties with Iran; and support for Hamas as well as Hizbollah caused substantial Egyptian and Saudi concern, albeit not always for similar reasons.[77] Increasingly, the two countries questioned Syria's role in Lebanon.

These policy differences were compounded by personal friction. President Hosni Mubarak's and King Abdallah's early, high hopes in Bashar Asad – whom they saw as a young, inexperienced leader they would tutor – quickly were disappointed.[78] The Saudi monarch, who was close to Rafic Hariri, personally blamed his assassination on Bashar. Still, efforts to improve relations among the three and limit the impact of their disagreements continued, even after Hariri's murder.[79] These only ended with the 2006 Lebanon war, during which they adopted radically different positions. Riyadh condemned Hizbollah's "recklessness"; [80] after the war, the Syrian regime proclaimed

same idea. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, January 2008-May 2009.

[74] Attacks by Syria, Hizbollah or Iran against the Future Current's relations with the West only tended to make these relations more legitimate in Sunni eyes. A Sunni resident of Beirut said, "I don't understand why our Lebanese foes denounce our alliance with the U.S. when they themselves are allied with Iran and Syria. Those countries harmed Lebanon more than did the Americans". Crisis Group interview, 7 June 2009.

[75] The head of al-Tawhid, a Sunni Islamist movement based in Tripoli, said, "the Future Current's pro-American alignment is an historical aberration. Sunnis, especially its leading families, always expressed their opposition to U.S. power. Hariri and Siniora are an exception. They want Sunnis to adopt a different culture, at loggerheads with pan-Arabism and the Muslim nation's fundamental interests". Crisis Group interview, Bilal Saïd Chaaban, Tripoli, 22 March 2008.

[76] http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.

[77] For example, Saudi Arabia is principally worried by Syria's close ties to Tehran and eager to loosen them, while, for Cairo, Syria's support to Hamas, seen chiefly through a domestic lens and the fear of an Islamist-controlled Gaza at its borders, arguably is the most immediate concern. Syria's confrontational rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel and backing for militant groups also is seen, from Egypt, as a direct challenge to its Arab leadership. See, eg, David Schenker and Simon Henderson, "The Saudi-Egyptian relations' Paradox", *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, 8 December 2009, at www.islamdaily.net/ar/Contents.aspx?AID=8003.

[78] The relatively quick consolidation of Bashar's power, combined with his adoption of positions inconsistent with Egyptian and Saudi wishes, is said to have ended Mubarak's and Abdallah's hopes. Crisis Group interviews, Egyptian diplomat, February 2010.

[79] Officially, "Egypt, like Saudi, adopted a cautious stance after Hariri's murder, refraining from joining in the concert of accusations waged against Syria. In January 2006, during one of Syria's most difficult periods, the Saudis were engaging Damascus, and Mubarak hosted Assad in Sharm al-Sheikh. The 2006 war was seen in Cairo as a betrayal. Syria either provoked it or did nothing to prevent it. It took no step to coordinate with its Arab partners at all. That was the last straw". Crisis Group interview, Egyptian diplomat, January 2010. That said, there is little doubt that Hariri's assassination deeply affected the Saudi monarch and was a decisive contributing factor in the deterioration between Riyadh and Damascus. Crisis Group interview, former close aide to Rafic Hariri, Beirut, March 2008. See also Crisis Group Report, *Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm*, op. cit., p. 15.

[80] www.metransparent.com/old/texts/egypt_jordan_vs_hizbullah.htm. In an interview with *Oukaz*, the Saudi daily, Saad Hariri asserted: "Saudi Arabia expressed the entire truth in its communiqué. These adventurers put us in a critical position as a result of their thoughtless recklessness …. We will hold these adventurers who provoked a senseless crisis accountable". Quoted in *L'Orient le Jour*, 18 July 2006. According to a senior UN official, several pro-Western Arab regimes were privately conveying the message that they wanted Israel to finish the job. Crisis Group interview, New York, September 2006.

its victory, and Bashar described Arab leaders who had taken the opposite side as "half-men".[81]

This series of events ushered in a period of open confrontation. It culminated with the Saudi, Egyptian and Jordanian decisions to send low-level representatives to the March 2008 Arab League Summit in Damascus; Hizbollah's May 2008 takeover of Beirut;[82] and mutual accusations involving members of the two camps.[83] In this context, Saudi involvement in Lebanon – and in particular support for the Future Current – intensified.[84]

The Future Current also began to alter its traditional position regarding armed struggle against Israel. Increasingly, it highlighted the unsustainability of a situation in which Lebanon bore most of the burden of that fight while other Arabs stood passively by. Mohamad Hajjar, a Future Current member of parliament, put it as follows:

> the neutralisation of Lebanon does not mean it will give up Arab causes, notably the Palestinian cause and the fight against Israel. Israel will forever remain our enemy. … We need a plan of action that will compel all Arab parties and states to assume their responsibilities so that Lebanon no longer will be the only arena of conflict. [85]

A Saida resident expressed a view widely shared by members of the Sunni community:

> Why should we carry the burden of fighting Israel on behalf of all other Arabs? Why should we alone pay the price? War with Israel is delaying all of Rafic Hariri's former projects. Hizbollah destroyed everything Hariri sought to achieve.[86]

A principal explanation for this shift relates to the growing rift with Hizbollah which, by then, had monopolised armed resistance against Israel and was seen as using that fight for purposes that had little to do with broader Arab objectives. A Sunni Islamist activist said:

> Syria and Iran did what they could to liquidate any Sunni resistance and replaced it with a purely Shiite one. At first, we backed it because our priority was the struggle against Israel. But it turned out that their goal was to weaken the Sunnis.[87]

5. Sectarian divisions

Perhaps the most striking transformation in Sunni attitudes since 2005 has been the intense sectarian polarisation and hostility toward Shiites. Tensions had existed in the past, but for the most part they had remained dormant or, if expressed, quickly contained. The dominant fault lines during the civil war were either between Christians and Muslims or within communities. Between 1990 and 2005, periodic frictions between Rafic Hariri and the two Shiite movements, Amal and Hizbollah, never took on the shape of a confessional conflict.

[81] www.thenational.ae/article/20090710/FOREIGN/707099796/1011/rss.

[82] Crisis Group Briefing, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, op. cit.

[83] Syria implied that Saudi Arabia might have played a role in provoking strife on Syrian territory. A Syrian analyst with connections to local intelligence asserted: "There is a growing body of hard evidence pointing to Saudi meddling. A Saudi agent has recently been caught with bundles of cash designed to foment subversive action and was expelled as a result. Syria documents each step taken, both on its soil and in Lebanon, but won't use the evidence as long as reconciliation remains a possibility. It is not Syria's style to lead to a point of no return". Crisis Group interview, Damascus, October 2010. During the Gaza war, Hizbollah's secretary general said, "I am telling the Egyptians, if you do not open up the crossing at Rafah, you will be complicit in the crime perpetrated against the people of Gaza. … We know that the Egyptian army comprises many generals and military officials whose hearts and blood remain Arab and who worry about the fate of the Arab nation". Full speech available at www.mecanopolis.org/?cat=617. In April 2009, Egypt accused Hizbollah of having established terrorist cells on its territory to prepare attacks against Egyptian targets and Israeli tourists in Egypt. See www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/116/article_83949.asp. Referring to a Hizbollah cell, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit declared: "Iran, and Iran's followers, want Egypt to become a maid of honour for the crowned Iranian queen when she enters the Middle East". See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8000427.stm.

[84] After the 2006 war, Saudi Arabia deposited $1 billion in the Central bank to support the Lebanese economy and donated $500 million to help rebuild the country. www.menafn.com/qn_news_story_s.asp?StoryId=1093122661. Riyadh also reportedly provided massive financial assistance to March 14 forces in the context of the June 2009 parliamentary elections. See *The New York Times*, 22 April 2009.

[85] *Al-Mustaqbal*, 17 May 2009. Not coincidentally, the Future Current chose as its slogan for the 2009 elections "Lebanon First".

[86] Crisis Group interview, Saïda, 23 May 2009.

[87] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 17 April 2009. The Future Current's stance was in evidence during the December 2008-January 2009 Gaza war when, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia – and unlike Hizbollah – it refrained from expressing support for Hamas. During the war, a Future Current parliamentarian said, "I do not know what were Hamas's calculations [in choosing to provoke this war]. But I hope they serve the interests of the Palestinian people". *Al-Sayad Magazine*, 23-29 Januray 2009. An observer in Tripoli claimed: "posters expressing solidarity with Gazans were only plastered on the streets toward the end of the war, after the Saudi monarch gave a speech in support of the Palestinian people". Crisis Group interview, Abdel Ghani Imad, Tripoli, 7 April 2009.

The worsening regional climate, marked by Iraq's sectarian strife, growing fear of Iran's status and the spectre of a "Shiite peril", undoubtedly spilled over into Lebanon.[88] But the deepening chasm between Lebanon's Sunnis and Shiites between 2005 and 2008 had also to do with domestic developments. It evolved progressively, reaching a new height at each of five key stages.

Hariri's assassination was the first turning point, exposing how far the two communities' interests had drifted. For Sunnis, Syria's weakening held the prospect of a more independent future, in tune with Rafic Hariri's original vision. In contrast, Shiites feared that Syria's withdrawal – by removing its military cover and thus facilitating implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 which, in 2004, had called for the "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" – could hasten the end of Hizbollah's armed status; Amal also worried about the loss of its privileged position in the political system.[89] Together, these shifting fortunes carried the potential of altering the sectarian balance.

Shiite apprehension was most dramatically conveyed during the massive 8 March 2005 demonstration, which coincided with the anniversary of the 1963 coup that brought the Baath party to power in Damascus and was meant as a gesture of gratitude and loyalty toward Syria. In Lebanon's then highly emotional context, this intensive display of sectarian and political feelings helped set off the even larger counter-demonstration which, on 14 March, brought together Sunnis and others to mark the one-month anniversary of Hariri's death. According to a journalist close to March 14:

> The 8 March demonstration set the Shiites against all other communities, principally the Sunnis. Sunni participation in the 14 March demonstration was anti-Syrian, but it was mainly confessional. They were protesting against Shiites and against all those who appeared to be thankful for their leader's murder.[90]

The second turning point coincided with Hizbollah's decision to join the government, taken in order to compensate for Syria's departure. A Hizbollah leader put it as follows:

> Before 2005, we never had sought to be represented in government, because Syria was the guarantor of the Resistance. After Syria's withdrawal, our governmental presence became a requirement to preserve the Resistance.[91]

Reflecting sheer electoral calculations, the Future Current, Amal, Hizbollah and Walid Jumblatt's Druze party formed an alliance in the run-up to the May-June 2005 legislative elections. It was short-lived. In December 2005, Shiite ministers announced they were boycotting cabinet meetings in protest against governmental approval of the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate Rafic Hariri's murder and the broadening of its mandate to look into other attacks on Lebanese. In other words, greater Shiite participation in the political scene put them in direct conflict with March 14 on issues the Sunni community considered particularly important.

The 2006 war and, more so, its aftermath marked the next escalation. The conflict itself produced a temporary unity of sorts, driven by hostility toward Israel and solidarity toward civilian – principally Shiite – victims; for a time at least, it overshadowed the periodic, vehement criticism of Hizbollah's conduct.[92]

This solidarity did not survive the end of the conflict. The two camps once more were at loggerheads when it came to drawing conclusions from the catastrophic damage wrought by the war. March 8 took the view that Israel's behaviour further validated the need for the Resistance and labelled Lebanon's resilience as a "divine victory". In contrast, March 14 argued that the outcome illustrated the bankruptcy of a strategy that provokes devastating Israeli attacks and then takes solace from mere survival. The debate was highly emotional, and Hizbollah's denunciation of Future Current leaders as traitors further radicalised the Sunni base.[93]

[88] Several leaders of the moderate axis began to describe regional tensions as a fight against a Shiite threat, almost certainly in an attempt to gain the support of the predominantly Sunni Arab public. Jordan's King Abdullah, in particular, warned against the emergence of a "Shiite crescent" including the Gulf, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. *The Guardian*, 27 January 2007.

[89] From the outset, Syria had backed and promoted Amal, in particular during the civil war. After the war, Syria systematically sought to protect its ally's interests and ensure that Hizbollah not achieve a hegemonic position over the Shiite community.

[90] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 7 April 2009. An Islamist activist echoed this view: "The 8 March demonstration, which thanked Syria, profoundly affected the Sunnis. They attended the 14 March demonstrations in vast numbers not for Rafic Hariri alone, but also as part of an existential struggle, in reaction to the other side's provocations, in response to the Shiite masses". Crisis Group interview, Ihab al-Banna, Beirut, 28 March 2008. A Sunni sheikh who also is an Hizbollah ally described 8 March as one of the movement's "mistakes". Crisis Group interview, Maher Hamoud, Saïda, 23 December 2008.

[91] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 14 January 2009; also Crisis Group interview, Hizbollah member of parliament, Doha, February 2010.

