

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
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**Questions**

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- 2. Please provide information on the June 2009 election results.**

**RESPONSE**

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**Executive Summary**

Note: There are various Romanised spellings of religious denominations, political parties and place names. Different sources refer to Hizballah and Hizbollah, Shia and Shi'a, Shiite and Shi'ite, Ta'if and Taef. In this response the spellings Hizballah, Shia, Shi'ite and Ta'if are employed, however alternative spellings in source materials have not been altered.

Since the end of the civil war in 1990 there have been a number of violent and potentially state-destabilising incidents in Lebanon. Perhaps the most serious include the assassination of the Sunni former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 and clashes between Hezbollah (Shi'ite) supporters and Sunni Muslims in Beirut in May 2008.

The Doha Agreement, forged in Qatar in May 2009, managed to avert civil war between Hezbollah and Sunni militias by resolving a number of issues and leading to the formation of a government of national unity. A number of sources employed for this response conclude that the post-Doha peace is likely to continue under the new parliament formed following the

7 June 2009 elections. Sources indicate that, once again, a government of national unity will be formed and destabilising violence should be averted for the foreseeable future.

The 7 June 2009 parliamentary elections saw the March 14 coalition of parties win the largest bloc of votes in parliament, despite the withdrawal of eleven Druze coalition parliamentarians in early August 2009. Media sources have widely reported that both major Shia political parties, Amal and Hezbollah, have publicly accepted the results, despite the fact that the March 8 coalition to which they belong won the popular vote. At the time of writing, negotiations to form a new national unity government continue.

A number of sources make the case that the peace and goodwill displayed by both the March 14 and March 8 coalitions during the campaigning and in the post-election negotiations is due to new regional and global geopolitical circumstances. Sources argue that an emerging rapprochement between Syria, Saudi Arabia and the United States has led Damascus to contain Hezbollah. These sources suggest that while this thawing of diplomatic and economic relations continues, Lebanon will remain relatively peaceful in the foreseeable future.

Despite the current political circumstance, there are suggestions that the Sunni community in Lebanon is developing a sense of victimisation in a country where Shi'ites increasingly occupying powerful positions both inside and outside state structures.

This response is organised under the following subheadings:

- **The Position of the Sunna in Lebanon**
- **The Lebanese Constitution**
- **Demography**
- **The March 14 Movement**
- **The March 8 Coalition**
- **The 7 June 2009 Elections**
- **Post-Election Procedures**
- **The Regional Context**
- **Incidents of Post-Election Violence**

### **The Position of the Sunna in Lebanon**

According to the US State Department, Sunni Muslims constitute approximately twenty seven percent of Lebanon's 2006 estimated population of 3,874,050 (US Department of State 2009, *Background Note: Lebanon*, January – Attachment 3). Accurate demographic statistics concerning Lebanon's population are difficult to acquire due to the fact that Lebanon has not conducted a census since 1932. The reasons for this fact are discussed in greater detail in the **demography** section of this response.

Writing for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Omayma Abdel-Latif argues that until recently the majority of the Sunni community were neither Lebanese nationalists, nor did they suffer from a persecution complex that is said to characterise other major religious communities in Lebanon. According to Abdel-Latif, all this changed following the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri in 2005:

...the death of Hariri "Lebanonized" the Sunna. In a complete break with their history, Lebanon's Sunna began to act not only as a sect among other sects, but also as a minority

whose existence was threatened, whose leaders were targeted, and whose sense of victimization was deep. It is within this context that the majority of Sunna became supporters of Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), a movement founded by Hariri that has become the predominant political force in the Sunni community under his son and successor, Saad. Most recently, the year-long protest movement spearheaded by Hizbollah and other opposition groups against the Hariri-backed government of Fouad Siniora was understood by the majority of Sunna in sectarian terms, as a “Shi’i”-led act of hostility against a “Sunni”-led government, rather than opposition to what those groups perceive as the government’s failing policies and its poor performance during and after the summer 2006 war with Israel. Shii-Sunni tensions reached an unprecedented peak in January 2007, when supporters of Hizbollah and the Amal Movement (another prominent Shi’i movement led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri) clashed with Mustaqbal supporters in violent scenes that reminded the Lebanese of the civil war days (Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, ‘Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists—A Growing Force’, *Carnegie Middle East Centre*, January, Number 6, p.2, **Attachment1**).

