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MIDDLE EAST

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Syrian Islamist rebels 'withdraw from Lebanese town after truce'

Islamist militants from Syria have reportedly mostly withdrawn from the Lebanese border town of Arsal.

Sunni Muslim clerics brokered a truce after days of fighting between the Syrian rebels and the Lebanese army.

Lebanon's government on Thursday announced an extra 12,000 troops would be deployed to the area.

Arsal fell to militants from Syria over the weekend, the first major incursion into Lebanon since the start of the Syrian conflict.

Seventeen Lebanese soldiers have died in the fighting, and 19 soldiers are reported to still be held captive by the militants who released three soldiers and six internal security forces officers (ISF) on Wednesday.

Syrian [doctors](#) working in the area have said that 42 civilians have been killed in the recent violence, which began on Saturday when the rebels seized Arsal.

Thousands of refugees have also fled the town, crossing the border back into Syria.

Around 47,000 refugees are said to have sought shelter from the war in Syria in tented camps around Arsal, a majority Sunni town in the northern Bekaa Valley.

The Lebanese Red Cross told Reuters that they had not seen any remaining militants whilst evacuating the wounded from the town.

"We didn't see any gunmen. We don't know if they were hiding or if they just weren't there," said Abdullah Zogheib on the road outside Arsal.

Muslim cleric mediators said that they would continue to negotiate the release of the remaining captives held by the militants.

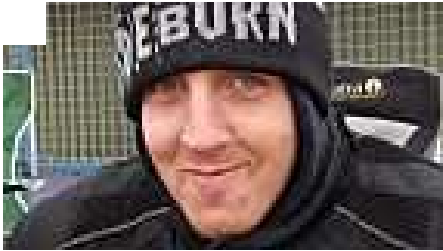
Several members of the group, the Association of Muslim Scholars, were themselves injured by a hail of bullets on Monday.

The fighters from Syria belong to the militant group the Nusra Front and also included fighters from the Islamic State group, formerly known as ISIS.

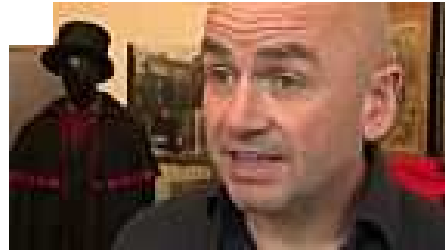
As the militants withdrew the Lebanese military continued to send armoured personnel carriers to the town, carrying out operations to verify that all the militants had withdrawn.

Lebanon's army has long complained of being under-funded at a time when the country is periodically affected by the fighting in Syria.

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