[92] See Crisis Group Report, *Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis*, op. cit.

[93] In a speech on 7 December 2006, Hizbollah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, accused the government of "encouraging the

The war also helped expose Hizbollah's impressive military advances since the 2000 Israeli withdrawal; many of its domestic opponents saw this as an acute threat. Sunnis in particular worried that the now more politically active and far better armed Shiites would be tempted to impose their rule.[94]

Another threshold was crossed when the struggle clearly shifted from the realm of elite politics to that of street politics. In December 2006, the Hizbollah-led opposition – frustrated by the government's decision to ignore the Shiite ministers' walkout – organised a sit-in in the centre of Beirut, a space considered by Sunnis as their own. Participants called for the resignation of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora – a former adviser to Rafic Hariri who was chosen by Saad to head the cabinet[95] – and assumed control of an area that had been entirely rebuilt after the civil war and stood as the embodiment of the slain leader's vision.[96] Sunnis were stung by the perceived provocation, a symbol of "Shiite expansion" in their sphere of influence.[97]

The first clashes among militants broke out when, in January 2007,[98] the opposition launched a general strike and paralysed several key transit routes in Beirut.[99] Such incidents became more frequent, as residents of adjoining Sunni and Shiite neighbourhoods got involved.[100] Clashes spread to other regions and involved other communities. In Tripoli, it took the form of armed conflict between the Sunni stronghold of Bab Tebbéné and the Alawite area of Jabal Muhsen that lasted several weeks.

This new stage in the inter-confessional confrontation led many within the Sunni community to ask its leadership for a military, self-defence capacity.[101] Their case was bolstered by the security forces' relative inability to stand between the opposing parties. The Future Current, facing competition from Sunni rivals in several localities, could not remain passive as its constituency became increasingly restless.[102] At the time, one of Saad's advisers said:

U.S. administration to attack Hizbollah via Israel". Nasrallah also accused Prime Minister Siniora of having "ordered the army to confiscate weapon ammunitions for the Resistance in the South at the height of the war .... Instead of arresting Israeli spies, one of the intelligence services beholden to the party in power [Future Current] sought to locate Hizbollah cadres. Some tried to locate me personally during the war …. I call for the establishment of a commission of inquiry to look into the conduct of all sides", at http://moqawma.blogspot.com/2006/12/7-2006.html. A Jamaa Islamiyya leader claimed that "every one of Nasrallah's accusations cost him Sunni support. If he stuck to speaking about the resistance, he would almost certainly have rallied the Sunni street". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 24 March 2008. A Beirut Sunni resident said, "I was with Hizbollah during the war and I backed its resistance against Israel. But when its leaders accused the government of being an Israeli agent, I began to hate them". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 10 June 2009.

[94] Many Lebanese Sunnis are convinced that Hizbollah is seeking to bolster the Shiite community's domestic status. They contend that the movement is trying to convert Sunnis, purchase land in Sunni areas and buy off Sunni religious figures. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, March 14 officials, sheikhs, Islamist activits, and residents, Beirut, Tripoli and Saïda, March 2008-June 2009.

[95] March 14 leaders suggested that the opposition was planning to attack the prime minister's offices (Sérail) to compel him to resign. Sunnis interpreted the sit-in as an attempt to besiege the Sérail, a symbol of Sunni power. A Tripoli sheikh said, "by surrounding the Sérail, the Shiites were desecrating a Sunni symbol. We were facing an armed community that occupied the centre of Beirut even as it laid siege to another community's leaders. This was extremely humiliating for Sunnis". Crisis Group interview, Hassan Chahal, Tripoli, May 2007. Lebanon's grand mufti, leader of the Highest Sunni religious institution, led a prayer in the government's headquarters, declaring that "the overthrow of Prime Minister Siniora and his government is a redline". *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 9 December 2009. Ihab al-Banna, an Islamist militant, said, "the mufti equated the government building to a mosque, a sacred space for the Sunni community". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 23 March 2008.

[96] A Beirut-based sheikh claimed that "March 8 occupied the heart of Beirut, which is the heart of Rafic Hariri's project". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 15 April 2009.

[97] Crisis Group interview, Future Current officials, Sunni sheikhs and activists, Beirut, Tripoli and Saïda, January 2008-April 2009.

[98] One month earlier, in December 2006, a Shiite resident of the Sunni neighbourhood of Tariq Jdideh was slain by Sunni gunmen. See www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1566289,00.html.

[99] Several people died and tens were wounded as a result of these clashes. The army responded by ordering a curfew. www.lebarmy.gov.lb/article.asp?ln=ar&id=13066.

[100] A mixed neighbourhood resident said, "virtually every day saw fighting between young militants from Khandaq al-Ghamik [whose residents are mainly Amal supporters] and from Basta [who tend to back the Future Current]. We were living in a permanent state of war that still haunts us". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, May 2009. Several bloody incidents between 2006 and 2008 threatened to drag the country toward a far more violent and destabilising conflict.

[101] During the demonstrations, some Future Current sympathisers were clamouring: "Oh Saad, we want Kalashnikovs, not bread". Crisis Group observations, Tripoli, March 2008. A Future Current parliamentarian claimed that he and his colleagues had met with several groups that demanded to be armed. Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008.

[102] Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, Beirut and Tripoli, March-May 2008. A close adviser to Saad Hariri explained: "We had to do something to address the anger of the Sunni youth. People were insulting us and insulting Saad Hariri, when we turned down their requests for weapons". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008.

> We cannot rely on the army. Amal and Hizbollah militants can enter any place they want and create disorder before the army steps in. Our best and only response is for our youth to take charge of protecting Sunni neighbourhoods.[103]

The Future Current's response to growing popular pressure was not to establish its own, centralised militia; Hizbollah's overwhelming military power would have rendered any such endeavour futile and counterproductive.[104] Instead, it created a private security organisation[105] charged with protecting its leaders – a reaction to the assassination of several March 14 figures between 2005 and 2007. It also recruited young militants to join Future Current-funded and managed groups to defend Sunni neighbourhoods.[106] Another adviser to Saad Hariri explained:

> The January 2007 general strike drove us to create these groups.[107] Beirut was virtually shut down as Amal and Hizbollah set up hundreds of checkpoints. Beirut's Sunni residents were in a state of shock: they were surrounded by Shiites. Hizbollah had taken control of all of Beirut, including its Sunni neighbourhoods. That's when we decided to recruit people and train them to defend their areas.[108]

The fifth and final stage in this spiralling crisis occurred in May 2008. Reacting to cabinet decisions it viewed as undermining its operational capacity,[109] Hizbollah and some of its allies mounted a vast military manoeuvre. Within a few hours, the movement was in control of Sunni-dominated West Beirut.[110] Saad Hariri was under siege in his residence, his personal guard, and the Future Current's private security and other forces having been routed.[111] The Sunnis' defeat was swift, unambiguous and humiliating.

C. A PARADOXICAL NEW BALANCE OF POWER

The May 2008 crisis carried several harsh lessons for the Future Current. To begin, it was utterly outmatched by its opponents' cohesiveness, determination and advance planning. Even within Hariri's entourage, criticism concerning the movement's strategic choices was bitter and rampant.[112] Sunni militants who joined the fighting blamed their leaders for "abandoning them".[113] Just as importantly, the events attested to the impotence of the Future Current's foreign allies. The U.S., France and

[103] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008**.** Future Current supporters were not alone in expressing such demands. Jamaa Islamiyya, which, like Hizbollah, continued to back armed resistance against Israel, nonetheless formed a group to defend its headquarters and Dar al-Fatwa, the official Sunni religious institution, located in the Sunni neighbourhood of Aïcha Bakkar. Crisis Group interview, *Jamaa Islamiyya* senior official, Beirut, 24 March 2008. He said, "young Shiites riding their scooters regularly invade Tariq al-Jadida (a Sunni neighbourhood), harass women, insult the Prophet's companions. They regularly fire shots in this area which they dub Tel-Aviv. We feel completely unsafe".

[104] "Our goal is to dissolve all existing militias, not to create new ones. But the state and its security forces are unable to protect us. That's why we have to ensure our self-defence. We have to provide our people with safety". Crisis Group interview, Moustafa Allouch, Tripoli, 6 May 2008.

[105] The organisation is known as Secure Plus. See www.blogging beirut.com/archives/1342-LA-Times-Reports-on-Secure-Plus.html.

[106] These groups were managed by the Future Current's former general coordinator, Salim Diab. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, Beirut and Tripoli, March-May 2008. Among these groups were Fouhoud Tariq al-Jadideh in Beirut and Afwaj Tarablos in Tripoli; others were established in Akkar, the Bekaa and Shebaa. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, March 2008. They are said to have numbered several thousand people, though the precise number and estimates vary widely. The Tripoli-based Afwaj Tarablos is said to have numbered anywhere between 3,000 and 9,000 militants. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current leaders, sheikhs, fighters**,** Tripoli**,** March-September 2008.

[107] In January 2007, the Lebanese General Workers Union called for a strike. In response, March 8 supporters shut down all of Beirut's street by using burning tires. The strike occurred two days prior to the skirmishes at Beirut Arab University.

[108] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008. Sunni neighbourhoods were patrolled at night by young residents. Crisis Group observations, Beirut and Tripoli, 2008.

[109] The government decided to dismantle Hizbollah's telecommunications network and to reassign the head of security at Beirut's airport, Wafiq Shuqayr. The later is a general officer close to the speaker, Nabih Berri, and accused by March 14 forces of sharing information with Hizbollah. Crisis Group Briefing, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, op. cit.

[110] Ibid.

[111] According to many observers, the recruits lacked preparation, motivation and knowledge. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, March 14 official and residents, Beirut, Tripoli and Akkar, March-May 2008. The brother of an Akkar fighter said, "these young people had no ideological purpose, they were not fighting based on a shared conviction. My brother used to say: 'when the fighting erupted, we had no weapons and we were sent to Beirut even though we knew nothing of the city. We were left to our own devices'. For many recruits, joining a group was nothing more than a means to make money". Crisis Group interview, 8 August 2009.

[112] The leadership was criticised, inter alia, for poor management of the Current's meagre military resources, its attempt to recruit young people essentially by using financial incentives and the absence of a unifying ideology that might have mobilised fighters. Crisis Group interviews, Future Current and March 14 officials, Beirut, Tripoli, Saïda, Miniyeh and Akkar, May 2008-September 2009.

[113] Crisis Group interviews, Akkar and Beirut, August 2009.

Saudi Arabia watched passively from the sidelines as Hizbollah flexed its muscles. During the subsequent Doha negotiations, March 14, feeling betrayed, had little choice but to accept most of the opposition's demands which, buoyed by the international community's support, it had resisted until then.[114]

In a way, the outcome also marked the end of the Future Current's brief flirtation with a military logic. From the outset, the effort to develop a parallel security force was at odds with the movement's avowed agenda – to reinforce the state and its monopoly on the use of force, consolidate the nation's sovereignty and promote national unity. It also would have amounted to mimicking the very practices for which it criticised Hizbollah without the remotest chance of matching the Shiite movement's overwhelming military might.

Its setbacks notwithstanding, the Future Current enhanced its popular support in the wake of the events. Stunned and alarmed by Hizbollah's decision to turn its weapons inwards, the Sunni community rallied solidly behind Hariri. In the face of what it experienced as an existential threat, any expression of dissent was viewed as betrayal.[115] In June 2009, the Future Current – buoyed by a massive Sunni turnout – triumphed in the parliamentary elections. The vote, a reflection of a powerful communal solidarity, signalled Hariri's emergence as a virtually unchallenged Sunni leader.[116]

Still, the May 2008 showdown enshrined a political-military equilibrium the Future Current could not ignore. The new president, Michel Suleimane, was selected by consensus, approved by March 14, March 8 and their respective external allies. The new cabinet, like the one emanating from the Doha accords, was a national unity government in which the March 14 coalition had fifteen ministers, the March 8 coalition ten, and the president five.[117] In essence, the Future Current and its allies no longer govern *against* but *with* the opposition – an opposition that can still contest March 14's policy choices but from within.

The domestic realignment was matched by regional and international repositioning. After the Doha accord, France broke ranks with the U.S. and rapidly normalised relations with Syria, credited with having allowed the new president's election.[118] The Bush administration itself, although not fundamentally altering its stance, softened its pressure on Damascus and disengaged somewhat from Lebanon.[119] Among some March 14 leaders, Barak Obama's election strengthened the conviction, rightly or wrongly, that the era of unconditional U.S. support was a thing of the past.[120]

Ironically, the June 2009 elections and Hariri's clear victory helped accelerate these changes. Syrian acceptance of the results and Hariri's selection as prime minister removed important impediments to a Saudi-Syrian rap-

[114] Between 2005 and 2008, the March 14 coalition registered several important victories. These included Syria's withdrawal and the establishment of the international tribunal over Shiite objections. Despite the breakup of the four-way alliance between the Future Current, Jumblatt's party, Hizbollah and Amal, and notwithstanding repeated opposition attempts to bring it down (through demonstrations, the resignation of Shiite ministers, a months-long sit-in and the refusal to elect a new president), the March 14 coalition remained in power.