Omayma Abdel-Latif’s thesis is that this evolving sense of victimisation is causing a swelling in the ranks of Sunni political Islamic groups and the creation of a more defensive and radicalised Sunni corps:

Anti-Shi’i rhetoric came to permeate the everyday discourse of ordinary Sunna, and both the Sunni religious establishment represented by Mufti Rachid Qabbani and the political leadership of Mustaqbal played an important role in fanning the flames of sectarian tension on the Sunni side. The result is a “Sunni street,” which is not only more sectarian and radicalized in general, but also has been left vulnerable to more extremist religious leaders who have a stronger message of sectarian hatred and rejection of the other (Abdel-Latif, O. 2008, ‘Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists—A Growing Force’, *Carnegie Middle East Centre*, January, Number 6, p.2, Attachment 1).

The 7 June 2009 elections resulted in the March 14 coalition, that includes Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), winning the largest number of seats in the Lebanese Parliament. However, having helped fan anti-Shi’ite (and anti-Syrian) sentiments, the Tayyar al-Mustaqbal leader and Prime Minister designate, Saad Hariri, has committed March 14 to forming a government of national unity with members of the Shi’ite ‘opposition’. Whether the Future Movement’s anti-Shi’ite rhetoric was simply part of the cut and thrust of electioneering or a prelude to something more ominous is open to debate. For now, a post-election rapprochement employing conciliatory language is dominating Lebanon’s body politic. This rapprochement is discussed in greater detail in the **Post-Election Procedures** section of this response.

Also discussed in more detail in this response is the Sunni community’s extra-constitutional right to always have a member of the community occupy the position of prime minister in Lebanon. This is a privileged position in the political system and a long-running source of tension with the members of the Shi’ite community who believe it is time for a reconfiguration of political power in line with current demographic reality.

Limited information on the economic status of Sunnies has been found. Only more general on Gross Domestic Product per capita is available. The CIA World Fact Book states that GDP per capita in Lebanon in 2008 was US\$ 11,100. Unemployment in 2007 was estimated to be 9.2% however the only estimate of the proportion of the population that lives below the poverty line dates from 1999 (28%) (‘Lebanon’, *The World Fact Book*, 2009 The Central Intelligence Agency, 20 July

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html> – Accessed 14 August 2009 – Attachment 2).

Prior to independence the French sought to ensure that the command of the armed forces of an independent Lebanon is dominated by Christians. According to Stratfor, the Syrian occupation from 1976 to 2005 saw a reconfiguration, with many Shi'ites and indeed Hezbollah members and sympathisers dominating the top ranks. According to the following Stratfor source, Sunnis constitute 35 percent of service personnel (approximately 21,000 persons):

The armed forces consist of about 60,000 men divided into several brigades, most of which are also divided along sectarian lines. Most army recruits come from rural areas in Lebanon, such as Akkar in the north, Iqlim al-Kharroub in the Shouf Mountains southeast of Beirut, and from southern Lebanon. Approximately 70 percent of the enlisted men are made up of Sunnis and Shia, divided almost equally.

Lebanon's military vastly outnumbers Hezbollah's cadre of trained fighters, but still lacks the ability and will to overtake Hezbollah bases in southern Lebanon and force the Shiite guerrilla force to disarm, a demand Israel says must be met before any move toward a cease-fire can be made. This is largely due to the significant number of Hezbollah sympathizers and members operating among the army's conscripts.

When the French created Lebanon in 1941, Paris sought to ensure Maronite Christians would monopolize the armed forces' top brass, which was intentionally designed to remain a small, defensive force out of fear that a strong Lebanese army would become embroiled in wider Arab regional conflicts. When Syria became the de facto ruler of Lebanon as result of the civil war in the 1980s, however, the Syrians decided to do some remodelling. Damascus played a direct role in putting Hezbollah members in important positions in the Lebanese army -- to the extent that Hezbollah now occupies many of the important positions previously held by Maronites. When Syria withdrew its approximately 20,000 troops from Lebanon following the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, it maintained a powerful presence in Lebanon's political, military and intelligence circles, keeping Hezbollah's position intact ('Fault Lines in the Lebanese Armed Forces', 2006, *Stratfor* website, 20 July [http://www.stratfor.com/fault\\_lines\\_lebanese\\_armed\\_forces](http://www.stratfor.com/fault_lines_lebanese_armed_forces) – Accessed 14 August 2009 – Attachment 3).

Given the strength of the Shi'ite Hezbollah militia and the dominance of Shi'ites in the ranks of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Sunni community will inevitably feel vulnerable.

