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The Salafi Jihadist Threat in Lebanon

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In the last few years, particularly after the May 2007 fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Barid, the threat of al-Qaeda establishing a base in Lebanon from which to wage its global jihad has become a cause for concern for most of the international community. This paper will examine to what extent this concern is justified by tracing the history of Salafi jihadism in Lebanon and analyzing its future prospects with an emphasis on the likelihood al-Qaeda will choose to open a new front in Lebanon. The paper concludes with a range of policy prescriptions intended to help Lebanon and the international community counter the growth of al-Qaeda and Salafi jihadism in general.

SALAFISM AND SALAFI JIHADISM

A shortcoming of many analyses on religious extremism in Lebanon has been the failure to distinguish between Salafism and Salafi jihadism, often resulting in the equation of Salafism with religious extremism and violence. Salafists are Sunni Muslims who seek to return to the purest form of Islam by imitating the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions.

They commonly reject attempts at Islamic reformation, maintaining that the example of Mohammed and his immediate followers is the only legitimate religious interpretation of God's will. While Salafists agree on the central tenets of the religion, divisions emerge when those tenets are applied to modern issues. One of these divisions is well-illustrated in the debate over whether Western civilians working in Iraq can be attacked. All Salafist groups believe that targeting and killing civilians is prohibited by Islam. However, if one believes that these civilians are assisting the U.S. military, then reference is made to those Qur'anic verses and hadiths (recorded sayings or traditions of the Prophet and his followers) that relate to the status of those who aid in warfare against Muslims, and the civilians become legitimate targets. If instead one argues that these civilians are not directly assisting the U.S. military, then the clear Qur'anic prohibitions on killing noncombatants triumphs.[1] Thus, though they share a common religious foundation, Salafists can engage in radically different activities based on their subjective application of hadiths to the modern day context.

Generally speaking, Salafists believe in creating the right societal conditions for establishing an Islamic state through education and proselytizing. That is not to say that they deny the potential for violence, only that they prioritize social reform. Salafi jihadists, on the other hand, believe that only violence and offensive jihad will lead to the establishment of an Islamic state. It is important to note that Salafi jihadists constitute only a small percentage of

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Salafists worldwide.[2] Ideologically speaking, Salafi jihadists also aim to: raise awareness among Muslims that their religion is declining in political, military, economic and cultural terms; identify the source for this decline in the persistent military humiliations at the hands of Israel and the West; and create a new identity defined by membership in the worldwide Muslim community, or umma.[3] This last goal suggests that an individual country's Salafi jihadists are open to the influence of the greater Muslim world.[4]

SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON: CAUSES

The roots of Islamic extremism and, by extension, the Salafi jihadist movement in Lebanon during the 1980s are complex and best analyzed on three levels: the local, the systemic and the individual.

At the local level, the rise of Salafi jihadism can be attributed to the nature of Lebanon's sociopolitical system as defined by the 1943 National Pact. The Pact stipulates that Lebanese Christians will forgo all military alliances with Western powers while Muslims will set aside any forms of nationalism that extend beyond Lebanon's geographical boundaries. The Pact also reinforced the confessional schism that existed by confirming that Lebanese presidents would be Maronite Christians, premiers would be Sunni Muslims and the speaker of the Parliament would be Shiite Muslim. Civil service appointments and public funding would also be determined on a confessional basis.[5] In sum, Lebanon's sectarian system has denied the possibility of one group monopolizing power and creating an authoritarian state, thus frustrating Lebanon's radical Islamists who aspire to create an Islamic state. It has also greatly polarized the various sects and hampered the growth of a national identity. As a result, Salafi jihadists became more receptive to outside actors and often paved the way for external interventions into Lebanese affairs.

At the systemic level, the rise of Islamist militancy in the broader Middle East coincided with an identity crisis stemming from the failure of pan-Arabism, the humiliation resulting from successive military defeats to Israel, and a perception among Muslims that the *umma* was losing the ideological battle to the West. In Lebanon, these frustrations were reinforced by a 15-year civil war that pitted Christians against Muslims and by Israel's 1982 invasion and subsequent 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Lebanese militants are also quite affected by ongoing regional conflicts, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the sectarian violence in Iraq.