[115] Thus, when several Salafi leaders signed a joint document with Hizbollah in August 2008, without the Future Current's acquiescence, they faced angry demonstrations and were compelled to abrogate the agreement. *Al-Safir*, 20 August 2008. Likewise, the Future Current's Sunni rivals suffered crushing losses at the June polls.

[116] On average, roughly 80 per cent of Sunnis voted for the Future Current or its allies. The Sunni vote played a decisive role in the March 14's victory. In predominantly Sunni areas, such as Tripoli, Akkar, Saïda and the West Bekaa, the elections clearly consolidated Hariri's pre-eminence. In several predominantly Christian districts, Sunni voters also made the difference, tilting the balance in favour of March 14. In Zahleh, they accounted for some 30 per cent of the vote even though they constitute no more than a quarter of the electorate; 86 per cent of them voted for March 14. In Beirut I, 37,000 Sunnis voted, and 83 per cent backed March 14; in 2005, only 13,000 had turned out at the polls. See *2009 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections by Ballot box, Candidates and Confessions*, Information International/As-Safir, (Beirut, 2009), a five-volume publication including a detailed report of the votes. Prior to the elections, a journalist from Tripoli said, "Nobody is going to punish the Future Current for the mistakes it has made in Tripoli. There is a lot of criticism of the movement's decision to exclude Misbah al-Ahdab, who enjoys considerable Sunni support, or to include people viewed as having been too close to Syria, such as Ahmad Karameh. But on election day, even those who are unhappy will vote for the Future Current's list – some because they are financially dependent on the movement, others because they want to prevent the election of an Hizbollah ally". Crisis Group interview, 7 April 2009.

[117] "Lebanon's new Government", International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 9 November 2009. According to a Hariri adviser, "the 7 May 2008 events and the Doha agreement have established new rules and a new balance of power between majority and opposition that the elections themselves couldn't alter. This is not an issue of Hizbollah domination but rather of a balance between different parties". Crisis Group interview, Mohamad Chatah, Hariri's foreign policy adviser, Beirut, 16 January 2010.

[118] Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°27, *Engaging Syria? Lessons from the French Experience*, 15 January 2009.

[119] Crisis Group Middle East Report N°83, *Engaging Syria? U.S. Constraints and Opportunities*, 11 February 2009.

[120] Crisis Group interview, Lebanese journalist with close ties to March 14, Beirut, 15 February 2009. See also www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=148558.

prochement which had begun earlier that year.[121] From then on, Riyadh adopted a more balanced approach and encouraged normalisation of ties between Syria and Lebanon, in particular by pressing Saad Hariri to visit Damascus – a trip that, given the prime minister's conviction that Syria bore responsibility for his father's death, was heavy in emotional and political significance.[122]

Domestically, March 14's difficulties and the reassertion of Syrian influence led Walid Jumblatt to distance himself from the coalition of which he had been a central pillar.[123] Instead, he struck a more neutral pose in the belief that it was the most prudent way to safeguard his community's vital interests.[124] Jumblatt said:

> I opposed US engagement with Syria. But I've changed my mind. Bush's project for a new Middle East was very dangerous. Look what's happening in Iraq and the disaster in Palestine![125]

Jumblatt's reorientation diluted the significance of Hariri's electoral victory, depriving March 14 of an influential and charismatic leader and calling into question the coalition's sustainability. A Hariri adviser lamented: "Jumblatt's realignment prompted a shift in the balance of power".[126]

The prime minister adapted to new realities and to his new position. Immediately after results were announced on 7 June, his rhetoric shifted from "we will not forget"[127] to an appeal for compromise and a call to turn the page on a period of tensions and internal conflict. After five months of negotiations, majority and opposition agreed on a national unity government in which March 8 enjoyed veto power over all major cabinet decisions.[128] Importantly, the ministerial declaration restated the traditional Lebanese position concerning Hizbollah's armed status,[129] asserting that the file would be closed only once the Arab-Israeli conflict was resolved. For the immediate future, the government made clear that it would focus on

[121] The first signs of a Syrian/Saudi rapprochement occurred at the January 2009 Arab summit in Kuwait with a meeting between King Abdallah and President Assad. This was followed by a visit by Assad to the Kingdom in September 2009, followed two weeks later by a reciprocal visit from the Saudi monarch. See www.alarabiya.net/views/2009/10/09/87510.html.

[122] During the visit, Hariri proclaimed his wish to build "privileged, honest and frank relations ... in the interests of both states and both peoples". Agence France-Presse, 20 December 2009.

[123] "While we allied during a certain stage under the banner of March 14 along with other parties and figures due to the reality in the country at the time, this alliance cannot continue. We must think about a new formation within the party firstly and at the level of the country secondly, in order to exit this bias and right-wing inclination .... We in the party and the March 14 team did engage in a battle with a political content. We engaged in a battle of rejecting the other, ie, a battle with a tribal character in which we rejected the other on sectarian, tribal and political bases. Our victory was therefore not real". www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=107029. Jumblatt even considered it "illogical when we met with the neoconservatives in Washington to protect the so-called Cedar Revolution, freedom and independence. It was unnatural for the Progressive Socialist Party in its historical context and positioning to meet with those who spread chaos in the Middle East and destroyed Iraq and Palestine". Ibid.

[124] Jumblatt clearly was motivated in part by communal considerations. After the 7 May events, he felt that Druze interests were under threat. One of his close aides said, "The Druze were asking themselves many questions. Their religious leaders told Jumblatt that it was not in their community's interests to confront the Shiites. They were asking why the Druze should pay the price for a battle between Sunnis and Shiites. Why should we make this sacrifice in order to defend the Sunnis?" Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 20 May 2009. Jumblatt himself told Crisis Group: "We are a small minority. We cannot stand against the others. In the event of a Sunni-Shiite conflict, or any other sectarian conflict that might involve the Druze, we will pay the heaviest price. We would run the risk of extinction". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 10 August 2009.

[125] Crisis Group interview, Walid Jumblatt, 22 September 2009.

[126] Crisis Croup interview, Mohamad Chatah, Beirut, 16 January 2010.

[127] This electoral slogan alluded both to the 2005 assassination of Rafic Hariri and 2008 takeover of Beirut, which Future Current militants vowed not to forget.

[128] According to an oral agreement between Saad Hariri, President Michel Suleiman and the opposition, one of the current ministers named by the president is a Shiite close to the opposition, as a result of which the March 8 coalition in effect has a blocking third. Crisis Group interview, former minister with close ties to Saad Hariri, Beirut, 23 September 2009. See also www.aljazeera.net/Mob/Templates/Postings/NewsDetailedPage.aspx?GUID=4BA4BA0E-4ACB-452B-BA72-C65B89B85229. That said, whatever reconciliation occurred at the top has yet to spill over to the base or to the two communities' religious leaderships. Indeed, mutual feelings of distrust and antipathy remain powerful. Crisis Group interviews, Sunni and Shia residents, Beirut, December 2009-February 2010. In the words of the (Sunni) Economy and Trade minister: "Resentment still runs very deep and the split between the Shiite and Sunni communities remains. Sunnis cannot forget what happened on 7 May. Since then, they have felt threatened by Hizbollah". Crisis Group interview, Mohamad al-Safadi, Beirut, 22 March 2010.

[129] The declaration recognised "the right of Lebanon through its people, Army and the Resistance to liberate the Shebaa Farms, the Kfar Shuba Hills and the northern part of the village of Ghajar as well as to defend Lebanon and its territorial waters in the face of any enemy by all available and legal means". See www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=131426.

domestic, economic matters,[130] though even on these issues it is far from certain various members can reach common ground.[131]

Hariri's most dramatic evolution touched on his relations with Syria. It was not risk-free. His official visit to Damascus, choreographed to symbolise a personal and political reconciliation with President Bashar,[132] came amid high expectations of progress on four files deemed important by March 14 and its international allies:[133] the dismantling of military bases run by pro-Syrian Palestinian factions outside the refugee camps; information on the fate of Lebanese citizens who "disappeared" during the civil war at the hands of Syrian forces; demarcation of the Syrian/Lebanese borders; and amendment of treaties and institutions that govern bilateral relations, chiefly the Higher Syrian-Lebanese Council. Mohamad Chatah, an advisor to Saad, said, "our relations with Syria are going through a test period – a test for us but also for the Syrians. Making progress on these various files, and principally on the nature of our bilateral ties, is a realistic objective but not a foregone conclusion".[134]

Hariri's policy adjustment troubled many within the 14 March coalition, who fear Syrian efforts to undertake a full comeback – political and even military – and advocate a tougher line toward both the domestic opposition and Damascus.[135] Several Future Current militants expressed frustrations and doubts.[136] In their eyes, the cabinet makeup, ministerial declaration and Hariri's visit to Damascus amount to major concessions that have yet to be meaningfully reciprocated. In the words of one movement leader, "people are asking whether these compromises are a signal of our weakness or of foreign pressure [from Saudi Arabia]. They don't understand where we are heading. We need to show them we have not relinquished our vision".[137] The Future Current's newfound "centrist" position also could lead rival Sunni figures to challenge Hariri's leadership. Those (few) who had maintained close ties to Syria throughout this period could claim that the Prime Minister's changed policy vindicates their position.[138]

Such potential problems notwithstanding, the Future Current for now appears able to preserve its dominant position among Sunnis. Continued uncertainly in the domestic and regional arenas is likely to convince most that closing ranks behind Hariri is still a priority. Unlike any potential competitor, the Future Current is truly national in scope and enjoys a vast network of social and charitable services. Echoing a largely shared view, one of its parliamentarians predicted: "The changes that have occurred

[130] Crisis Group interview, Mohamad Chatah, Beirut, 16 January 2010.

[131] Disagreements already have surfaced, for example regarding the holding of municipal elections in May 2010, appointment of senior officials and the budget. Interestingly, these discords at times have cut across the two coalitions. On some questions (such as whether to lower the voting age), the Aoun bloc voted with some March 14 members, while some members of the majority backed the amendment along with Hizbollah and Amal. The amendment ultimately failed. See *Al-Nahar*, 23 February 2010.

[132] Hariri went to Damascus accompanied by his cousin and chief of staff, Nader Hariri, rather than a cohort of ministers and officials. He held several lengthy, private meetings with Bashar al-Assad.

[133] Crisis Group interviews, Samir Frangieh, March 14 official, Beirut, 7 January 2010; Mohamad Chatah, Beirut, 16 January 2010.

[134] Crisis Group interview, Mohamad Chatah, Beirut, 16 January 2010. The future of Syrian-Lebanese relations remains uncertain, of course. Aside from those inherent in negotiating a new relationship, problems could come from the outside: tensions on the Israeli-Lebanese border, developments affecting the international tribunal, the evolution of inter-Arab relations and the shape of U.S. regional policy, in particular vis-a-vis Iran.

[135] Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, December 2009-Februray 2010. The long and arduous negotiations between Saad Hariri and Michel Aoun regarding the cabinet makeup caused tensions within March 14, as its Christian members felt too many concessions were being made to their Christian rival. Ultimately, Aoun obtained satisfaction on several key points: his son-in-law's appointment to the cabinet despite March 14's strong opposition; the selection as telecommunications minister of a person with close ties to the Free Patriotic Movement, notwithstanding Hariri's and his colleagues' earlier claim to the position. Hariri's Christian allies complained that they were not sufficiently involved in negotiations and bemoaned the fact that Aoun's movement was awarded five ministries while they got only three. The day the government was formed, former President Amine Gemayel's Kataeb movement threatened to quit the March 14 coalition; their minister, Salim al-Sayegh, boycotted the cabinet's first meetings. *L'Orient Le Jour*, 10-12 November 2009.

[136] A Future Current supporter lamented: "After this long struggle, we are back at square one. Hariri is improving his relationship with Bashar, he made numerous concessions to the March 8 coalition when it came to the new cabinet, and the ministerial declaration legitimised Hizbollah's weapons". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 13 February 2010.

[137] Crisis Group interview, Mohamad Chatah, adviser to Saad Hariri on foreign affairs, Beirut, 16 January 2010. According to a Future Current parliamentarian, "our base and most mid-level cadres accept Hariri's new relations with Damascus but without conviction". Crisis Group interview, Nouhad al-Machnouk, Beirut, 2 January 2010.