### **The Lebanese Constitution**

The Lebanese Constitution of 1926 states that parliamentary political power is to be divided along confessional lines. This means that the seats in Parliament are reserved for state-recognised confessions (religious denominations) only, with seat numbers allocated according to the size of each denomination. Furthermore, the constitution stipulates that Christians and Muslims must have an equal number of seats in Parliament. The following source, produced by the US Department of State, confirms the confessional nature of the constitution and explains the distribution of political power in Lebanon resulting from the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if agreement of 1989. The extra-constitutional National Pact of 1943 states the position of Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim:

The Constitution provides that Christians and Muslims be represented equally in Parliament, the Cabinet, and high-level civil service positions, which include the ministry ranks of Secretary General and Director General. It also provides that these posts be distributed proportionally among the recognized religious groups. The constitutional provision for the distribution of political power and positions according to the principle of religious representation is designed to prevent a dominant position being gained by any one confessional group. The "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament be Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi'a Muslim, respectively. This distribution of political power functions at both the national and local levels of government.

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement, which ended the country's 15-year civil war, reaffirms this arrangement but, significantly, mandates increased Muslim representation in Parliament so that it would be equal to that of the Christian community and reduces the power of the Maronite Christian presidency. In addition, the Ta'if Agreement endorses the constitutional provision of appointing most senior government officials according to religious affiliation. This practice is operative in all three branches of government. The Ta'if Agreement also stipulates a cabinet with power equally allocated between Muslims and Christians. The political establishment has been reluctant to change this "confessional" system, because citizens perceive it as critical to the country's stability (US State Department 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report – Lebanon*, October, Section II – Attachment 4).

Democratic Reporting International's report *Assessment of the Election Framework – Lebanon* from December 2008 provides useful analysis of the complexity of the political/electoral framework of Lebanon. The report also mentions the May 2008 events, which nearly lead to the resumption of civil war in 2008:

Lebanon's political system is based on the 1926 Constitution, the extra-constitutional 1943 'National Pact' and the 1989 Ta'if Agreement that ended 15 years of civil war. The agreements made in Doha in May 2008 added a layer of political compromise to an already complex legal-political framework.

Between 1990 and 2005 the post-civil war political system was only put to the test to a limited degree, because Syria dominated Lebanese politics in this period and served as the final arbiter of domestic conflicts. The post civil-war system was therefore tested for the first time only after the Syrian troop withdrawal in 2005, through which Lebanon regained a modicum of national sovereignty.

Initially the country achieved a number of important successes, including the peaceful 2005 elections, whose results were generally accepted, the subsequent formation of a cross-party Government, the establishment of dialogue between all national political leaders and the elaboration of a new draft election law by the Government-appointed expert 'Boutros Commission'. However, the national dialogue broke down in the face of assassinations of pro-Government MPs, disagreements about the composition of the Cabinet and the role of the international investigation into the Hariri and subsequent assassinations. The international context complicated the situation: Syria resisted attempts to limit its influence and the July 2006 Israel War raised urgent questions about the international and domestic role of Hezbollah. In November 2006 Hezbollah and Amal left the Government to form an opposition together with General Aoun's 'Free Patriotic Movement'. Simmering tension turned into civil strife in May 2008, when Hezbollah and affiliated groups took control of part of Beirut by force in response to a Cabinet decision that Hezbollah considered a threat to its core security interests. This incident disproved Hezbollah's longstanding claim that it would only use its weapons against Israel, not for settling domestic disputes. With the country on the brink of a wider civil war, the political groups met for talks in Doha under the mediation of

the Amir of Qatar and reached agreement on three key issues: the election by Parliament of Michel Suleiman as President (May 2008), the formation of a new cross-party Government (in July 2008), and the adoption of a New Electoral Law based on a revised electoral system (adopted in September 2008) (Democratic Reporting International 2008, *Assessment of the Election Framework: Election Law of 2008 – Lebanon*, December, p.4 – Attachment 5).

## Demography

As indicated, the 1926 Constitution and the National Pact of 1943 distribute political power in Lebanon along religious demographic lines. Demographic changes in Lebanon since 1932 remain a highly charged political issue, with many Shi'ites political leaders seeking a redistribution of power in line with the new demographic realities. Lebanon, however, has not conducted a census since 1932 and therefore demographic data from Lebanon is often unreliable given its political importance. The following demographic data is contained in the US Department of State's *Background Note: Lebanon*, updated in January 2009:

Nationality: noun and adjective--Lebanese (singular and plural).

Population (2006 est.): 3,874,050.

Growth rate (2006 est.): 1.23%.

Major ethnic groups: Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1% (note: many Christian Lebanese do not identify themselves as Arab but rather as descendents of the ancient Canaanites and prefer to be called Phoenicians).

Religions: Muslim 60% (Shi'a, Sunni, Druze, Isma'ili, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant), other 1%.

Languages: Arabic (official), English, French, Armenian.

Education: Years compulsory--8. Attendance --99%. Literacy (2005 est.)--87.4%; 93.1% male, 82.2% female.

Health (2006 est.): Infant mortality rate--23.7/1,000. Life expectancy --70.41 male, 75.48 female.