At the individual level, the growth of Salafi jihadism is attributable to the success of local and foreign Salafi jihadist leaders in penetrating Lebanese Muslim society with their ideology. While nonviolent Salafists are the most likely to be receptive to the ideology due to the common religious foundation, ordinary criminals and alienated individuals with little concern for Islamic thought also make up the pool of recruits. It is no coincidence that the cities in which Salafism and Salafi jihadism emerged and developed—Tripoli, Majdal, Anjar, Qarun and Sidon—are characterized by high unemployment and rampant poverty.[6]

GEOGRAPHIC ENABLERS OF SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON

Geographically, Lebanon is relatively small and there are few remote areas from which Salifi jihadist organizations can operate freely. The exceptions are the areas surrounding Tripoli and the Palestinian refugee camps that are outside the control of the Lebanese state.[7] While it is possible that small groups have operated in the hinterland surrounding Tripoli, all major Salafi jihadist organizations have thus far used the refugee camps as their bases. Given their centrality to Salafi jihadism in Lebanon, a brief overview of the camps is in order.

The Palestinian "problem" can be traced back to the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the June 1967 war, during which more than 300,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, mainly settling in the South. A further influx of approximately 3,000 Palestinian militants occurred in 1970 in the aftermath of what Palestinians refer to as "Black September," when King Hussein of Jordan evicted the majority of armed Palestinians from his country in three weeks of bloody fighting. Today,

according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), there are between 350,000 and 400,000 refugees in Lebanon, most of whom live in 12 camps.[8]

Conditions within the Palestinian refugee camps slowly improved under the control of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1970s due to an influx of money from the Arab Gulf states and strong employment programs. When the PLO was ejected from Lebanon in 1983 by Israeli and Syrian forces, the economies of the camps collapsed, despite UNRWA's continued provision of aid. The refugees suffered yet another blow when the Gulf States cut off funding in response to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's siding with Iraq during the first Gulf War in 1991.

Since then, conditions have steadily declined. Palestinians are prevented by law from working in over 60 skilled professions and are not allowed to own property or register companies. Construction around the camps is prohibited, resulting in severe overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, and a large percentage—as high as 27% in some camps—live in abject poverty.[9]

Each successive Lebanese government has ignored Palestinian issues for fear of appearing to facilitate the naturalization of the overwhelmingly Sunni refugees, which would upset Lebanon's delicate power balance. As such, feelings of resentment and alienation are common within the camps, making them either ripe ground for recruitment or, at the least, passive supporters of extremist groups targeting the state.

SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON: HISTORY

In the 1990s, large-scale crackdowns on Salafists by Lebanese security forces, multiple Israeli aggressions against Lebanon and violent clashes with rival Islamic groups further mobilized Salafi jihadists. However, Salafi jihadist ambitions remained almost exclusively local during that decade and the various groups rarely subscribed to the doctrine of al-Qaeda's global insurgency. Furthermore, Lebanon's various Salafi groups were not united under a single organization and so were not considered too great a threat to the state.

From 2003 to 2007 the threat was completely transformed as Lebanon, and the region as a whole, witnessed a number of events that led to the rapid growth of Salafi jihadist movements. The most consequential of these events were the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The political and security void that characterized Lebanon in the aftermath of the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal from the country gave radical groups room to maneuver and grow. Syria's effective intelligence and security apparatus had previously kept many of the radical Islamist groups in check, but Lebanese forces were incapable of rising to the task. At the time the Salafi jihadist movement faced difficulties in many parts of the world, and the lack of security in Lebanon attracted many of its members.[10] Additionally, the withdrawal of the Syrian presence delivered a further blow to the camp economies as it had provided employment to many Palestinians. This sudden job loss resulted in dramatic increases of drug and alcohol abuse which in turn facilitated the encroachment of radical jihadist groups.[11]

The second major factor in the rapid spread of Salafi jihadism in recent years was the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Following the invasion, Asbat al-Ansar, a Salafi jihadist group based out of the Ain al-Hilweh camp, sent—with the tactical cooperation of Syrian military intelligence—hundreds of volunteers to join the Iraqi insurgency, where they not only gained combat experience but also strengthened their ties to al-Qaeda leaders. Such activity subsided upon Syria's 2005 withdrawal; however, Damascus continued to act as a willing conduit for fighters moving to and from Iraq.[12] As Andrew Exum notes, there was a definite correlation between the 'Awakening' in Iraq, which severely limited al-

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Qaeda's ability to operate there, and the rise of Lebanon as a base of Salafi jihadist operations.[13]

AL-QAEDA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON

The extent to which al-Qaeda has now and in the past maintained a presence in Lebanon is the subject of considerable debate, with Syria and its supporters claiming that al-Qaeda poses a real threat to Lebanon's national security while the anti-Syrian coalition led by Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and parliamentary majority leader Saad al-Hariri believes that Syria fabricates this threat in order to destabilize Lebanon and justify continued intervention. Externally, Swedish, Danish, German, Italian and U.S. intelligence agencies are convinced that al-Qaeda has a real presence in Lebanon and is set on striking against their respective interests in the country.[14]