[138] A close adviser to former Prime Minister Omar Karameh, who kept close ties to Damascus, said, "Hariri no longer can make use of anti-Syrian rhetoric to mobilise Sunnis. This will help us in the future. Moreover, his language increasingly mirrors that of the Sunni opposition he used to attack". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 13 February 2010.

do not threaten the movement. Till now, people have followed Saad Hariri".[139]

Of potentially far greater moment than the four abovementioned issues (border demarcation; the disappeared; Palestinian camps; and the institutional structure of bilateral ties) or even the Sunni community's reaction to normalised relations are the proceedings of the international tribunal regarding the murder of Rafic Hariri and other Lebanese. Between 2005 and 2008, the tribunal emerged as the principal trigger for hostilities between the March 14 coalition on the one hand and Syria and Hizbollah on the other.[140] The former, convinced of Damascus's culpability, see it as a means to end Syrian impunity and curtail its influence in Lebanon.[141] Syria has viewed it as a political instrument which the U.S. and the March 14 coalition have used to pressure the regime. Tellingly, disagreements concerning the tribunal prompted the Shiite ministers' resignation in 2005.[142]

With the national unity government and steps toward Syrian-Lebanese reconciliation, the issue, for now, has been put on the back-burner.[143] But that could change. There are indications that the chief prosecutor might announce indictments sometime before the end of the year,[144] and speculation is mounting that he might implicate Hizbollah members.[145] Warning about the potential implications of such allegations, Jumblatt compared them to the "Aïn Remaneh bus" – an allusion to the attacks that triggered the 1975 civil war.[146] Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbollah's secretary general, claimed they were "very, very, very dangerous", questioning the tribunal's impartiality and making clear that holding party members responsible could destabilise the country.[147] How this develops and who is incriminated could profoundly affect future relations between Hariri, Syria and the Shiite movement.

D. THE FUTURE CURRENT'S POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES

The Future Current is both extremely centralised and tremendously fluid. It has organised around patriarchal figures – Rafic and then, to a lesser extent, Saad –, assigns important roles to Hariri family members[148] and works somewhat in the manner of a royal court in which access to resources generally is a function of proximity to the ruling family. At the same time, the Future Current never established party-like organisational or ideological structures (even though it formally registered as a party in 2007).[149] It lacks a clear political program, a coherent, institutionalised decision-making process and professional cadres capable of mobilising and organising supporters. To an extent, supporters are bound together by the power of Rafic Hariri's memory and legacy,[150] although the staggering national debt, persistent conflict with Israel and shape of the new unity government call into question large components of Rafic's grand design.

In so far as the Future Current has presented a unifying vision, it essentially has been a negative one, predicated on hostility toward Hizbollah and its local and foreign backers. According to Moustafa Allouch:

> The Future Current's popularity stems from instinctive reactions. Some of those who back us do so chiefly on the basis of communal solidarity triggered by the Sunni-Shiite conflict as well as antagonism toward Hizbollah and [its Christian ally] Michel Aoun.[151]

In recent years, the Future Current's loose organisation and political flexibility was an asset. It enlarged its appeal to different, often contradictory constituencies. The Current became a broad assembly of Islamists, Arab nationalists, Lebanese nationalists and secular activists; of rich and poor; of Beirut residents convinced that "the capital is the centre where efforts need to be focused"[152] and inhabitants of provinces for whom "the priority is the development of peripheral areas";[153] of people drawn to the West and of some drawn to radical Islamist figures. Had the Future Current been rigidly organised as a politi-

[139] Crisis Group interview, Nouhad al-Machnouk, Future Current parliamentarian, Beirut, 20 January 2010.
[140] See Crisis Group Briefing, *Lebanon at a Tripwire*, op. cit., pp. 8-11.
[141] Ibid.
[142] See above, p. 11.
[143] In a February interview, Hariri said of the tribunal: "What we got is a process that takes time, and whoever thinks that this justice will not come is very wrong, very dead wrong. Everything in that tribunal is moving forward in the right way. All we have to do really is to be patient". http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8514727.stm.
[144] http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=169998.
[145] See, eg, www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,626412,00.html.
[146] *As-Safir*, 26 May 2009.
[147] www.almanar.com.lb/newssite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=86890&language=ar.
[148] Among them, Bahia Hariri, Saad's aunt, is the movement's representative in Saïda; Nader Hariri, his cousin, is his chief of staff; Ahmad Hariri, another cousin, is head of the committee tasked with restructuring the Future Current institutions.
[149] See www.almustaqbal.org/category.php?i=NzA.
[150] Crisis Group interview, Future Current officials, Beirut, March 2008.
[151] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 25 March 2008.
[152] Crisis Group interview, Future Current supporter, Beirut, May 2009.
[153] Crisis Group interview, Future Current supporter, Minieh, 8 August 2009.

cal party, such competing views might well have been unmanageable. As one of its parliamentarians put it, "there is not really a movement or political organisation called the Future Current. There is, rather, a vast gathering of supporters".[154]

Over time, however, the dominant traditional style of patriarchal politics, combined with a lack of cadres, institutions and internal coordination mechanisms, could prove costly.[155] Militants at times take actions without any oversight.[156] The Future Current's support, powerful as it is, remains, in the words of one of its parliamentarians, "imperfect, fluid and fragile".[157] A local UN expert commented: "Patron-client politics create erratic loyalty; one's allegiance quickly can shift against the leader, as soon the leader stops providing funds".[158]

There also is a large gap between stated principles and actual behaviour. The Future Current denounces others, notably Hizbollah, for undermining the state,[159] yet its policies have differed little in their impact. It too has stepped into the economic, social and security void left by the state as a means of addressing constituent demands, asserted influence over state institutions,[160] encouraged a sectarian discourse and sought out foreign assistance.[161] Such practices, followed by much of the political class, perpetuate the state's weakness.

The Future Current's patron-client style of politics simultaneously undermines long-term prospects for national development and fosters a culture of dependency. Particularly in areas typically neglected by the state, the Current's constituency feels entitled to a share of Hariri's wealth.[162] One of its parliamentarians said:

> Hariri is willing to assist with the development of certain regions and to help people who are in need. But they prefer to remain unproductive and completely rely on Hariri. Many people expect the Future Current to do everything for them. I have with me a letter from a constituent asking Hariri to pay his debts. It's time we change that mentality.[163]

The Future Current's most acute dilemma today is that the more it plays on and appeals to Sunni fears and insecurities – the more it retains its current system of patronage – the less Hariri can aspire to a national role. After the 2009 elections, the leadership claimed that it had begun a serious reform process. It established a committee to help transform the movement into a genuine political party; by February 2010, the committee was supposed to present ideas on how to refashion the decision-making mechanism, internal coordination and membership standards, rules and regulations. However, the Future Current's first congress, initially scheduled for April, and which was due to unveil a new structure and program, has been postponed.[164] Scepticism regarding the depth and speed of such changes remains widespread, including within the Future Current itself.[165]

[154] Crisis Group interview, Nouhad al-Machnouk, Beirut, 20 January 2010.

[155] For Jamal Jarrah, a Future Current parliamentarian, "there is a gap between the central leadership and regional coordinators. There is no well-defined coordination mechanism to allocate responsibilities, clarify the decision-making process or control and assess how our cadres are performing". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 9 November 2009.

[156] Such lack of central control – which is not unique to the Future Current – can have dangerous implications. A journalist with close ties to the movement said, "many clashes that take place are essentially local disputes, even though those who fight claim to do so on behalf of the Future Current, Amal or some other group". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 9 September 2009.

[157] Crisis Group interview, Jamal Jarrah, Beirut, 9 November 2009.

[158] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 30 July 2009.

[159] Many Future Current members and officials consider Hizbollah "a state within the state", a separate armed militia that is responsible for law and order in certain areas – for example, Beirut's southern suburbs. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, January 2008-June 2009.

[160] The Interior Security Forces, which serves as the country's national police and security service, is seen by the opposition as working on the Future Current's behalf. Its head, Achraf Rifi, is known to be close to Hariri. See *Al-Akhbar*, 20 November 2009.

[161] Many Future Current leaders and supporters openly acknowledge the "organic" link between the movement and Saudi Arabia. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut. Tripoli, 2006-2009.

[162] An Akkar resident said, "it's Saad Hariri's responsibility to spend money on our region. We are completely ignored by the state and are among Lebanon's poorest regions. All the other leaders meet their constituents' demands. Today, we belong to Hariri's camp and so he should take care of us". Crisis Group interview, Akkar, 8 August 2009. A Tripoli resident remarked: "Saad Hariri is a billionaire. He should pay more than all the others". Crisis Group interview, 8 April 2009.

[163] Crisis Group interview, Jamal Jarrah, Future Current parliamentarian for the western Bekaa, Beirut, 9 November 2009.

[164] A new date is due but has yet to be set. Crisis Group interview, Hariri advisor, Beirut, 15 April 2010.

[165] Crisis Group interviews, Future Current parliament members and supporters, Hariri advisors, Beirut and Tripoli, December 2009-February 2010.

III. THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF SUNNI POLITICAL DIVERSITY

The Future Current's existing supremacy over the Sunni community is something of an anomaly. For much of its contemporary history, the community has been both geographically and politically fragmented. Its main strongholds are spread throughout the country, in Beirut, north Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the southern city of Saida. Although ideologically Sunnis have shared certain outlooks (Arab nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s; various Islamist projects from the 1980s onwards), their leadership has been divided among many competing local figures. Under the circumstances, and under Saad Hariri's dual role as head of the movement and leader of the nation, an important question is how long the Future Current can maintain its quasi-hegemony.

A. LOCAL PERSONALITIES

During Rafic Hariri's era, the Future Current concentrated its activities in Beirut – at once the power centre, hub of state institutions and economic capital. According to several of his then-advisers, the movement deliberately tempered its efforts in other Sunni localities to avoid an overly sectarian taint. One said, "Hariri left Saida to concentrate most of his work in Beirut. In his eyes, the capital symbolises the state and Lebanon's cosmopolitanism. He wished to be at the heart of Lebanon and at the intersection of all its religions".[166] Tellingly, his free-market economic policies benefited the centre of the country but overlooked – and, in some ways, hurt[167] – peripheral, impoverished regions such as the Bekaa and Akkar (in northern Lebanon), as well as popular neighbourhoods in Tripoli, the nation's second largest, predominantly Sunni city.

Of at least equal importance, the scope of Hariri's ambitions likely was constrained by Syria and its allies who were present in these areas. Future Current supporters argue that Damascus prevented the movement from spreading its influence;[168] in contrast, local pro-Syrian figures – such as Omar Karameh in Tripoli and Abdel Rahim Mrad in the western Bekaa – thrived.

The one exception was Saida, Rafic Hariri's birthplace. In 1979, he founded his first association in the southern city. Led by his sister, Bahia, the Hariri Foundation funded numerous projects and provided important social services there. Unlike other predominantly Sunni areas, the city was free of any Syrian military presence and thus enjoyed greater room to manoeuvre. Even in his stronghold, however, Hariri faced rivals. In the 2004 municipal elections, a year prior to his murder, the list led by his family suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of candidates backed by two other leading local Sunni figures, Oussama Saad[169] and Abdel Rahman al-Bizri.[170]

The 2009 parliamentary elections revealed a strikingly different picture that illustrated both the Future Current's broad and more or less unrivalled support among Sunnis country-wide and Saad Hariri's clear leadership status. In Tripoli, his three most significant challengers, who each nurtured prime ministerial ambitions, were forced to acknowledge Hariri's pre-eminence: Omar Karameh, a former prime minister and scion of a powerful local family;[171] Najib Miqati, another former prime minister and wealthy businessman enjoying good relations with both Damascus and Riyadh;[172] and Mohamad Safadi, current economy and trade minister and successful businessman with close ties to Saudi Arabia.[173]

[166] Crisis Group interview, Alain Badaro, Lebanese businessman, Beirut, 2008.

[167] Hariri's various projects – whether related to economic development, infrastructure building, social services, tourism, sports or education – were focused on the capital. Beirut also attracted the bulk of investments during Rafic Hariri's era. See Sandra Iché, "La capitale: deuxième pôle d'intégration", in *L'Orient-Express: Chronique d'un magazine libanais des années 1990*, Institut français du Proche-Orient (Beirut, 2009), at http://ifpo.revues.org/645.

[168] Crisis Group interview, Moustafa Allouch, former Future Current parliamentarian, Beirut, 25 March 2008; Khaled Daher, Future Current parliamentarian for Akkar, Beirut, 18 August 2009.

[169] Oussama Saad's father, Maarouf, and brother, Mostafa, both were important figures. In 1992 and 1996, Mostafa Saad won a parliamentary seat despite facing a strong coalition led by both Nabih Berri, the Shiite speaker of parliament, and Rafic Hariri.

[170] Abdel Rahman al-Bizri hails from a traditional Saïda family. He is the city's mayor. His father was both minister and deputy.

[171] Karameh entered politics after his brother's murder in 1987. Backed by Syria, he became prime minister in 1990 and used clientelist networks to build support. Karameh is close to Hizbollah and has been highly critical of the Future Current.

[172] Mikati built a reputation in Tripoli largely thanks to the work of Al-Azm wal-Saada, an organization that offers social services. He sought to position himself somewhere between the 14 and 8 March coalitions but, given strong polarisation, he has had only modest success. Mikati is a member of Crisis Group's International Advisory Board.

[173] In 1995, he founded the Safadi Foundation, which has contributed to Tripoli's social, cultural and athletic renewal. Safadi is a member of the March 14 coalition and a Future Current ally.