Work force (2001 est.): 2.6 million (US Department of State 2009, *Background Note: Lebanon*, January – Attachment 6).

The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008* provides current statistical estimates for Lebanon's religious confessions, as well as changes to demography since the 1932 census. According to the report, Sunni Muslims comprise 28 percent of Lebanon's population in 2008, equal in size to the Shia population:

...the most recent demographic study conducted by Statistics Lebanon, a Beirut-based research firm, showed 28 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 28 percent Shi'a Muslim, 22 percent Maronite Christian, 8 percent Greek Orthodox, 5 percent Druze, and 4 percent Greek Catholic. Over the past 60 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly due to the emigration of large numbers of Maronite Christians and a higher than average birth rate among the Muslim population. There are also very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus (US State Department 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Lebanon*, October, Section I – Attachment 4).

## The March 14 Movement

The March 14 Movement is an alliance of political parties affiliated with a number of religious denominations. March 14 takes its name from the date of a mass anti-Syrian protest

held in 2005 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The following source from *Al Arabiya* provides a succinct summary of the main members of the March 14 coalition. The source describes the coalition as anti-Syrian:

The anti-Syrian March 14 alliance won a parliamentary majority in a 2005 election. Its name is derived from a mass protest held in Beirut a month after Hariri's assassination to demand an end to Syrian influence in Lebanon. Its main components are:

#### FUTURE MOVEMENT- SAAD AL-HARIRI

Chosen to assume his father's political mantle in 2005, Hariri is Lebanon's most influential Sunni Muslim politician. Hariri, 39, has led March 14 through four years of confrontation with rival factions backed by Damascus. A billionaire businessman, Hariri enjoys firm backing from Saudi Arabia and the United States.

#### PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST PARTY- WALID JUMBLATT

Lebanon's most influential Druze leader, Jumblatt, 59, has led the Progressive Socialist Party since the assassination of his father, Kamal, in 1977. Once an ally of Damascus, Jumblatt moved firmly into the anti-Syrian camp in 2004. He has recently adopted a more conciliatory position than his March 14 allies.

#### LEBANESE FORCES- SAMIR GEAGEA

Geagea, who heads the Lebanese Forces party, is a Maronite Christian and the only leader from the 1975-90 civil war to go to jail, serving 11 years for political killings. He was released in 2005. He declared himself a political prisoner. Geagea, 57, is not a candidate in the election, though his wife, Sethrida is running.

#### PHALANGE PARTY- AMIN GEMAYEL

Gemayel, 65, leads the Maronite-dominated Phalange Party. He served as president from 1982 to 1988. He took office after the assassination of his brother Bashir, an ally of Israel who had been elected president but was killed before he could take office. Gemayel is not running in the election, but his son Sami and nephew Nadim are candidates. Gemayel's eldest son, Pierre, an MP and government minister, was assassinated in 2006 ('Main players in Lebanese elections' 2009, *Al Arabiya*, 21 May - <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/05/21/73411.html> - Accessed 3 June 2009 - Attachment 7).

In August 2009 Walid Jumblatt withdrew his Druze-based party, the *Progressive Socialist Alliance*, from the March 14 Coalition, as is indicated in the following source from Reuters India:

...Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri is set to resume talks on Monday aimed at agreeing a new coalition government, a political source said.

Hariri left Lebanon last week for a holiday, effectively freezing the talks, to take stock of a policy shift by one of his main allies, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, after he signalled an end to his membership of the Sunni politician's alliance.

Hariri's anti-Syrian "March 14" alliance, grouping Sunni, Druze and Christian factions, defeated a rival coalition including the powerful Shi'ite group Hezbollah and its Christian allies in a June parliamentary election ('Lebanon's Hariri set to resume government talks',

2009, *Reuters India*, 10 August <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-41650820090810> – Accessed 11 August 2009 – Attachment 8).

## March 8

March 8 is a coalition of largely pro-Syrian political parties and includes the Shi'ite political parties Amal and Hezbollah, as well as a significant block of the divided Christian vote led by former civil war Prime Minister and anti-Syrian, Michael Aoun. It is referred to as 'the opposition' in a number of sources. *Al Arabiya* provides a useful summary of the coalition parties and their leaders:

The March 8 alliance coalesced in response to anti-Syrian protests that swept Lebanon after Hariri's killing. It is named after a rally held on March 8, 2005 to show support for Syria. Christian politician Michel Aoun joined the alliance in 2006. Its main components are:

### HEZBOLLAH- SAYYED HASSAN NASRALLAH

Hezbollah is a Shiite Islamist group formed after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and backed by Iran and Syria. Its power rests on its formidable guerrilla army, as well as its network of social and charitable activities. The United States lists it as a terrorist organization but they are widely considered as the nation's strongest resistance against Israeli aggression. Hezbollah's secretary-general is Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, 48. He is not running for parliament, where Hezbollah's bloc is headed by Mohammad Raad.