But what does having a "real presence" in Lebanon entail for a group like al-Qaeda? Since the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has ceased to exist as a structured organization and instead persists as a network of affiliated groups motivated by a common ideology.[15] Terrorism expert Marc Sageman recently took this notion further by arguing that the threat of al-Qaeda leaders plotting attacks and issuing commands to affiliated groups has transformed into one in which local groups conceive and execute operations independently with little or no guidance from the top.[16] Other analysts take exception to this argument, concluding that while al-Qaeda has exhibited bottom-up initiatives it still remains capable of top-down operations.[17] Sageman's characterization of al-Qaeda would imply that the organization has established a presence via groups like Fatah al-Islam and Asbat al-Ansar. However, its activities over the last nine years seem to indicate that it is attempting to establish a more traditional presence in Lebanon so as to exert more direct control over operations in the area.

What follows is a brief history detailing al-Qaeda's involvement in Lebanon which demonstrates that while the threat of al-Qaeda has often been exaggerated, it is by no means a Syrian myth. The group has repeatedly worked with local Salafi jihadist groups by providing financing, training and ideological guidance.[18]

Links between al-Qaeda and Lebanese Salafi groups began to develop in 2000, when a group of possibly Chechen origin and connected to Osama bin-Laden asked Bassam Kanj, a veteran from Afghanistan, to set up a Salafi jihadist network in Lebanon. Kanj focused his recruitment efforts in the poor neighborhoods of Tripoli and in Ain al-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp located outside the city of Sidon in south Lebanon. In January 2000, a group known as Dinniyeh was involved in a week-long firefight with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) after which the group more or less disbanded with survivors joining Asbat al-Ansar.[19]

From 2001 to 2005, Asbat al-Ansar was one of the most prominent Salafi jihadist groups in Lebanon. Although it has denied formal links to al-Qaeda, Asbat al-Ansar is reported to be partly funded and armed by the organization.[20] During this period other incidents occurred linking al-Qaeda to Lebanon. First was the March 2003 car bombing murder in Ain al-Hilweh of Abd al-Sattar Jad (AKA Abu Muhammad al-Masri), identified by Israeli intelligence services as al-Qaeda's commander in Lebanon.[21] Two months later, in May 2003, was the arrest of a Yemeni, Maamun al-Awami (AKA Abu al-Shahid) for providing military training to a group that was plotting to blow up a McDonalds. Al-Awami was arrested while leaving the Ain al-Helwa refugee camp and accused of having connections to prominent al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri who funded his group. At around the same time, Lebanese authorities discovered a cell linked to al-Qaeda under the supervision of known jihadist Ismail al-Khatib.[22]

Beginning in 2004, al-Qaeda's leadership in Iraq decided to use Lebanon as a base where it could hold meetings and plan operations in Iraq. Al-Qaeda also began to increase funding of certain religious programs and charities including Jund al-Sham, a splinter group of Asbat al-Ansar. Jund al-Sham, during this period at least, was used by al-Qaeda to directly influence events in Lebanon according to Fida Itani of the Lebanese daily *Al Akhbar*.[23] In September 2004, 20 al-Qaeda

suspects, including two leaders, were arrested in connection with a plot to attack the Italian embassy in Lebanon. One of the involved networks was based in Ain al-Hilewh and the other was based in West Beqaa.[24] Following these arrests, Lebanese authorities claimed that al-Qaeda no longer had a network in Lebanon.[25]

However, one year later—in December 2005—an al-Qaeda affiliated organization claimed responsibility for firing rockets at Israel from the south of Lebanon. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, at the time leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, announced on tape that the attack was "made under direct instructions from Osama bin-Laden" and Lebanese Interior Minister Ahmed Fatfat confirmed that the attacks were financed directly by al-Qaeda.[26] In January 2006, Lebanese police announced the capture of 13 al-Qaeda suspects connected to al-Zarqawi who were in the process of planning suicide attacks in Iraq and possibly Lebanon.[27]

Later that year, al-Qaeda's "Human Resources Group" arrived in Lebanon to reinforce the tactical, technical and logistical skills of local groups. The group was led by "Suleyman D." (AKA Abu Ghradia), a Syrian member of al-Qaeda with training experience in Turkey and Afghanistan.[28] Weeks later, Palestinian-Syrian Abdullah Hadraji, together with seven members of al-Qaeda, visited Nahr al-Barid with the goal of establishing an official presence in Lebanon.[29] At this point the story of al-Qaeda in Lebanon becomes inextricably linked to that of Fatah al-Islam.