Safadi's decision to join forces with Hariri was not unexpected. More surprisingly, after seeking an independent posture, Miqati followed suit. Going it alone almost certainly would have come at a cost; although he likely would have won a parliamentary seat, opposing Hariri would have tarnished his local and national credentials among a Sunni community that overwhelmingly supported him. Saudi Arabia also reportedly worked behind the scenes to achieve this alliance.[174] There were benefits for the Future Current too: a broad alliance neutralised a potential rival and so lessened the risk of diluting the Sunni vote.[175] In the end, all members of the joint list were elected.

The poll's most prominent victims were two diametrically opposed figures, whose only common trait was that they were not part of the Future Current's coalition. With 33.5 per cent of the vote, Karameh was unable to win a parliamentary seat.[176] He retained a measure of support thanks to his family's reputation and historic ties as well as patronage networks; several local groups also lent their backing.[177] He lost significant ground among Sunnis, however, most probably due to his close ties to Syria, alliance with Hizbollah[178] and open hostility toward Hariri. At the other end of the political spectrum, Misbah Al-Ahdab, a businessman whose fervent opposition to Hizbollah and Damascus had earned him a measure of Sunni support, won only 20 per cent of the vote and thus lost his parliamentary seat.[179] Although he was a member of the March 14 movement, he had been pushed aside by the Future Current to make room for Miqati.[180]

In the western Bekaa (the West-Bekaa/Rashayya district), the Future Current's chief rival – Abdel Rahim Mrad, a former minister with close ties to Syria and Hizbollah – also was roundly defeated.[181] As in Tripoli, communal solidarity in the face of perceived threats coupled with memories of Syria's past role[182] impaired his candidacy. The intermingling of Sunnis and Shiites in this area only further strengthened the prevailing sectarian logic.[183]

Electoral results in Saida – which, for the first time since the civil war, formed an independent district instead of being attached to adjoining Shiite areas –[184] were equally revealing. Turnout reached record highs (close to 70 per cent overall and nearly 74 per cent among Sunnis),[185] and the candidates' identities put the spotlight on the contest: on the one hand, Oussama Saad, who had soundly defeated Rafic in 2004; on the other hand, Bahia, the former prime minister's sister, and Fouad Siniora, the outgoing March 14 prime minister.[186] The poll was seen by the two sides as a referendum on both Saad Hariri and the Future Current. Results were unequivocal. The Siniora-Hariri list captured 68 per cent of the vote, far outpolling Oussama Saad's.[187]

[174] According to some Future Current and March 14 officials, Riyadh virtually demanded such an alliance in order to avoid inter-Sunni divisions. Crisis Group interviews, Tripoli, January-May 2009.

[175] See Crisis Group Report, *Lebanon's Elections*, op. cit., p. 7.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Notably some Islamist and Arab nationalist groups.

[178] Karameh went as far as to justify Nasrallah's description of the 7 May events (when Hizbollah took over much of Beirut) as a "glorious day". Responding to those who had criticized Nasrallah's statement, he explained: "Nasrallah's discourse is a reaction to the Future Current leader's statement" ["we will not forget"], the Future Current rallying cry. *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 31 May 2009.

[179] Al-Ahdab was a young Sunni parliamentarian from Tripoli and a member of the Democratic Renewal Party led by Nassib Lahoud, another prominent March 14 figure who was left out in 2009. Al-Ahdab had fared exceptionally well in the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections in alliance with the Future Current. In 2009, after being pushed aside, he waged a campaign centred on the need to protect Sunnis and resist Syria and Hizbollah. Crisis Group interviews, residents and officials, Tripoli, April-May 2008. See *2009 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections*, op. cit., (North Mohafaza), p. 20.

[180] Tripoli is allotted eight parliamentary seats, of which five are set aside for Sunnis. Hariri, Safadi and Miqati agreed that Miqati and the Future Current each would have two seats and Safadi the fifth.

[181] Mrad received 27 per cent of Sunni votes, Hariri's list 73 per cent. See *2009 Parliamentary Elections*, op.cit., (Beqaa Mohafaza), p. 298.

[182] The general headquarters of Syria's intelligence services were based in Anjar, just north of that district.

[183] Much of the western Bekaa was under Israel's occupation until 2000; when its troops withdrew, Hizbollah's resistance was considered sacred. Since then, sectarian tensions have profoundly affected the general feeling. Crisis Group interview, Jamal Jarrah, Future Current parliament member in the Bekaa, Beirut, November 2009.

[184] Saïda previously had been attached to Zahrani, Tyr and Bint-Jbeil, which gave Shiite voters a decisive say.

[185] Turnout was 50 per cent in 2000 and 42.6 per cent in 2005. *As-Safir*, 14 July 2009.

[186] Siniora served as finance minister under Rafic Hariri. He comes from Saida, but his local roots do not run deep. Rather, he emerged as an important Sunni leader as a result of his prime ministership.

[187] See *2009 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections*, op. cit., (South Mohafaza), pp. 15-18.

In sum, the Future Current demonstrated its quasi-hegemonic position within the Sunni community. Hariri's foes and potential rivals still could bank on backing due to local circumstances, but this proved largely insufficient to dent his support. In all likelihood, it will take profound changes – more genuine normalisation of relations with Syria and a palpable reduction in sectarian tensions – to alter this reality.

B. SUNNI ISLAMISM

Contrary to some expectations, Lebanon's heightened sectarianism did not boost the appeal of Sunni Islamist movements.[188] To the contrary: their popular support waned even as confessional tensions rose. For the most part, this reflected the political nature of the struggle in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination, which called for closing ranks behind a strong leadership capable all at once of rallying the base, unifying its various components, defending their interests within the local political arena, striking an alliance with Christians and Druze and reaching out to important backers abroad. In this regard, the Future Current held an obvious comparative advantage. In contrast, most of the smaller Islamist parties lacked a coherent political project, let alone a united leadership; very few took proper account of the country's multi-confessional identity, political pluralism or relations to the West.

The Current's powerful message of Sunni unity even appealed to many who previously had been drawn to Islamist movements.[189] The spokesman of one of these, the Party of Islamic Liberation, acknowledged: "The polarisation and divisions that followed Hariri's assassination seriously hurt our party and Islamist projects more generally. In Tripoli, many gave up on Islamist movements and rallied around the Future Current".[190]

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the Islamist scene. Its eclipse by the Future Current was, in many ways, an anomaly, attributable to the particular context which saw Saad Hariri's rise. As the community returns to its tradition of greater pluralism, religious actors predictably will assume renewed importance. The relative attenuation in sectarian tensions coupled with steps to normalise Lebanese-Syrian relations might lead the Future Current's more hard-line constituency to distance itself. Intra-Sunni differences could resurface, making it more difficult for the Future Current to remain as the wide congregation of diverse, contradictory, Sunni sensitivities it has become.[191] Some Islamist militants, who felt constrained first by Syria's overwhelming presence and then by the Future Current's hegemony, believe a new page could be turning. Already, a number of Islamist figures assess that the payoff from their alliance with Hariri's movement has fallen short of expectations.[192] Jamaa Islamiyya's parliament member said:

> Many Islamist activists acknowledge they made a mistake in letting the Future Current monopolise the scene. They now realise that the Current's positions and commitments are not always reliable. There is a thirst for greater pluralism among Sunnis.[193]

In the absence of genuine, secular political parties, and given the shallowness of patron-client relations that characterise much of Lebanese politics, religious actors are, in fact, a key vector of both community ethos and practice. In close and regular interaction with the Sunni community through mosques, Islamic universities and schools or more private social networks, they help mobilize it as well as shape its outlook and worldview; because of their moral standing, Islamist figures likewise can legitimise or discredit certain viewpoints or practices. Hundreds of thousands attend weekly Friday sermons, a critical forum for the communication of political, social or religious ideas. All in all, Islamist figures can reach captive audiences with a range of different, even competing messages: calling for armed action or, conversely, appealing for calm; lessening sectarian tensions or deepening them.[194]

[188] As a general matter, Sunni Islamist movements – unlike the Future Current – call for the imposition of Sharia (Islamic law); spreading of Islamic mores and values; and eventual establishment of an Islamic state. That said, whereas some, such as the Salafis, espouse a narrow sectarian outlook expressing hostility toward Shiites and Alawites, others (including the Party of Islamic Liberation and the Jamaa Islamiyya) do not.

[189] Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, Tripoli, Akkar and Saïda, May 2006-September 2009.

[190] Crisis Group interview, Liberation Party's spokesman, Tripoli, 20 November 2009.

[191] See Section II.D above.

[192] Jamaa Islamiyya clearly was disappointed by the fact that they won only a single parliamentary seat. Crisis Group interview, Jamaa Islamiyya officials, Beirut, September 2009-May 2010. After the elections, the Future Current's main Salafist ally, Dai al-Islam al-Chahal, said that Hariri's movement had been "unfair [toward the Salafists]. It neither respected their rights nor appropriately assessed their [electoral] weight, despite the concessions they made". Quoted in *Al-Akhbar*, 23 June 2009. In the words of an Islamist militant with close ties to the Future Current: "there is significant discontent among Islamists toward the Future Current on account of its attempts to control and marginalise them". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 May 2010.

[193] Crisis Group interview, Jamaa Islamiyya member of parliament, Beirut, 3 May 2010.

[194] In the aftermath of the Hizbollah/Future Current clashes in May 2008, Dai al-Islam al Chahal, a Salafist figure, called for armed jihad, www.alarabiya.net/programs/2008/10/18/58458.html, whereas Jamaa Islamiyya issued a plea for calm and dialogue.

Islamist institutions are, however, highly dysfunctional, raising questions as to their ability to play an effective and helpful role.

1. Dar al-Fatwa (House of Religious Edicts)

Dar al-Fatwa is Sunni Islam's official representative body in Lebanon and, as such, the community's most significant organised religious expression. It is headed by the Grand Mufti (also known as the mufti of the Republic), who is elected by a state-appointed collegial body of Sunni political and religious leaders.[195] It carries significant weight among Sunnis in general and their religious leaders in particular. In the words of the Jamaa Islamiyya parliamentarian, "Lebanese Sunnis generally recognise two sources of authority: political, represented by the prime minister, and religious, represented by Dar al-Fatwa".[196]

Its centrality is perhaps best illustrated, ironically, by the length and breadth of criticism which it faces. Complaints are of three kinds. First, Dar al-Fatwa's religious authority has waned due to charges of corruption routinely levied by both religious leaders and ordinary citizens.[197] Secondly, and partly as a result, it has failed to impose itself as the paramount supervisory and regulatory institution it is meant to be. The effect has been felt in the often chaotic proliferation of small religious centres whose diplomas Dar al-Fatwa refuses to validate and where more militant, radical teachings can and do take place.[198] The former head of a religious institution claims: "Anyone can run his own school or institute. Countless decisions are made arbitrarily by individuals for lack of central control over their program or curriculum".[199] Thirdly, and consequently, it has sought to compensate for its lack of grassroots legitimacy through closer ties to the community's political leadership, letting itself be caught in the country's political and religious polarisation.

As the internal morass deepened, the institution increasingly has served as a source of religious legitimacy for the Future Current, notably by resorting to a more divisive and openly confessional rhetoric. Some in the opposition charged that it was fanning sectarian flames.[200] An independent sheikh from Tripoli said, "tensions between the Future Current and Hizbollah, which initially were of a political nature, gradually took on a sharper religious character. The participation of sheikhs and religious scholars helped turn the conflict into a more pronounced sectarian one".[201]

Dar al-Fatwa's entanglement in Lebanon's political strife has hindered its ability to be an important moderating voice. Still, due to its historic status and essential functions, it remains even today one of the few institutions poten-

"Safeguarding the Resistance by Rallying Around it", Jamaa Islamiyya, Beirut, 16 May 2008.

[195] The decree governing Dar al-Fatwa's status describes the mufti as the "Muslims' religious chief", ultimately responsible for all Sunni religious institutions. In particular, he controls the management of *waqf* (a religious endowment of real estate properties, traditionally placed under Dar al-Fatwa's management); issues religious edicts; and appoints, promotes and dismisses Dar al-Fatwa's religious and administrative personnel (such as imams, preachers and teachers). See decree no.18, at www.studies.gov.lb/Cultures/arLB/tContent/Hierarchy/The%20%20Presidencies/Ministries%20Council/Directorates/Pages/Dar%20al%20Fatwa.aspx. There also are Dar al-Fatwa affiliated muftis for the regions of Mount-Lebanon, Tripoli, Akkar, Bekaa and Saïda, elected by bodies comprising local political and religious personalities as well as representatives of various regional unions and professional chambers. Ibid.

[196] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 May 2010. A religious figure with close ties to the Salafis said, "Dar al-Fatwa is a key institution for all Sunnis, regardless of political or religious affiliation. It represents Sunnis vis-a-vis other communities and governs the community's religious affairs". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 May 2010.