### AMAL MOVEMENT- NABIH BERRI

Speaker of parliament since 1992, Amal leader Nabih Berri occupies the highest position reserved for a Shiite in Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system. Berri, 71, has led Amal since 1978 when the Shiite group's Iranian-born founder, Imam Musa Sadr, disappeared on a visit to Libya. Berri has long been viewed as one of Syria's closest allies in Lebanon.

### FREE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT- MICHEL AOUN

Aoun, 74, returned from exile in France in 2005 to win more seats than any other Christian leader in that year's parliamentary election. Once one of the toughest opponents of Syrian influence in Lebanon, he struck an alliance with Hezbollah in 2006 and turned the page on a history of conflict with Damascus in 2008 when he visited Syria. A former army commander, Aoun served as prime minister from 1988 to 1990 in one of two competing governments until Syrian forces drove him from the presidential palace.

### MARADA MOVEMENT- SULEIMAN FRANJIEH

Franjeh, 43, a former interior minister, is a close personal friend of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Franjeh's father, mother and sister were killed by Christian gunmen in 1978 as part of a power struggle among Christian factions at the time. Franjeh's grandfather, also called Suleiman Franjeh, was president of Lebanon from 1970-76 ('Main players in Lebanese elections' 2009, *Al Arabiya*, 21 May <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/05/21/73411.html> – Accessed 3 June 2009 – Attachment 7).

## The 7 June 2009 Elections

The exact number of seats the March 14 coalition of political parties garnered in the 7 June Parliamentary elections in Lebanon varies slightly from source to source. The following BBC report put the number of seats won by March 14 at 71:

Interior Minister Ziad Baroud confirmed the 14 March coalition of Saad Hariri had won 71 seats in the 128-member body, one more than four years ago.

Hassan Nasrallah, head of militant movement Hezbollah, said he accepted the outcome.

... The turnout was 54%, Mr Baroud said, the highest percentage among Lebanon's three million voters since the 1975-91 civil war ('Lebanon confirms Hariri election win', 2009, *BBC News*, 8 June [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8089285.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8089285.stm) – Accessed 11 August 2009 – Attachment 9).

The following BBC source states that the March 14 coalition won sixty-eight seats, the opposition March 8 coalition won fifty-seven seats, and three seats were won by independents. It also states that March 8 coalition leaders from both Amal and Hezbollah, the two leading Shi'ite parties, quickly accepted the results:

Almost universal predictions, including those of many political insiders, put the two sides so close that the result would be decided by a tiny handful of seats, with a high chance of a hung parliament.

In the event, the opposition garnered a mere 57 seats, with the "loyalists" as they are known locally, winning 68, and associated independents a further three.

In the context, it was a significant victory - although oddly enough, given that the constituency basis was radically different from the last elections, the vote produced a chamber very similar in composition to the one that emerged from the 2005 polls.

... The other surprise was that despite acute political tensions and memories of last year's bloody street battles, the voting passed off without serious violence.

Equally impressively, all parties appeared ready to accept the results, even those on the losing side.

Hezbollah's TV station, al-Manar, carried Saad al-Hariri's victory speech live in the middle of the night, and conceded in a news bulletin immediately afterwards that the loyalists had won a majority - long before the results were officially confirmed.

One of Hezbollah's main allies, Nabih Berri, who is Speaker of the outgoing parliament and heads the mainstream Shia movement Amal, said he fully accepted the results and congratulated the winners (Muir, J. 2009, 'LEBANON: Lebanon poll offers no easy answers', *BBC News* 8 June [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8089990.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8089990.stm) – Accessed 11 August 2009 – Attachment 10).

As stated earlier, Walid Jumblatt's Druze based party, the Progressive Socialist Alliance withdrew from the March 14 coalition in early August 2009. According to the following source from Reuters India this withdrawal removes March 14's absolute majority. It also states that Jumblatt has withdrawn his party from the alliance due to the changing regional geopolitics (see **Regional Context** section of this response):

...Jumblatt's shift has redrawn Lebanon's political map and undermined the win, effectively stripping March 14 of an absolute majority in 128-seat parliament and complicating the talks Hariri was holding on the new cabinet.

Hariri, a billionaire businessman with political backing from Saudi Arabia and the United States, had reached a deal on the distribution of seats in the new cabinet before Jumblatt's announcement.