Fatah al-Islam was officially formed on November 26, 2006 after splitting from Fatah Intifada, a secular pro-Syrian faction that had itself broken away from the mainstream Fatah movement in 1983. The group's leader, Shakir al-Absi, has denied all links to al-Qaeda, claiming "al-Qaeda has its strategy; we have ours."[30] However, investigations into the group indicate that Fatah al-Islam was actively trying to deepen its affiliation with al-Qaeda. According to Syrian political analyst Sami Moubayed, Fatah al-Islam repeatedly tried to gain al-Qaeda approval for its operations, but failed each time despite al-Absi's and other group members' strong links to al-Zawahiri and other top al-Qaeda members. Abdullah al-Binshi, the Saudi "*sharia* expert" sent by al-Qaeda to evaluate Fatah al-Islam, concluded that "Lebanon is not the land of jihad." Abu Abdulrahman al-Afghani, another senior member of al-Qaeda who evaluated Fatah al-Islam's operations, left unconvinced of their tactics.[31]

Abu Hamza, a jihadist who has in the past demonstrated key insight into al-Qaeda operations, wrote on the jihadist forum "Ekhlaas," that Fatah al-Islam continued to attempt serious negotiation to become a formal affiliate until the group was crushed by the Lebanese Armed Forces during the May 2007 firefight at Nahr al-Barid.[32] Al-Qaeda saw fighting against the Lebanese government as counterproductive to jihadist interests and worried about becoming new targets of the LAF, so it severed relations with Fatah al-Islam.[33]

That al-Qaeda had personal, financial and ideological connections to the major Salafi jihadist groups in Lebanon should not be taken to mean that it was alone in supporting these groups. Multiple actors have been accused of funding and providing weapons to these groups in order to advance their own agendas. Ultimately, however, the real winner would always be al-Qaeda and its adherents. For example, there is considerable evidence that at various points in its development, Fatah al-Islam was supported by both Syria and Saad al-Hariri's Future Movement. Al-Hariri is alleged to have funded Fatah al-Islam so that it might act as a counterbalance to Hezbollah, while Syria, which has a history of sponsoring foreign terrorist groups, may have supported Fatah al-Islam to deflect attention from the United Nations al-Hariri tribunal or to use the group to break up any potential al-Hariri-created Islamist coalition that could be used to fight Hezbollah.[34] As both actors quickly learned, however, Fatah al-Islam was following its own program and used the funds it received to recruit dozens of new combatants, organize more training sessions at Ain al-Hilweh and prepare plans for attacking UNIFIL in the South.[35] As a Hamas official explained, "all sides tried to benefit from [Fatah al-Islam] but no one can control them."[36] By late 2007, al-Qaeda had

developed a vast network throughout Lebanon; however, it remains unclear how the group intends to use it.[37]

FUTURE OF SALAFI JIHADISM IN LEBANON

Having suffered strategic defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, many analysts are concerned that al-Qaeda is searching for new fronts on which to wage its global jihad. This concern is reinforced by multiple statements made by al-Zawahiri and bin-Laden over the last few years explicitly referring to Lebanon,[38] and by the appointment of al-Saadi Nahed, a Saudi extremist and veteran of the insurgency in Iraq, as the new "emir" for al-Qaeda in Lebanon.[39] This section will address the likelihood that al-Qaeda will continue to establish a traditional presence in Lebanon from which to pursue its objectives and, if so, whether it will be successful given the current situation.[40]

As mentioned earlier, Lebanon's small size and sectarian population greatly limit the ability of extremist groups to freely maneuver within the country. A further limitation, according to a former high-ranking jihadist, is that many Islamic groups and religious leaders have ties to Lebanese intelligence services.[41] As such, should al-Qaeda choose to settle in Lebanon, it will be compelled to find a home in the Palestinian refugee camps. With Nahr al-Barid completely destroyed after the May 2007 fighting, Ain al-Hilweh, the largest of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps, which hosts Asbat al-Ansar, Jund al-Sham and possibly other unknown Salafi jihadist groups that subscribe to al-Qaeda's ideology, is the most likely candidate. In fact, according to several sources, al-Qaeda may have already begun infiltrating the camp. In September 2008, a Jordanian official told *Al-Hayat* that a group of al-Qaeda members including 25 Jordanians and a number of Yemenis, Saudis and Europeans had relocated to the camp from Iraq. He also asserted that "al-Qaeda representatives are in Lebanon at present and they are trying to establish contact with [certain] groups based in Ain al-Hilweh." These "certain groups" would include Jund al-Sham, Asbat al-Ansar and the remnants of Fatah al-Islam. Others doubt that this infiltration is being directed by a central al-Qaeda authority and refer to what currently exists as a "fake al-Qaeda."[42]

