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31 October 2007

Lebanon: The *mukhabarat*, including their activities, power and organization; whether they have any ties with Syria; how Syria's withdrawal has changed them

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The *mukhabarat* are the Syrian secret police and intelligence apparatus in Lebanon (*MERIP* 23 May 2006; *Global Politician* 16 Aug. 2007). Media sources report that the mukhabarat have been present in Lebanon since the mid-1970s (*MERO* 23 May 2006; *IHT* 17 Mar. 2005) and were particularly "pervasive" during the 1990s (USIP Nov. 2006). According to an article in the *International Herald Tribune* (*IHT*), Syrian intelligence has been instrumental to Syria's influence in Lebanon (17 Mar. 2005).

Specific information on the activities, power and organization of the mukhabarat was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, an article in *The Global Politician*, an independent online journal (*Global Politician* n.d.), states that Syrian intelligence operates covertly in certain Palestinian camps in Beirut, the suburbs of Tyre, and the Bekaa valley (*ibid.* 16 Aug. 2007). The same article reports that Syrian intelligence is also monitoring North Lebanon (16 Aug. 2007). The United States (US) Department of State *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006* states that there have been instances when Syrian intelligence officers intervened in the judicial process so that their supporters would not be prosecuted (6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1e).

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a non-partisan information resource concerned with foreign policy issues (n.d.), and *The Nation*, provide information on Fatah al-Islam, a militant Sunni organization in Lebanon, which is allegedly tied to Syrian intelligence (8 June 2007; *The Nation* 10 July 2007; see also CFR 1 June 2007). Syria denies such allegations (AP 20 May 2007) and claims that Fatah al-Islam has ties to al-Qaeda (CFR 8 June 2007; AP 20 May 2007). The CFR and *The Nation* report that the Lebanese government asserts that the objective of Fatah al-Islam is to "destabilize" Lebanon (CFR 8 June 2007; *The Nation* 10 July 2007; see also CFR 1 June 2007).

A professor specializing in the Middle East at the Toledo International Centre for Peace in Madrid provided the following information on how Syria's withdrawal has affected the mukhabarat:

Syria's withdrawal did not alter the mukhabarat in Lebanon. It led to a major fragmentation of the [L]ebanese intelligence services. Lebanese intelligence officers with allegiance to Syria still hold key positions especially at the Beirut Airport and the presidential palace in Baabda. In addition, Shia-dominated parties AMAL and Hezbollah share intelligence with both their Iranian and Syrian

counterparts. (10 Oct. 2007)

A 14 July 2006 document on the website of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) states the following:

Syrian forces have officially left Lebanon, but Syria and the Syrian security services still play a major political role in Lebanon.

...

Elements of Syrian intelligence stayed in Lebanon despite Syrian declarations otherwise... .

In an interview with the International Crisis Group (ICG), a Lebanese member of parliament stated that the mukhabarat are still in Lebanon "but they no longer work for the government" (5 Dec. 2005). The CFR states that Syrian intelligence operatives are present in Lebanon and continue to wield influence in many parts of the country (26 Apr. 2006). *Middle East Report Online (MERIP)* explains that although there were expectations in 2005 that the Syrian security influence in Lebanon would be reduced, by 2006, there was little evidence of change (23 May 2006).

In contrast, a witness providing evidence before the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament (UK 7 Mar. 2007a) stated that "[t]he rule of the Mukhabarat, the security services, which was continuous in both Lebanon and Syria, has collapsed in Lebanon and remains in Syria" (UK 7 Mar. 2007b).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact a professor of history at the University of Balamand in North Lebanon, a professor of political science at the Lebanese American University in Beirut and a special adviser to the Muslim World Initiative at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC), *Daily Star* [Beirut], Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group (ICG), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Radio France Internationale (RFI), United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), U.S. Committee for Refugees.

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