Some of Hariri's Christian allies, such as former president Amin Gemayel, have called for a review of the seat-sharing arrangement in light of Jumblatt's shift, which they assume will weaken March 14's say in government.

Hezbollah and its allies in the rival alliance, which has the backing of Syria and Iran, say the arrangement should not be altered. Hariri, who took a family holiday to "think and reflect", has yet to comment.

The change in Jumblatt's position is seen linked to an end to Syria's isolation by many Western governments and rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Rivalry between the two Arab states has been seen at the heart of four years of turmoil in Lebanon triggered by 2005 the assassination of statesman Rafik al-Hariri, Saad's father ('Lebanon's Hariri set to resume government talks', 2009, *Reuters India*, 10 August <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-41650820090810> – Accessed 11 August 2009 – Attachment 8).

### **Post-Election Procedures**

The following post-election analysis was produced by the *International Republican Institute*. The source provides a useful summary of the post-election processes for forming a government and highlights the main domestic issues that will affect the formation of a new government. Furthermore, the source highlights the bridge-building and conciliatory language employed by Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt in reference to the March 8 coalition:

In accordance with the constitution, the president in consultation with the parliament will elect the prime minister, which is reserved for the Sunni community. The prime minister, in coordination with the president, is then responsible for forming a cabinet. Parliament will elect the speaker of parliament, a position reserved for the Shia community. The frontrunners for prime minister include leader of the Future Movement Saad Hariri and former Prime Minister Najib Mikati. For speaker of parliament, the main candidate being discussed is current speaker and Amal Movement leader Nabih Berri. PSP and Democratic Gathering bloc leader Walid Jumblatt has already backed both Hariri and Berri for prime minister and speaker of parliament, respectively.

The main issue in the election of the prime minister and formation of the cabinet is the blocking third veto. Following Hezbollah's attack on Beirut and Mount Lebanon in May 2008, Lebanese leaders resolved the crisis through the signing of the Doha Agreement. In addition to electing a consensus president and adopting a new electoral law, the agreement created a national unity government with a veto power, or the blocking third, given to the March 8 opposition. March 8 wants this power to extend beyond the elections. March 14 has stated that it is for a national unity government; however, it rejects granting the opposition the blocking third veto, claiming it is a temporary provision in the Doha Agreement that was never meant to extend beyond June 7 and that the concept contradicts and paralyzes democratic governance. Hezbollah seeks to retain the blocking third veto power beyond the elections so it can prevent any decision on its control of arms. Hezbollah's desire for the

blocking third as well as its decision to run less candidates in the elections suggest that Hezbollah is more comfortable in the opposition rather than actually governing. Hezbollah has hinted it would give up its demand for the blocking third if certain guarantees, most likely on its arms, were made by the ruling majority. As an alternative, there has been talk of the president being granted the blocking third veto power.

Other issues that will dominate the political landscape include: the role of the president, privatization of the telecommunications and electricity sectors, a new electoral law, full implementation of the Taef Agreement and arms outside the control of the state, which is the main topic of an ongoing national dialogue held under the auspices of the president.

... The election results are a major victory for the ruling coalition, which has endured a tenuous four years in power. The new parliament will have the opportunity to rectify previous mistakes and advance a reform agenda, though an obstinate opposition in possession of the blocking third veto would make that less of a possibility. There is a general feeling in Lebanon that the polarization of the last four years pitting March 14 against March 8 must not continue. Already some in March 14, most noticeably PSP leader Walid Jumblatt, have been building bridges with the opposition. Both Jumblatt and Future Movement Leader Saad Hariri have been speaking in reconciliatory tones following the March 14 victory. Within the March 8 opposition, fractures are starting to appear in the alliance, especially after FPM took all three seats in Jezzine, the traditional stronghold of Amal leader Nabih Berri, due in large part to votes from Hezbollah supporters. A reorientation of political groups in the post-election period is a real possibility (International Republican Institute 2009, 'Election Watch Lebanon', IRI website [http://www.iri.org/newsreleases/2009-06-post\\_election\\_watch\\_lebanon.asp](http://www.iri.org/newsreleases/2009-06-post_election_watch_lebanon.asp) – Accessed 13 August 2009 – Attachment 11).

## **The Regional Context**

Already quoted sources have described the two main political coalitions in Lebanon, the March 14 Movement and March 8, as anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian respectively. Sources also described March 14 as both pro-western and Saudi-backed. This serves to highlight the profound role regional and international geopolitics plays in Lebanese politics. It is therefore useful to view the post 7 June 2009 elections period through this geopolitical prism as it helps explain the lack of serious political violence between Sunnis and Shi'ites in the weeks since the elections. A Stratfor states that the recent diplomatic thaw between Hezbollah's ally Syria and March 14 supporters Saudi Arabia and the United States of America has led Syria to avoid assisting Hezbollah (and therefore the March 8 coalition), and that Syria actually assisted March 14's election prospects:

### **Summary**

A visit to Damascus by U.S. envoy Fred Hoff is part of a slow rapprochement between the West and Syria, which sees an opportunity to reshape its regional status and reclaim a hegemonic position in Lebanon. The more secure Syria feels about its position in Lebanon the more willing it will be to distance itself from Hezbollah and Iran.