Regardless, Ain al-Hilweh is quite different than Nahr al-Barid and it cannot be assumed that—even given al-Qaeda infiltration—the camp will radicalize at the same astonishingly quick rate that Nahr al-Barid did. Ain al-Hilweh is home to several Palestinian nationalist parties including Fatah and Hamas which, fearing the fate of Nahr al-Barid, are proactively trying to avoid a confrontation with the state. A joint security force involving all the various factions has been formed to create some sense of internal order, and discussions have been held regarding turning over some of the most-wanted jihadists that may be living in the camp.[43] The Salafi jihadist groups are resisting this "moderating" of the camp, however a prominent Fatah commander has been quoted as saying that "all the Palestinian forces are discussing how to get rid of [them]" and that "if a peaceful solution is not found, we will mount a security operation against them and finish them off once and for all."[44] Furthermore, the LAF, and to some extent Syria, has undercover intelligence officers stationed in the camp, thus making large-scale operational planning a challenge.[45] Al-Hilweh's external security environment is also quite different from al-Barid's. Fearing attacks on UNIFIL forces stationed nearby, the LAF has encircled the camp, and Hezbollah, which is hostile to al-Qaeda, is in effective control of south Lebanon.

Assuming al-Qaeda means to exert more direct control over groups in Lebanon, it is still unclear how receptive Lebanese Salafi jihadist groups would be to subordinating themselves to bin-Laden or al-Zawahiri. Although these groups share much of al-Qaeda's ideology, they have thus far failed to unite under a single organization due to their dissimilar agendas. Indeed during the Nahr al-Barid fight, no other Salafi jihadist group militarily—much less vocally—aided Fatah al-Islam, as those groups' leaders believe that jihad should be waged against Israel, not Lebanon.[46] Furthermore, Salafi jihadists in Lebanon have to contend with several enemies—the Lebanese

government, Israel, Shiite and Christian groups, and UNIFIL—and may thus be unwilling to utilize their limited resources to engage in activities that may upset the prioritization of their targets.[47] As Bilal Saab and Magnus Ranstrop argue, "each [group] is more concerned about its own survival than about waging an offensive jihad against 'infidels'."[48]

Crucial to the continued survival of a terrorist group is active support or at least passive sympathy on the part of the local population. Thus far, al-Qaeda-related groups have not appreciated the importance of winning over the local population—a strategy that is all the more important considering the recruitment challenges it faces. Foreign jihadists are no longer entering Lebanon at a high rate, and a majority of the Lebanese Sunni community is opposed to Salafi jihadist ideology.[49] While operating from Nahr al-Barid, the Salafi jihadists treated the locals with disdain and often fought with them.[50] As a result, the population often protested the presence of Fatah al-Islam; However, ultimately there was no opposing organization powerful enough to dislodge the Salafi jihadists.[51] Should these groups continue to alienate the population in Ain al-Hilweh, al-Qaeda will find that its presence will not be tolerated and at this stage, Palestinian groups are sufficiently powerful to defeat the Salafi jihadists should it come to a confrontation.

It has been argued that al-Qaeda recognizes the above challenges and indeed has no intention of waging jihad from Lebanon.[52] Instead, al-Qaeda may settle on using Lebanon as a staging ground for operations in Palestine and Europe. In the past two years numerous groups from Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Jordan—most of which have close links to al-Qaeda—have gone to Lebanon, primarily to Ain al-Hilweh, to train. After training, many of the jihadists either return to their home country or move on to Iraq. It has been reported that a significant number travel to several European countries with considerable ease.[53] The threat to Europe is very real: in September 2009, French police disrupted a Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) cell allied to the al-Zarqawi network in the suburbs of Paris. Two of the detainees told authorities they had received explosives training at a camp near Tripoli in northern Lebanon (Hunt 2006).[54]

POLICY PRESECRIPTIONS

Regardless of al-Qaeda's aims in Lebanon, it is imperative that the threat of Salafi jihadism be contained and its root causes addressed. For even if al-Qaeda has no intention of establishing Lebanon as a battlefield for global jihad (at the moment preferring instead to use Lebanon as a training ground and intermediary post between Europe and several Middle East countries), beyond the destabilizing effect that such groups have on the Lebanese state, the groups that currently exist could well form the backbone of future al-Qaeda initiatives if left unchecked. The international community should take this opportunity while groups are still relatively weak and divided to quash the threat of Salafi jihadism in Lebanon using military, diplomatic and economic tools.