[197] Crisis Group interviews, sheikhs and Sunni militants, Tripoli and Beirut, March 2008-April 2009.

[198] Crisis Group interviews, Jamaa Islamiyya officials, Salafis sheikh, directors and teachers of religious schools, Beirut and Tripoli, January 2008-May 2010.

[199] Crisis Group interview, Bilal Haddara, Tripoli, March 2008.

[200] Following a series of armed clashes between Future Current and March 8 loyalists in May 2008, the mufti of the republic, Mohamad Rachid Qabbani, said: "The Sunnis are fed up .... This strike is turning into [civil] disobedience and an invasion of the streets of Beirut, carried out by militant gangs .... We used to think that Hizbollah is concerned with fighting the Israeli occupation, and all of a sudden it is turning to be a militant force to occupy Beirut, and this is why we call upon the Arab and Islamic nations to help us and stop these harmful aggressions in Lebanon". www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/07/beirut.strike/index.html. Several Sunni members of the opposition criticised the mufti's excessive closeness to and dependence on Saad Hariri. Abdel Rahim Mrad, a former minister, accused him of "contributing to divisions among Moslems and of ... discarding his role as a unifier". Former Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss described him as the "mufti of the Serail [the prime minister's official residence]. He is not the mufti of the republic or of all Muslims". Quoted in *al-Akhbar*, 15 May 2007. More broadly, a Jamaa Islamiyya official argued that the muftis have contributed to "reactivate Sunni-Shiite discord". Crisis Group interviews, Beirut, April 2009.

[201] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 17 April 2009. There are some notable exceptions. Tripoli's mufti, Malek al-Shaar – whose January 2008 election reflected a consensus among the city's political actors and who therefore enjoys more room for manoeuvre – worked hard to reduce tensions between Sunnis and Alawites in September 2008, following months of clashes. Crisis Group interviews, Hariri advisor, Beirut, March 2008; Mikati advisor, Tripoli, March 2008; Dar al-Fatwa judge, Beirut, 1 May 2010. See also *Al-Manar*, www.almanar.com.lb/newsSite/EpisodeDetails.aspx?EpisodeID=238&language=ar.

tially capable of engaging the range of Sunni movements, Salafi included. This is a role it should recover and exercise. A Jamaa Islamiyya member of parliament said:

> Dar al-Fatwa can play a unifying role for Sunni Islamists. Through dialogue, it can spread a more moderate vision of Islam and encourage religious actors to respect redlines – including rejection of *takfir* [the practice of accusing others of infidelity or impiety], acceptance of the nation's pluralism, recognition and respect for the state and its institutions, as well as tolerance of others.[202]

2. Jamaa Islamiyya

Jamaa Islamiyya, the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, is arguably the nation's best organised Sunni Islamist movement, although, unlike its counterparts in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Jordan, it has failed to attract a significant popular following. This partly reflects its strategy of focusing on the middle classes to the detriment of more disadvantaged social strata. It also results from historical circumstance. During the civil war, for example, Jamaa Islamiyya took a back seat to more nationalist Sunni Arab movements while, in its aftermath, it suffered from Syria's military presence. Throughout, it has battled a series of splits, which weakened the movement and reduced its appeal even though it has pragmatically sought to adjust its ideology to local realities by espousing a moderate brand of Islam.[203] Regardless of size, what makes the Jamaa Islamiyya a disproportionately important player is its potential ability to help bridge the Sunni-Shiite divide and thus contribute to normalising sectarian relations.

Since 2005, the movement has been somewhat at odds with the community's overall ideological stance. From the outset, resisting Israel and supporting the Palestinian cause constituted Jamaa Islamiyya's core political objectives. The movement took this commitment a step further following Israel's 1982 invasion, when it founded a military branch – Dawn Forces (*Quwat- al-Fajr*) – to fight the occupation. These were relatively active, especially until 1985; they launched their last suicide attack in 1990, before being disbanded in accordance with the Taef accords. Jamaa Islamiyaa subsequently maintained its backing for Hizbollah's struggle, even as it assumed a strictly political stance itself, participating in the 1992 parliamentary elections and winning three seats.[204]

As the sectarian rift and Sunni distrust of Hizbollah deepened following Hariri's murder, Jamaa Islamiyya has had to walk a fine line, balancing its ties to the Future Current with support for both Palestinian militant movements and the Shiite organisation. The May 2008 Beirut clashes and Hizbollah takeover doomed this effort, forcing the movement to take sides in an increasingly bitter sectarian contest.[205] Ultimately, despite enduring disagreement on core issues – how to approach the Palestinian cause, the fight against Israel and relations with the West [206]– Jamaa Islamiyya opted for an alliance with the Future Current.[207] In turn, building a stronger relationship with Jamaa Islamiyaa and its relatively moderate brand of Islamism proved beneficial to Hariri's movement, for it satisfied the Future Current's more religious constituency without alienating its Christian partners.

Jamaa Islamiyya's realignment disoriented and troubled some of its supporters[208] and, electorally, the payoff was quite modest.[209] Juggling awkwardly between an un-

[202] Crisis Group interview, Imad al-Hout, Beirut, 3 May 2010.
[203] For example, the movement recognises the state and its institutions, respects religious pluralism and urges an end to the political system's confessional basis in order to lessen "intercommunal tensions". It also rejects violence other than as a means of resisting the occupation. See Jamaa Islamiyya website, www.al-jamaa.org/pageother.php?catsmktba=15.

[204] In 1972, the movement participated in parliamentary elections; its sole candidate lost. www.al-jamaa.org/pageother.php?catsmktba=15.
[205] A movement leader spoke of his fears regarding "Shiite advances in Lebanon, Shiite attempts to infiltrate Sunni circles and Hizbollah's efforts to co-opt Sunni sheikhs". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 April 2009.
[206] A member of the movement's political bureau said, "as the Future Current sees it, Hamas belongs to the Iranian-Syrian axis, whereas we continue to enjoy close ties to the Palestinian organisation. We share the same vision of the Palestinian cause, support its resistance and have the same Islamic outlook. The Future Current's passive attitude when Palestinians were being slaughtered during the Gaza war was unacceptable". Crisis Group interview, Hussein Hamadeh, Beirut, 26 January 2009.
[207] During Rafic Hariri's era, Jamaa Islamiyya and the Future Current already were cooperating at the local level and for electoral purposes. In 2005, the movement boycotted the elections, so as "not to play a part in the polarisation". See *Al-Safir*, 25 July 2009.
[208] A number of Jamaa Islamiyya militants and leaders expressed their discomfort with the decision to align with the Future Current. Crisis Group interviews, Tripoli, March 2008; Jamaa Islamiyya senior official, Beirut, 24 March 2008. A former member argued that, in so doing, the Jamaa Islamiyya was indirectly siding with the U.S. Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, April 2009.
[209] In 2009, the movement was not even involved in pre-electoral negotiations between the Future Current and prominent Sunni figures in the north. Its candidate won 8.5 per cent of the vote in Tripoli, less than 8 per cent among Sunnis. *2009 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections*, op. cit. (North Mohafaza), pp. 17-21. Likewise, despite its presence in Saïda, it could not compete with powerful local families. It agreed not to present a candidate in the city in exchange for the inclusion of one of its members on the Future Current's list for Beirut 3.

natural partnership with the Future Current and its own quite distinct ideological outlook, it was caught in a political contradiction that it has yet to resolve.[210] Tellingly, the lone Jamaa Islamiyya parliamentarian – elected on the Future Current's list – abstained from voting for the Hariri-led government, a first, tentative step toward a potential reassertion of the movement's independent vision and of greater Sunni political pluralism.[211] He explained:

> There is no contradiction. The Future Current and Jamaa Islamiyya are two independent movements and for that reason we differ on several questions. Now, as the situation pacifies and sectarian and political polarisation diminish, we are in a position to gradually express our differences more clearly. Islamists want to see greater pluralism within our community – not in order to oppose the Current, but to complement it.[212]

3. Salafis[213]

Missionary Salafism

Missionary Salafism's brief heyday occurred in the early 1990s, when young sheikhs who had spent time in Saudi Arabia, chose to come home at the end of the civil war. This was particularly the case in Tripoli[214] and Majdal Anjar[215] in the Bekaa. It was not long before its fortunes turned. In 1995, a jihadi salafist group murdered the head of the Ahbash, a pro-Syrian Islamic association, on the grounds that it was heretical.[216] In response, the Lebanese and Syrian security services cracked down on salafists, drawing little distinction between their violent and non-violent expressions.[217] This downward trend accelerated as of 1999 following bloody fighting between a jihadist group and the Lebanese army. Tens of militants, both missionary and jihadi salafists, were arrested. Salafi activities were tightly controlled, pushing many activists underground.[218]

The Salafi movement experienced yet another setback due to the international context. The 11 September 2001 attacks in the U.S., followed by a series of explosions in Riyadh in 2003,[219] prompted a significantly drop in outside financial contribution to Salafi mosques and learning centres. Foreign donations, notably from Saudi Arabia, were cut back or subjected to various conditions, notably guarantees of their non-jihadi inclinations.[220] According to the former head of a Salafi institute:

[210] In contrast to its Sunni allies, for example, it waged a strong campaign in Hamas's favour during the December 2008-January 2009 Gaza War. Crisis Group observations, Beirut and Saïda.

[211] See www.almustaqbal.com/storiesprintpreview.aspx?storyid=386101.

[212] Crisis Group interview, Imad el-hout, Beirut, 3 May 2010.

[213] The Salafiyya is a form of puritan fundamentalism that invokes the founding fathers of Islam, the so-called "venerable ancestors" (al-Salaf al-Salih, whence the movement's name), notably the Prophet Mohammed and the first four "rightly-guided" Caliphs of the original Muslim community, in order to identify the fundamental principles of Islam. It insists on literalist readings of Islam scripture and denounces as illicit all forms of innovation (*bid'a*). Missionary Salafism concentrates on preaching and proselytising as means of reinforcing or reviving faith and preserving the cohesion of the community of believers, whereas jihadi Salafists believe they are engaged in the military defence (or, in some cases, expansion) of *Dar al-Islam* ("House of Islam" – that area of the world historically subject to Islamic rule) and the *umma* (Islamic community) against infidels. For a more in-depth analysis of Islamist currents, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

[214] The first expressions of Salafism in Lebanon occurred in the 1940s in Tripoli. However, Sheikh Salem al-Chahal's efforts were both ideologically and organisationally limited. It took the return from Saudi Arabia of his two sons – Radi al-Islam and Da'i al-Islam – for the movement to experience a revival of sorts in the northern city. Crisis Group interviews, Salem al-Chahal, Da'i al-Islam al-Chahal, Radi al-Chahal, Hassan al-Chahal, Tripoli, May 2006-April 2008.

[215] In the Bekaa, a Kurdish sheikh, Zouheir Chawich, first took the lead. Married to a woman from Majdal Anjar, he chose to reside there. Adnan Oumama's return from Saudi Arabia provided missionary Salafism with a more serious boost in the area. *Al-Hayat*, 26 January 2006.

[216] The organisation's full name is Association of Islamic Charitable Projects.

[217] A year after *al-Ahbash's* leader was assassinated, the government disbanded the most significant missionary organisation, al-Hidaya wal-Ihsan Association **(**Association of Guidance and Charity). Crisis Group interviews, Tripoli sheikhs, May 2006-April 2008.

[218] Crisis Group interviews, Salafi sheikhs, Beirut and Tripoli, March 2008-May 2010.

[219] The first explosions occurred in May; car bombings targeted three different expatriate residential compounds, killing more than 30 people and wounding over 100. Another explosion took place in November, also targeting a residential expatriate compound. It killed eighteen people and wounded tens of others. Saudi authorities accused al-Qaeda. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 16 November 2003.

[220] For example, funding for the Al-Amin Institute – which had been provided by the International Islamic Relief Organisation, a Saudi charitable organisation – has dropped significantly since 2004. Crisis Group interview, Bilal Hadara, Al-Amin Institute former director, March 2008. A close advisor to Saad Hariri acknowledged that Saudi aid to Lebanese salafists was dwindling. "Now money is coming more from the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. More generally, foreign donations have been reduced significantly since the September 11 attacks". Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008.

> We could not get funding for new projects. Our old ones were investigated by donors who took a much stricter look at how the centres were run, where monies were going and, most importantly, what were the institutes' political leanings. We had to prove that we did not back bin Laden.[221]

As Saudi support waned, Kuwaiti-inspired Salafism grew.[222] But for salafists, the picture remained bleak. Syria's 1996 decision to close down the Association of Guidance and Charity, the most important salafi institution in Lebanon, had left them largely disorganised, and all the more vulnerable to reduced overall funding, which hurt the missionary networks' ability to mobilise followers. By its very nature poorly structured,[223] missionary salafism also saw many of its preachers go their own way; several sheikhs thereafter would claim the status of sole legitimate representatives of Lebanese Salafism.[224]

After a period of disarray, Salafism reemerged in the wake of Hariri's assassination. The Future Current renewed ties with Salafi leaders, joined in shared hostility toward Syria and the Shiite community.[225] The Future Current provided financial assistance to some of these leaders,[226] and, in return, Hariri's movement asked them to moderate their discourse and teaching.[227] For activists, the offer – coming after years of persecution and harassment – was welcome.