### **Analysis**

U.S. envoy Fred Hoff left Israel for Damascus July 15 to meet with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem. Hoff's visit is a prelude to an upcoming visit to Syria and neighbouring states by U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell.

Washington's growing interest in Damascus fits into a larger U.S.-Saudi diplomatic effort to bring Syria back into the Arab fold and dilute Iranian influence in the Levant. If Riyadh and Washington could get their way, they would have Damascus completely sever relations with

Iran and militant proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas. In exchange, Syria would be able to break out of diplomatic isolation, play a larger role in regional affairs, advance its peace negotiations with Israel and invite badly needed investment to boost the stagnant Syrian economy.

... Syria has a long-standing tactical relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon but no desire to overempower the Shiite Islamist group. For Syria to negotiate effectively with the Saudis and the Americans, it needs to demonstrate its ability to contain Hezbollah. The June 7 Lebanese elections provided such an opportunity.

Prior to the Lebanese elections, Syria was engaged in back-channel talks with Saudi Arabia and the United States during which the Syrians privately pledged to facilitate a win for the Western-backed March 14 coalition over the Hezbollah-led opposition alliance. Immediately following the elections, STRATFOR sources in Hezbollah were outraged upon learning that the Syrians, despite their reassurances to Iran and Hezbollah that they would ensure the success of opposition candidates in northern Lebanon, the western Bekaa Valley and Zahle in the south, ended up taking a much more neutral stance. A STRATFOR source in Syria claims a large number of voters who travelled from Syria to vote in Lebanon ended up casting their votes in favour of the March 14 coalition on the government's instruction, thereby tipping the balance toward the West's political preference ('Syria, U.S.: A Slow Rapprochement' 2009, *Stratfor*, 15 July [http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20090715\\_syria\\_u\\_s\\_slow\\_rapprochement](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20090715_syria_u_s_slow_rapprochement) – Accessed 12 August 2009 – Attachment 12).

Stratfor goes on to argue that Saudi Arabia has accepted that Syria should regain hegemony in Lebanon on the proviso that it is at the expense of Iranian hegemony and Hezbollah is contained:

Saudi Arabia, which carries substantial clout among the Lebanese Sunni population, has come to terms with Syria's bid to reclaim influence in Lebanon and wants Syria to eclipse Iran's role in the Levant. But the Saudis also understand that Syria is reluctant to dismantle Hezbollah and incur the backlash for such a move. So, Riyadh has revised its demands, asking Damascus instead to contain Hezbollah's actions to prevent the group from playing an injurious role in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia has primarily used its petrodollar prowess to rehabilitate the Syrian regime, pumping money into Syrian coffers every time Damascus delivers on its preference ('Syria, U.S.: A Slow Rapprochement' 2009, *Stratfor*, 15 July [http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20090715\\_syria\\_u\\_s\\_slow\\_rapprochement](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20090715_syria_u_s_slow_rapprochement) – Accessed 12 August 2009 – Attachment 12).

Given the role both Saudi Arabia and Syria are playing in Lebanon, inter-sectarian violence between the Sunnis and Shi'ite communities, like that witnessed in May 2008, is unlikely in the near-future. An article published in *The Independent* indicates that peaceful negotiations between March 14 and March 8 will continue for the foreseeable future while Syria, Saudi Arabia and the United States seek rapprochement. It also states that another power-sharing government, similar to that negotiated in the Doha Agreement, is inevitable:

It may take weeks to agree on a new government, but few analysts expect political disputes to spark armed confrontation.

"Lebanon will not witness another round of violence," said Hilal Khashan, political science professor at the American University of Beirut. "There's a regional understanding on this, which we saw at work yesterday when despite the heated atmosphere, the election took place peacefully."

...The Lebanese have no stomach for a repetition of last year's echo of their 1975-90 civil war, analyst Rami Khouri said.

"They realise that what they did last May, the Sunni-Shi'ite fighting in the streets, was a catastrophe. They want to avoid that at any cost," he said of the clashes in which Hezbollah and its allies briefly took over the Muslim half of Beirut.