A comprehensive policy to address this threat may include: international community assistance to Lebanon in the form of military aid and advisors to Lebanon; domestic and internationally-supported economic and political development programs; a revaluation of Palestinian policies on the part of the Lebanese government, complemented by progress on resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict; engagement with other groups within Lebanon that could serve as a moderating force; and cooperation with Syria.

It is too much to expect the LAF to assert itself in the camps, as doing so would almost certainly result in a violent confrontation. However, the international community must continue to provide military support and consider sending military officers and intelligence officials to advise the LAF in counterterrorism practices. Given that most of the advisors are currently tied up in Iraq, one solution—suggested by Andrew Exum—is to create an "Advisor Corps," a "group of soldiers with the specific mission of training and advising foreign militaries on combating returning jihadists and the counterinsurgencies they will lead."[55] Special attention should also be given to aiding Lebanese counterterrorism efforts,

particularly those of the Military Intelligence Directorate, which is the most experienced, effective and capable counterterrorism institution in Lebanon.[56]

A key lesson that advisors might impart is the importance of having the support of the local population. Most of those living within the Palestinian camps have little sympathy for the Salafi jihadist groups that operate in their midst, however relative to the LAF they are considered by many to be the lesser of two evils. During the Nahr al-Barid firefight with Fatah al-Islam, the LAF indiscriminately shelled the camp, resulting in a high civilian death toll. After the main fighting was over, forces entered the camp looting anything of value, smashing whatever had not been destroyed by the shelling and even urinating in olive jars.[57] Already disadvantaged by government policy, actions such as these can only further radicalize the local population and aid jihadist recruitment efforts. Alienating the population also obstructs the human intelligence collection efforts that are fundamental to dismantling a terrorist group. Recent reports that the Lebanese military was planning on helping to reconstruct Nahr al-Barid and a published statement by the army declaring that it was keen on strengthening the "solid relationship with Palestinians" are steps in the right direction, but much more has to be done before Palestinians will trust the military.[58]

To halt the radicalization of Palestinians in the camps it is imperative that government policy towards them also be reviewed. That is not to say that Palestinians should be naturalized; doing so would upset the balance of power in Lebanon and also impede negotiations over the right of return. Rather, Bernard Rougier argues that the only way to halt and possibly reverse this radicalization is to allow the refugees to work and live freely in Lebanon. Besides aiding them economically, this step will allow them to escape the shadow of the extremist clerics within the camps that shape their world view.[59] More complicated, but perhaps just as necessary, is the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Rougier argues that if nothing is done on this front, the "nearby enemy"—represented by the PLO in the eyes of most Salafi jihadists—will lose its legitimacy, thus making it easier to overcome. Attention will be then turned to the "distant enemy" which, according to al-Qaeda, must be targeted as a priority. He writes, "Ain al-Hilweh might become the vanguard of a Salafi jihadist militancy that would spread in the Palestinian territories, break through national barriers, and change the scale of the struggle, the better to strike…the West in general."[60]

Economic and political development programs in the North will also go a long way in denying Salafi jihadist groups additional recruits. According to a recent report co-authored by the United Nations Development Program and the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, 53% of citizens in the North live in poverty and 18% live in extreme poverty. In each case, the rates are twice the national average. While some Salafist groups and NGOs provide relief, ultimately only the state can offer the resources necessary to effectively tackle unemployment and poverty in the North. In February 2008, the Future Movement announced that it would donate $52 million in development aid to Tripoli, Akkar and other regions in the North. This is a welcome step in the right direction, but far from the potential that could be achieved should the current political stalemate end.[61] In the meantime, given the relatively small amount of money that it would involve, the international community should consider delivering more aid to the region.

Engaging with other groups within Lebanon may also prove an effective way to control the spread of Salafi jihadism. After the 2007 fighting in Nahr al-Barid, Fatah and Hamas, which were at the time fighting each other in Gaza, cooperated with each other and with Lebanese authorities to isolate the threat from al-Qaeda.[62] As noted earlier, these groups continue to be a moderating force in Ain al-Hilweh and should not be ignored. The issue could also serve as a basis for cooperation between the U.S. and the Hamas government of Palestine. The international community should also seek the cooperation of Hezbollah, if only unofficially, whose human intelligence assets in the South are far superior to those of the state.