But it came at a cost. In theory, Salafism rejects not only active political participation but also allegiance to any political leader not in strict conformity with its interpretation of Islamic law – a prohibition that is all the more pertinent in Lebanon's multi-confessional context. Among rank-and-file Salafists, therefore, the perception that some movement leaders had entered into deals with members of the political class caused considerable disquiet.[228] To make matters worse, the Future Current quickly lost interest in placating the missionary movement.[229] Its followers were both relatively small in numbers and disinclined to vote, making them irrelevant to any electoral strategy.[230] An activist with close ties to Tripoli

[221] Ibid. According to another Salafi sheikh, "prior to 2001, no control whatsoever was exercised on what Islamic institutes taught. As a result, the curriculum was heavily influenced by hard-line views". Crisis Group interview, Samir Kamaleddine, Tripoli, March 2008. An Islamist activist added: "Following 2001, foreign donors gradually intensified their oversight, but that was not accompanied by greater state supervision of religious institutions". Crisis Group interview, Ihab al-Banna, Beirut, 11 May 2010. According to several sheikhs and Islamist activists, many of the lesser known institutes still disseminate militant, hard-line teachings. Crisis Group interviews, Tripoli and Beirut, May 2006-May 2010.

[222] This trend is mostly organised around the Association for the Renewal of Islamic Heritage, which was led by a Tripoli businessman, Safwan Zu'bi, until April 2010, when he was replaced by Nadim Hijazi, a Tripoli sheikh. It finances several projects, including a salafi university, schools, medical centres and mosques. Crisis Group interview, Safwan Zu'bi, Tripoli, March 2008. See also the Association's pamphlet, "Trajectoire de la Guidance et du Bien". The Association plays an important role in Tripoli, where "mayors", village leaders and ordinary citizens reportedly ask its leaders for monetary and other forms of assistance. Crisis Group interview, member of the Higher Islamic Council, Tripoli, 15 April 2008.

[223] Salafism in general opposes, on religious grounds, setting up party or political structures. Crisis Group interview, Salafi sheikhs, Tripoli, May 2006.

[224] Crisis Group interviews, Da'i al-Islam al-Chahal, Hassan al-Chahal, Safwan al-Zu'bi and other local sheikhs, Tripoli, May 2006-March 2008.

[225] As a general matter, Salafis exhibit intense hostility to Shiism. In August 2008, several Salafi representatives – including Hassan al-Chahal and Safwan Zu'bi – signed an agreement with Hizbollah aimed at ending "sectarian incitement" and rejecting "all acts of aggression by one Muslim faction against another". The document was widely condemned by other Islamist and Salafi currents, and the agreement almost immediately was suspended. See *Al-Hayat*, *As-Safir* and *An-Nahar*, 19 August 2008.

[226] The Future Current's financial support was acknowledged by both Salafi sheikhs and movement officials. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-April 2008. Among beneficiaries have been Da'i al-Islam al-Chahal, one of the main Salafi leaders in Tripoli, as well as Oussama and Adnan Oumama in the Bekaa.

[227] A Saad Hariri adviser claimed that the Future Current leader demanded that Salafi missionary groups change their program – notably by abandoning the practice of *takfir* (denouncing others of infidelity or impiety) – and place their institutes under Dar al-Fatwa's authority. This did not happen, and thus relations between Salafis and Hariri deteriorated. Crisis Group interview, Beirut, March 2008. As this report went to press, no progress had been reported.

[228] Several former students who attended Salafi institutes voiced strong criticism of the rapprochement with the Future Current and lamented their leaders' public support for Saad Hariri. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-April 2008.

[229] In 2007, the grand mufti appointed Oussama Rifai as mufti in Akkar. Salafis, who viewed him as hostile to their cause, denounced the selection and dispatched a delegation to see Saad Hariri. Rifai nonetheless remained in place. During elections for Tripoli's mufti, Salafi sheikhs were sidelined, according to Da'i al-Islam al-Chahal, a Salafi leader in Tripoli. See www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=26211.

[230] A handful of Salafi leaders – Salem al-Chahal, Da'i al-Isalm al-Chahal and Hassan al-Chahal – presented their candidacies in various parliamentary elections. They form the exception; in general, efforts to translate religious allegiance into political support bumps up against the views of rank-and-file members who were taught to oppose all forms of political participation. Bilal Haddara, the former director of the Salafi Al-Amin institute, acknowledged: "We lack a concrete plan. We don't have a program, we know that most Salafis do not vote and therefore we can't really mobilise our supporters. And yet, we are convinced of the

Salafists said, "Hariri used the Salafists when he needed them. Then he disposed of them".[231] For now, the Current's aim appears to be narrowly focused on retaining loyalty from Salafi leaders it bankrolls.[232] However, their co-optation has led more radical – and frustrated – Salafists to drift toward separate, jihadist forms of activism.

Jihadi Salafism

Lebanese jihadi groups first emerged in the course of the country's long civil war. Prior to 1990, they essentially comprised non-Salafi, Islamist movements calling for armed struggle against Israel,[233] as well as Palestinians from refugee camps.[234] Over the subsequent decade, the return of fighters from the Afghan war contributed to the emergence of a Salafi jihadist movement which flourished chiefly among disadvantaged Sunnis from North Lebanon and the Bekaa. The so-called Lebanese "Arab-Afghans" were few in number[235] yet found relatively hospitable terrain in a country that not long before had harboured a large number of armed militias whose former members were finding social reintegration difficult. A series of violent incidents ensued, beginning with the 1995 assassination of Nizar al-Halabi, president of the Ahbash association.[236]

Between 31 December 1999 and 5 January 2000, the mountainous area of Dinniyeh above Tripoli experienced violent clashes between the army and a group of jihadi militants. Roughly 30 people were killed.[237] This marked the most significant incident involving a jihadi organisation that was not based in a Palestinian camp. The group was established in 1997 by Bassam al-Kanj (Abou Aïcha), a Lebanese who had fought in Afghanistan.[238] Abou Aïcha recruited tens of activists from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Tripoli, the Akkar and Dinniyeh itself.[239] In 2002 and 2003, a Tripoli-based group carried out attacks against U.S. and British commercial chains, including two McDonald's.[240]

The first concrete jihadi manifestation in the Bekaa grew out of the return of another Afghan veteran, Mostafa Ramadan (also known as Abu Mohamed al-Loubnani), who is believed to have been close to the then-head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi.[241] In 2003, Abu Mohamed began organising his own network, focusing mainly on recruiting, training and dispatching jihadi

necessity of finding a way to defend Islam other than those that currently exist". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, March 2008.

[231] Crisis Group interview, Beirut, 3 May 2010.

[232] Crisis Group interviews, Future Current officials, March 2008.

[233] These include, notably, Al-Fajr Forces (Jamaa Islamiyya's military branch) and the Islamic Unification Movement (Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami), a pro-Iranian Sunni group, both of which emerged in the early 1980s. The former's principal objective was to resist Israeli occupation forces. The latter, which sought to impose Islamic rule, also fought against Syria's military presence and against a number of Lebanese militias. Between 1982 and 1985, Tripoli was the scene of harsh battles between Al-Tawhid and Syria, before Syrian forces took control of the city. Crisis Group interviews, Jamaa Islamiyya officials, Beirut and Tripoli, March 2008-April 2009; Al-Tawhid president and former militants, Tripoli, March 2008. See Fidaa Itani, *Jihadist in Lebanon, From Al-Fajr Forces to Fatah al-Islam*, (Beirut, 2008).

[234] See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°84, *Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 19 February 2009, p. 24. See also Bernard Rougier, *Le Jihad au quotidian*, (Paris, 2004).

[235] See *Al-Hayat*, 27 January 2006.

[236] The murder was carried out by a Palestinian jihadist group, Usbat al-Ansar, although two Lebanese militants (including a former Afghan fighter) also were involved. The episode illustrated the relationship between Palestinian camp jihadism and Lebanese circles. Crisis Group interviews, missionary and jihadi Salafi sheikhs, Tripoli and Palestinian camps, May 2006-March 2009. See also Bernard Rougier, op. cit., pp. 108-111.

[237] Among them were soldiers, Islamist militants and civilians. See *al-Hayat*, *al-Nahar* and *al-Safir*, 1-11 January 2000.

[238] Abu Aïcha was born in 1965 in an Akkar village. At the age of twenty, having earned a scholarship from the Hariri Foundation, he pursued his studies in the U.S. At roughly that time, he grew closer to religious circles in the U.S. In 1989, he went to Peshawar, in Pakistan, for military and religious training before fighting in Afghanistan and then Bosnia. He returned to Lebanon in 1996. Crisis Group interviews, sheikhs and Islamist activists, Tripoli, Beirut and Akkar, May 2006-November 2009. See also *al-Nahar*, 11 July 2000.

[239] According to the government, it is an "armed terrorist group with ties to al-Qaeda which was preparing an uprising aimed at establishing an Islamic emirate in the north". See *al-Nahar*, 11 July 2000. Group members attended religion classes and were trained in the use of light weapons. Crisis Group interviews, former members and former detainees of the Dinniyeh groups, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006. Various participants and people close to Abu Aïcha described the movement's aims differently – inter alia, to resist Israel in South Lebanon, train jihadists to fight in Chechnya or protect themselves from harassment and arrest by Lebanese and Syrian security forces. Crisis Group interviews, ex-detainees and sheikhs, Beirut and Tripoli, January-May 2006-April 2008. *An-Nahar*, 11 July 2000; booklet published by the detainees' parents entitled "Dinniyeh detainees: Truth and Tragedy" (undated); "Lebanon: Torture and unfair trial of the Dhinniyyah detainees", Amnesty International, May 2003.

[240] See *L'Orient le Jour*, 9 April 2003.

[241] Abu Muss'ab Al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian jihadi Salafi who moved his operations to the predominantly Sunni Arab areas of Iraq after the 2003 war, having been routed first from Afghanistan in 2001 and then from a corner of Iraqi Kurdistan in March 2003. He founded Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (al-Qaeda's Organisation in Mesopotamia). See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°52, *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, 27 February 2006, p. 14.

fighters to Iraq.[242] The Bekaa reportedly exported tens of volunteers to fight U.S. forces.[243] In 2004, security forces arrested some fifteen militants suspected of ties to Abu Mohamad; the government accused the group, known as the "Ismaël al-Khatib and Ahmad Miqati networks",[244] of preparing attacks against foreign embassies and official buildings in Lebanon.[245] These various networks reportedly faced huge difficulties in coming up with a unified and coherent structure. A sheikh with close jihadi ties said:

> Jihadis have a problem getting organised. They often have clashing agendas. Some want to go after domestic targets; among them, a portion is focused on Shiites, another on Christians, a third on the state and a fourth on foreign forces stationed in Lebanon. Others wish to participate in international jihad. Moreover, the various groups and their leaders compete with one another, prompting divisions even within single networks.[246]

The jihadi phenomenon reached its highest – and deadliest – point with Fatah al-Islam, whose destruction by the army in 2007 cost hundreds of lives and the demolition of the Nahr al-Bared camp, where the group had taken refuge.[247] Fatah al-Islam brought together the disparate faces of jihadism: Afghan-Arabs; Lebanese militants influenced by local movements; internet-recruited young volunteers from around the Arab world; Palestinian camp activists; and returnees from Iraq.[248] Known to all, manipulated by many and ultimately controlled by none, as seen below, Fatah al-Islam lacked a clear vision and perished amid an orgy of nihilistic violence that illustrated the fragmentation, confusion and limits of Lebanon's salafi jihadism.