Ultimately, another inclusive, power-sharing government was inevitable, he argued. "The real election was last May in the streets and Hezbollah won. That defined the power structure that came out of Doha and that is going to continue -- nobody is going to force decisions down the throat of the other side" ('Lebanon's post-election fate tied to region', 2009, *The Independent* <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/lebanons-postelection-fate-tied-to-region-1699828.html> – Accessed 05 August 2009 – Attachment 13).

### **Incidents of Post-Election Violence**

There have been a number of security incidents since the 7 June elections that should be acknowledged. Only one incident, reported by a number of news agencies, resulted in death. The following report posted by the BBC describes an exchange of gunfire between Saad Hariri supporters and Amal supporters in which a female bystander was shot dead by a stray bullet. The report suggests that the battle began when Amal supporters responded to triumphalism displayed by March 14 supporters in the form of fireworks:

Supporters of Western-backed Sunni prime minister-designate Saad Hariri have clashed with followers of the Shia Amal group in Lebanon's capital Beirut.

A woman was killed and two other people were injured during the clashes, with gunfire reported in several districts.

Troops were deployed and the army reportedly warned it would fire on any armed person on the streets.

It came a day after Mr Hariri was named PM with the backing of politicians from Amal and his own parliamentary bloc.

It was not clear what sparked Sunday's clashes, which lasted a couple of hours, and reportedly involved automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades.

Fatal stray bullet

But tension is said to have mounted on Saturday when Mr Hariri's supporters set off fireworks to celebrate him being named as prime minister.

A 30-year-old woman was killed by a stray bullet during the fighting in the Aisha Bakkar area of west Beirut, security officials said.

"Orders have been given to [the army] to open fire on any armed person appearing on the streets and it will not tolerate any breach of security," said a statement from the army leadership, reported Reuters news agency ('Lebanese factions clash in Beirut', 2009 *BBC News*, 28 June [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8123471.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8123471.stm) – Accessed 13 August 2009 – Attachment 14)

The following source was published by Reuters and describes a minor incident in which a bomb was delivered to General Security Headquarters in Beirut, however it failed to detonate:

A small bomb containing 200 grams (7 ounces) of explosives sent to Beirut's General Security headquarters was defused on Friday after failing to explode because of a technical glitch, security sources said.

Bombs are rarely sent to government buildings although several explosive devices are defused or explode every week in Lebanon.

Tensions in Lebanon have dissipated after a Qatari-mediated deal in May last year dragged the country back from the brink of civil war. Before that Lebanon had suffered bouts of political killings, bombings and sectarian conflict since the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri ('Parcel bomb defused at Beirut government building', 2009, *Reuters AlertNet*, 12 June, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LC347569.htm> – Accessed 13 August 2009 – Attachment 15).

The most recent killing of a political apparatchik in Lebanon at the time of writing appears to have occurred on the 14 February 2009 when a member of Walid Jumblatt's Druze Progressive Socialist Party was allegedly stabbed to death in Beirut. The following report from Reuters states reported the Druze reaction:

Lebanese leader Walid Jumblatt is forced to raise his voice to calm followers demanding revenge for the killing of a member of their Druze community.

"We have no enemies in Lebanon," Jumblatt screams at his supporters, trying to avoid a bloody reprisal for the killing of 58-year-old Lutfi Zeineddin, who was stabbed to death in Beirut after a Feb. 14 political rally.

Followers of the leading anti-Syrian politician are not convinced. "We are losing martyrs!" responds one, his comments echoed by others in a heated exchange captured on amateur video and broadcast recently on Lebanese channel New TV.

The footage demonstrates the depth of communal hostility generated by political conflict in Lebanon, but also shows that the country's leaders have, for now at least, decided to keep tensions in check as a June 7 election approaches.

With the vote seen as tight contest between the "March 14" parliamentary majority coalition and a rival alliance led by Shi'ite Hezbollah, no one is ruling out scattered violence.

But any trouble is unlikely to be on the scale of Lebanon's brush with all-out civil war last May, when Hezbollah and its allies routed followers of Jumblatt and Sunni politician Saad al-Hariri, leader of the March 14 coalition.

... In Zeineddin's village of Chbaniya, nestled in the mountains east of Beirut, Najib Nimr Sabra says it will be difficult to restrain his fellow-Druze in the event of more violence.

"They let it pass this time, but they were bursting to take revenge. If this is repeated, it will become much more serious," said the 32-year-old, who witnessed what he described as a frenzied knife attack on Zeineddin by a gang. "It was as if they'd carried a vendetta against him for 20 years," he said (Perry, T. 2009 'Lebanese cool political heat, but tensions simmer', *Reuters*, 12 March <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL8711170> – Accessed 13 August 2009 – Attachment 16).

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Google <http://www.google.com>

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