Any long-term solution to the threat of al-Qaeda and its affiliates should involve Syria,

given its ability to control the stream of jihadists flowing across its border with Lebanon and its possible material and financial support for the groups themselves. From 2005 to 2007, the U.S. used blunt diplomatic warnings to force Syrian cooperation on the issue of foreign fighters crossing into Iraq from Syria. However, given Syria's recent relative power gains, Syria would likely be more resistant to such pressure today. The U.S. still holds significant leverage over Syria, including the ability to its lift sanctions, ease pressure on the ongoing al-Hariri Tribunal and International Atomic Energy Agency investigations, and more generally, to pull Syria westward where it stands to gain more politically and economically. However, the U.S. would likely only be willing to use such leverage as part of comprehensive negotiations over the Golan Heights and peace with Israel. Similarly, Syria would likely only renounce support for these groups (if this support is indeed present), in exchange for such concessions. The Obama administration has already indicated its desire to restart the Syria-Israel track; helping stem the threat of Al-Qaeda in Lebanon is just one more reason to do so.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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[6] Ibid., 829.
[7] While these are the areas to which Salafi jihadist groups are restricted, other extremist organizations operate more widely within Lebanon. For example, Hezbollah operates independently in southern Lebanon below the Litani River as well as within the Beqaa Valley. However, Salfi Jihadists are not on friendly terms with Hezbollah, and so do not have access to these areas.
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[12] See Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005) 48-52; and Jane's, "Asbat al-Ansar," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, 2008.
[13] Andrew Exum, "Return of the Jihadi," *Democracy Journal* (Summer 2008): 44-54.
[14] See Bilal Y. Saab, "Al-Qa'ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon," *CTC Sentinel* (Combating Terrorism Center), November 2008: 6; and Abdulmajid al-Sabati, "Interview with Italian FM D'Alema." *Al Watan*, January 13, 2007.
[15] See Marc Sageman, *Understanding terror networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31 (1) (Summer 2006): 32-33.
[16] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Interestingly, Abu Hamza, a jihadist with intimate knowledge of al-Qaeda operations, makes a similar argument in a posting to on the jihadi web-forum, "Ekhlaas." In his essay, "Bin Laden and the Globalization of Jihad" he writes, "Al-Qaeda is not an organization or a traditional side in an international war. It is cells and an ideological orientation that jumps every day to new regions that meet the requisite Sharia and strategic goals… The spidery chain of spontaneously-generating cells, an expanding network, and terrorist strikes will not end as long as there are basic incentives, like religious and ideological doctrine and the bitter reality of domination, oppression, and humiliation in which the *umma* lives." See Will McCants, *Jihadica*, May 26, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/channeling-sageman> (accessed April 10, 2009).
[17] See Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008; and Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda Strikes Back," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.
[18] This section relies heavily on a 10 part series published in April 2007 in *Al-Akhbar*, a Lebanese daily newspaper. This series contains an unprecedented level of detail not found in English language sources and is considered a reputable and relatively impartial source on the question of al-Qaeda in Lebanon.
[19] See Saab and Ranstrop, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism;" and Jane's, "Al-Qaeda in Lebanon," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, March 2006.
[20] Jane's, "Asbat al-Ansar."