The evolution of Lebanon's jihadi Islamism toward a chaotic, bloody albeit generally controlled violence reflects the ambiguous and contradictory approach of the nation's authorities and political actors. To begin, as seen, the loss of legitimacy, credibility and authority suffered by its missionary counterpart drew some disillusioned activists closer to the jihadi variant.[249] The state's essentially security-driven response – arbitrary arrests, indefinite detention, resort to torture – deepened the sense of persecution among militants who lacked any realistic prospect of rehabilitation.[250] Many salafis – convinced the charges levied against militants in connection with the Dinniyeh affair were fabricated – experienced the event as a symbol of injustice and were further motivated to join similar groups.[251] In the words of a Tripoli sheikh:

> Islamists throughout Lebanon felt aggrieved by the Dinniyeh events. Everyone was talking about the militants' fate, particularly within religious circles and in sermons. This helped radicalise numerous Islamists, from the North to the Bekaa.[252]

[242] *Al-Hayat*, 26 January 2006.
[243] Abu Mohamad al-Loubnani, along with his son and several other Lebanese from Sunni regions in the Bekaa, died in Iraq in 2005. Ibid.
[244] Al-Khatib, who hailed from Majdal Anjar, died in prison several weeks after his arrest. Ahmad Miqati, born in Tripoli, had fought in Dinniyeh.
[245] *Al-Mustaqbal*, 4 January 2005.
[246] Crisis Group interviews, sheikh with close ties to jihadi groups, Saïda, December 2008.
[247] The conflict led to the deaths of 450 civilians, soldiers and Islamist militants; the devastation of the Palestinian camp and its surrounding areas; the displacement of approximately 6,000 families; and huge economic losses. Crisis Group interviews, Palestinian officials and UNRWA representatives, April-September 2008. See also "A Common Challenge, a Shared Responsibility", report presented by the Lebanese government at the Vienna donors conference, 23 June 2008. See Crisis Group Report, *Nurturing Instability*, op. cit, pp. 25-28.
[248] Tens of Lebanese fought in Iraq, far more than in Afghanistan. Early on, Syria – which at that time still controlled Lebanon – and Lebanese authorities allegedly facilitated the transit of fighters to Iraq. A Saïda sheikh said, "there was an implicit agreement between jihadists on the one hand and Lebanese and Syrian authorities on the other with regard to the legitimacy of jihad in Iraq". Crisis Group interview, 23 December 2008.
[249] Crisis Group interviews, Salafi sheikhs, Islamist militants and jihadi activists, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-May 2010.
[250] Procedures for arrest and detention remain highly arbitrary in Lebanon. Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists; NGO official, Tripoli, February-August 2008. Also see "Lebanon: Torture and Unfair Trial of the Dhinniyyah Detainees", op. cit. Once released from prison, Islamist militants typically are left on their own, without meaningful rehabilitation assistance. Crisis Group interviews, sheikhs, Islamist militants and former detainees, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-May 2010.
[251] Many Lebanese Islamist activists were convinced that Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services fabricated evidence against the Dinniyeh group. They claim the group had retreated to the mountains in order to practice its faith and flee a wave of arrests aimed at anyone with a beard. Crisis Group interviews, Islamist sheikhs and activists, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-April 2009. Several Islamists interviewed by Crisis Group asserted that the group had agreed to dismantle its camp but that its members were then trapped and attacked by the army. Crisis Group interviews, Khaled Daher, Da'i al-Islam al-Chahal, both of whom played a mediating role at the time; Imam of a Tripoli mosque with close ties to the group; former detainees, Beirut and Tripoli, May 2006-April 2009. A network that began targeting Western commercial chains initially was formed to raise funds for parents of the Dinniyeh detainees. A sheikh with close ties to the network said: "Its principal aim was to avenge the brothers from Dinniyeh who were unjustly killed". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, May 2006.
[252] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, May 2006.

The Islamists' sense of victimisation was bolstered by a broader feeling of marginalisation and humiliation. For the most part, recruits hailed from disadvantaged areas which suffered from a dangerous blend of appalling living conditions, inadequate social services and a shortage of schools. The state essentially was absent from such areas, including in terms of day-to-day law and order. It was precisely in such no-go zones that the government – facing a security threat in the context of a security vacuum – resorted to mass repression, which had the effect of radicalising those it wished to subdue. For many impoverished, disaffected youth, the turn to religious militancy became an act of defiance, an expression of dignity in the face of daily indignities.[253]

Actors from across the political spectrum – both internal and external – tended to promote jihadism in practice even as they vehemently denounced it in words. In 2005, parliament amnestied several Islamists arrested in connection with the Dinniyeh and Majdal Anjar incidents,[254] most likely in order to contain and co-opt various components of the Sunni community at a time of intense sectarian polarisation and confrontation. Likewise, Bahia Hariri provided funds to a Palestinian jihadist group, Jund al-Sham, in the hope of achieving a temporary and fragile calm.[255] When it still maintained a strong military presence, Syria also allowed fighters to access Iraq from Lebanon, both to hamper the U.S. effort and as a means of managing any potential Islamist threat.[256]

The case of Fatah al-Islam is the most apt illustration of such ambiguities. Even as various parties accused one another of promoting the movement,[257] its history points to collective responsibility. From the outset, Fatah al-Islam's emergence was visible to all, and its expansion required at the very least extreme carelessness, if not active involvement by Syria, the Future Current, Tripoli's missionary Salafist circles, Lebanon's security apparatus and various Palestinian factions in Nahr al-Bared.[258] Each, at one point or another, seemingly expected to profit from Fatah al-Islam, even as it became increasingly apparent that it was beyond anyone's control.

More generally, by fuelling the country's sectarian polarisation, the political class made it easier for jihadism to grow. Another fitting example involves the mid-2008 clashes between Sunni residents of Bab-Tebbaneh and Alawite residents of Jabal Mohsen, two neighbourhoods of Tripoli. The fighting, which lasted months, reflected the interplay between residual resentment from the civil war, a more hard-line jihadist discourse[259] and the country's deteriorating sectarian atmosphere.[260] Above all, the battle between Bab-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen was an extension of the May 2008 Beirut confrontation, when Hizbollah took over large parts of the city. As a Salafi sheikh said in July of that year: "What happened in the capital was a humiliation. Everyone is calling for revenge. Even our women are urging us to respond".[261]

[253] A resident of Bab-Tebbaneh – one of the most deprived and impoverished Sunni neighbourhoods in Lebanon – explained: "Bab-Tebbaneh's residents are humiliated by the way Tripoli residents and the Lebanese people in general look down on them". Crisis Group interview, Bab-Tebbaneh, May 2006. For some, membership in a militant group and espousal of the jihadi cause appear to be the sole means of social and economic emancipation. Crisis Group interviews, sheikh and jihadist activists, Tripoli, May 2006. When the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Moussab Zarqawi, was killed in 2006, the many residents of the Sunni neighbourhood of Bab-Tebbaneh were in mourning. Several street vendors renamed their carts "Abou Moussab". Crisis Group interviews, Bilal Shebaan, leader of the Tripoli-based al-Tawhid movement, Tripoli, 22 March 2008; Bab-Tebbaneh resident, 12 May 2010; NGO official working in Bab-Tebbaneh, Beirut, 13 May 2010; Islamist activist, Beirut, 11 May 2010.

[254] Most observers agree that the rights of detainees involved in the Dinniyeh events, as well as members of the Al-Khatib and Miqati networks, were flouted. According to credible reports, they were tortured and arrested without ever standing trial. Still, their release was motivated by political as opposed to legal considerations. During its first session, the parliament elected in 2005 approved their amnesty along with that of Samir Geagea, the Christian leader of the Lebanese Forces. The decision was widely seen by Islamists and members of the opposition as a gesture of appreciation for the Islamist groups' support for Hariri. Crisis Group interviews, Beirut and Tripoli, February 2006-December 2009.

[255] Bahia Hariri acknowledged having paid members of the dissolved Palestinian faction Jund al-Sham to persuade them to leave Taamir, a Saïda neighbourhood abutting the Palestinian camp of Ayn el-Helweh. Hariri's opponents maintain that, given heightened tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, she was determined to avoid renewed conflict between the state and Sunni Islamists. See *as-Safir*, 5 June 2007.

[256] See Crisis Group Report, *Nurturing Instability*, op. cit, p. 25. See also fn. 248.

[257] Amid rising internal tensions, the March 14 coalition openly accused Syria of having engineered Fatah al-Islam's emergence in Lebanon in order to subvert and destabilise the country; in contrast, the March 8 coalition blamed the Future Current and Saudi Arabia for promoting the Islamist group as a fighting force against Shiites.

[258] On Fatah al-Islam, See Crisis Group Report, *Nurturing Instability*, pp. 25-26.

[259] Dai al-Islam, an Islamist sheikh from Tripoli, said, "after the events of 7 May, I warned our supporters that our opponents would seek to go after Tripoli and the North. At the time, I told them: if you are attacked, you have the right to defend yourselves as long as the state cannot and does not wish to defend you. I had issued a fatwa, and I still stand by it". www.alarabiya.net/programs/2008/10/18/58458.html.

[260] A young Bab-Tebanneh resident said, "if you were to give me a weapon, and I was facing an Israeli and a Shiite, I'd shoot the Shiite". Crisis Group interview, August 2008.

[261] Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, 17 July 2008.

Despite the political class' recklessness and the state's short-sighted, overly security-based response, the jihadist phenomenon for the most part has remained manageable. To a large extent, this is due to its relatively confined geographic space. In the Bekaa as in the South, Hizbollah's powerful presence effectively curbed the jihadists' progress. In Tripoli and North Lebanon, the tragedy that struck Nahr al-Bared has since held the jihadists in check. Although many were outraged and radicalised by the harshness of state repression, the events led to an even sharper level of surveillance and repression. They also highlighted the extraordinarily heavy cost of any future confrontation. What is more, Nahr el-Bared's destruction not only deprived jihadists of an ideal sanctuary, it also hampered their access to other Palestinian camps insofar as the conflict marked the end of the era of camp inviolability.[262]

Other Palestinian factions, determined to avoid Nahr al-Bared's fate, have since redoubled their vigilance.[263] In Aïn el-Helwe, for example, militant factions have exhibited greater willingness to work hand-in-hand with the Lebanese army and with opposing Palestinian factions such as Fatah in order to maintain security.[264] The leader of the main Salafist faction, Usbat al-Ansar, claimed that it is "religiously prohibited" to fight the Lebanese Army.[265]

Lebanon is not a jihadi sanctuary in the fashion of Afghanistan, Chechnya or Iraq, each of which attracted significant transnational networks. Several attacks have occurred, but for the most part they have been of limited scope and sophistication.[266] Al-Qaeda, in particular, has not shown serious interest.[267] This is not for lack of potential targets: Israel lies just across the border, and the UN (with several participating European contingents) bolstered its military presence on the southern border in the wake of the 2006 war.[268] To date, however, jihadists have been unable to establish a significant, sustained presence; any armed activity triggers a prompt and strong response and, when they have engaged in combat, jihadists have paid a heavy price. After each and every one of the above-mentioned confrontations, the army further cemented its control over jihadists and potential or suspected sympathisers. Though ingredients for a more widespread jihadist movement remain present, and risks ought not to be dismissed, the development of more organised movements does not appear likely in the foreseeable future.

[262] Although the Cairo agreement – which, among other provisions, granted the PLO the right to control security and order in the Palestinian camps – was abrogated in 1987, the parties agreed after the civil war that the Lebanese army would not enter the camps but rather stay at their outskirts. See Crisis Group Report, *Nurturing Instability*, op. cit., p. 12.

[263] Crisis Group interviews, Palestinian officials and Islamist activists, refugee camps and Beirut, April-December 2008.

[264] See Crisis Group Report, *Nurturing Instability*, op. cit, pp. 27-28.

[265] *Al-Akhbar*, 6 December 2008.

[266] These have included an attack against the UN peacekeepers (the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon, UNIFIL) and a rocket launch aimed at Israel, both of which were claimed by jihadist groups.

[267] None of the above-mentioned attacks was claimed by al-Qaeda, although some were committed by individuals with ties to al-Qaeda leaders.

[268] The Security Council authorised UNIFIL in 1978 to ensure peace and security in the wake of Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon. After the 2006 war, it was significantly bolstered, from 2,000 to more than 12,000 troops, and charged, among other things, to "monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the south of Lebanon; and extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons". UN Security Council Resolution 1701; Crisis Group interview, Milosc Strugar, UNIFIL director of political and civil affairs, Beirut, 17 May 2010.

IV. CONCLUSION

A page was turned when Saad Hariri assumed the position of prime minister, bringing the era initiated by his father's killing to a close. But Lebanon remains in transition: the Sunni community's internal organisation, ties to other local constituencies, relations to outside actors and attitude toward regional issues are far from static. The choices it will make in these respects are but one component of an equation with many moving parts and an unpredictable overall direction.

Saad Hariri himself has undergone a remarkable shift, from a confrontational role that predetermined much of his behaviour and limited his options to a position at the crossroads of a number of important dynamics: he heads a national unity government which strives to maintain a subtle domestic balance; he embodies a compromise between Syria and Saudi Arabia even as he retains strong credentials in the West; he has a stake in stability and moderation in an environment that, at its core, remains radicalised and volatile; and his success as prime minister depends in part on reversing the very sectarian mobilisation that brought him to power and that ensured his ascendancy over the Sunni community.

In order for Hariri to successfully govern, this transition now needs to be solidified and deepened. Much will depend on his ability to further distance himself from sectarian and clientelist politics and, with Damascus, to manage the thorny issue of Lebanese-Syrian normalisation. Changes also are required on the Sunni scene, both to turn the Future Current into a more institutionalised party and to better regulate a religious field that, in recent years, has become less disciplined, more chaotic and thus more prone to fuel militant sentiment.

Beirut/Brussels, 26 May 2010

APPENDIX A

MAP OF LEBANNON

Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

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APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in fourteen additional locations (Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Bujumbura, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo and Seoul). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Russia (North Caucasus), Serbia and Turkey; in the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Gulf States, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti and Venezuela.

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May 2010

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