[21] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism: Chapter 6--Terrorist Organizations*, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 30, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2007/103714.htm> (accessed April 10, 2009).
[22] Fida Itani, "Thus Lebanon Entered the Era of Globalized Jihad [in Arabic]," *Al Akhbar*, April 7, 2008.
[23] To support her claim, Itani profiles 15 of Jund al-Sham's highest ranking members, many of whom have close links with prominent al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
[24] Jane's, "Al-Qaeda in Lebanon."
[25] Olga Mattera, "The Re-emergence of al-Qaeda in the Middle East [in Italian]," *Osservatorio Strategico* 8 (4) (April 2006): 10.
[26] See Alon Ben-David, "Al-Qaeda eyes options in Lebanon," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 2006; and Olivier Guitta, "Al-Qaida's Opportunistic Strategy," *Middle East Times*, August 18, 2008.
[27] Emily Hunt, "Can al-Qaeda's Lebanese Expansion be Stopped?" *Policy Watch*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (Washington, D.C.): 2006.
[28] Fida Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic]," *Al-Akhbar*, April 11, 2008.
[29] Itani, "Arab Mujahadeen Bring Their Enthusiasm to Lebanon [in Arabic]."
[30] Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "Final in Lebanon Camp, a New Face of Jihad Vows Attacks on U.S.," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2007.
[31] Sami Moubayed, "Al-Qaeda sets Lebanon record straight," *Asia Times*, September 15, 2007.
[32] Will McCants, *Jihadica*, May 24, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/bin-laden-statement-prompts-speculation-on-aq-strategy-in-palestine-part-3> (accessed April 20, 2009).
[33] Andrew Exum, "Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon," *Global Politician*, March 2008.
[34] See Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Fida Itani, "Groups trained in Lebanon and launched worldwide [in Arabic]," *Al-Akhbar*, April 10, 2008; Fida Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 4, 2008; Seymour M. Hersh, "The Redirection: Does the new policy benefit the real enemy?" *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2007; and "March 14 denies charge of funding Fatah al-Islam," *The Daily Star*, November 8, 2008.
[35] Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon."
[36] Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon."
[37] Itani, "Al-Qaida roots itself in Lebanon."
[38] On December 20, 2006 al-Zawhiri said: "All the UN resolutions that have taken parts of it, and recognized Israel's presence on it, starting with the partition resolution to Resolution 1701 are all null and void, and, in the balance of Islam, are worthless. We should reject, renounce and fight these resolutions. We should not take hesitant positions towards these resolutions by saying that we will respect and acknowledge them as a fact of life, and other such statements that would squander the Muslim's rights. Recognizing these resolutions implies the recognition of the Hebrew state." On February 13, 2007, al-Zawhiri said: "I call on the brothers of Islam and of jihad in Lebanon not to yield to resolution 1701 and not to accept. . . the presence of international and Crusader [Western] forces in south Lebanon." In December 2007, bin-Laden described the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon as "Crusaders" sent to Lebanon "to protect the Jews" of Israel. On April 21, 2008, al-Zawhiri called upon jihadists to attack UNIFIL forces.
[39] Nicholas Blanford, "Was Al-Qaeda Behind Beirut Bombing?" *Time*, January 25, 2008.
[40] In early March 2009, in an internet question and answer session posted on several jihadi websites, a well-regarded jihadist with connections to al-Qaeda and affiliated groups asserted that al-Qaeda had already established a real presence in Lebanon, was well-armed and currently completing preparations for operations against Israel. This information has not been corroborated by other sources. See Al-Shishani, "Al-Qaeda Ideologue Describes Alleged Spread of Al-Qaeda in the Levant."
[41] Mahan Abedin, "A search for unity: interview with Omar Bakri Mohammed," *Asia Times*, June 12, 2008.
[42] See "Al-Qaeda has Infiltrated Ain al-Hilway Camp," *The Daily Star*, September 13, 2008; and Abdel-Latif, "Cedar Jihadis."
[43] Uhammad Salah, "Ayn Al-Hulwah Trying to Avoid Fate of Al-Barid," *Al-Safir*, November 10, 2008.
[44] Nicholas Blanford, "In Lebanon, pragmatism tempers jihadist aims," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 2008.

[45] While Syria officially withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, there remains a small core of intelligence officers in Lebanon, particularly in the South.
[46] Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstrop, *Fatah al Islam: How an Ambitious Jihadist Project Went Awry* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), 211.
[47] Ibid., 45.
[48] Ibid., 2.
[49] Saab and Ranstrop, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism," 841.
[50] Andrew Exum, "Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon."
[51] Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon."
[52] Abedin, "A search for unity: interview with Omar Bakri Mohammed,"
[53] See Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic];" and Itani, "Training and funding that paved the way for Fatah al-Islam [in Arabic]."
[54] Hunt, "Can al-Qaeda's Lebanese Expansion be Stopped?"
[55] Exum, "Return of the Jihadi."
[56] Saab and Ranstrop, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism." While in January 2006 Lebanese security forces announced the creation of a Special Agency to Combat Terrorism, which would have branches throughout the country and whose staff would receive international counterterrorism training, today this agency exists in name only. Bilal Y. Saab, Interview by Matteo Tomasini, *Senior Research Analyst, Brookings Institution* (April 25, 2009). For more information on current MID initiatives, see Saab, "Al-Qa'ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon," 5-9.
[57] See Rosen, "Al Qaeda in Lebanon;" and Nicholas Blanford, "Is Lebanon facing a 'new breed' of Al Qaeda?" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24, 2007.
[58] "Army to implement new field measures at Nahr al-Barid camp," *Naharnet*, March 20, 2009.
[59] Rougier, *Everyday Jihad.*
[60] Ibid.
[61] Taylor Long, "Poverty and patronage." *Now Lebanon*, February 19, 2008.
[62] Daniel Levy, *Talking Points Memo*, May 21, 2007, <http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2007/05/21/five_comments_on_the_lebanon_s> (accessed April 23, 2009).