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# Lebanon: Political leadership confronted by Salafist ideology

**O**bservatoire du monde arabo-musulman  
et du Sahel

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## INTRODUCTION

Whilst it was already engulfed in political crisis in 2011, Lebanon is now reeling from the socio-economic, sanitary and political consequences of the Syrian crisis. Even in the unlikely scenario of resolution in the medium term of the Syrian conflict, such consequences are likely to persist and play a part in an alteration of Lebanon's identity. Nonetheless, from a security stand-point, it has to be highlighted that the spills of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon have remained relatively limited compared to the outbreaks of mass violence on the other side of the border.

The Lebanese ability to avoid spill-over goes against all the expectations of international analysts, political actors and academics specialised in civil war conflict.<sup>1</sup> This research memorandum makes the hypothesis that although peace in Lebanon is relative, it is also the result of mechanisms of political and social control that are well established and include the links between public figures or community leaders with the wider population. As we know, the consociational model of Lebanon makes these elites "community champions" and mediators between their own communities and the Lebanese state. Thus they are at the same time spokespeople, heads of intercommunity negotiations and inter-communal conflict regulators. Indeed, leaders have to engage with the radical members of their communities and "control" their "political channels."

Through the example of the Sunni Lebanese community, this memo analyses first and foremost the rise of Sunni extremism in the form of Salafist ideology. Secondly, we will look at the mechanisms of control and interaction between the poor urban youth and Sunni public figures, with a particular focus on issues of community mechanics. This analysis will outline in what way(s) such mechanisms exist in a similar form among Shi'ite, Maronite and Druze communities and hence to what extent this explains the rearrangement of the Lebanese State in the face of the Syrian crisis.

We will demonstrate that contrary to studies that represent Islamists as a threat to Lebanese stability and national cohesion,<sup>2</sup> such individuals are not necessarily dogmatic. On the contrary, Islamists will adapt and integrate themselves to their local context. Indeed, often deeply entrenched in the local, social and family tissue of their communities

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<sup>1</sup> See also : Tine Gade, "Limiting violent spillover in civil wars: the paradoxes of Lebanese Sunni jihadism, 2011–17", *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 2017, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 187-206. Published online on 27 April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Alia Ibrahim, "The Pope's Visit and Tripoli's Big Loss", *Al-Arabiyya*, 15 September 2012, <https://english.alarabiya.net/views/2012/09/15/238112.html>. Rabih Hassan, "The Beirut Bombings and the Islamic State's Threat to Lebanon", Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point, 15 December 2015.

as mediators or conflict mediators,<sup>3</sup> Islamists are also pragmatic. Private or community interests alongside political and family related matters can often take precedence on the religious aspect.

## I – Salafist ideology in Lebanon: between ‘scientific’ statements and sectarian realities

Although Islamist sentiment<sup>4</sup> has existed in Lebanon since the 1940s, Salafist ideology was imported in the 1990s. This was thanks to a generation of theology students in the coastal town of Tripoli in the north-west of the country, who attended the Islamic university of Medina in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> This movement to the Holy City of Islam arose after the expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League in 1981, after which Cairo interrupted its bursaries to Lebanese students at Al-Azhar. Consequently, Saudi Arabia offered replacement scholarships. By the end of their studies, these young graduates returned to Tripoli and established institutes to spread the teachings of the Sharia with their pockets lined with Petrodollars.

If some of these former students claim to be “Madkhalists” (following the Saudi Sheikh Rabi’a al-Madkhali) and to reject all forms of partisan action, they hold political positions against Hezbollah and political Shi’a-ism. Being a Salafist in Lebanon thus has a different meaning than in the Saudi context where Salafism is a religion of State and where clerics enjoy considerable autonomy in relation to the princes. Salafists in the land of the Cedars are dependent on external finances and thus constrained to adapt their ideological message in a pragmatic manner at the demand of potential backers in the Gulf. As a result, during the summer of 2007, a group of Lebanese Salafists entirely changed its posture towards Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> After having assessed that the political and material benefits of a compromise would be potentially greater than those of confrontation, they decided to seal an agreement with the Shi’ite group.

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<sup>3</sup> Janine Clark, “Islamist Women in Yemen. Informal Nodes of Activism”, In *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Dir. Quintan Wiktorovicz, 164–184. Bloomington, Indiana University Press ; Pall Sultan. Salafism in Lebanon. *Local and Transnational Resources*, doctoral thesis, Utrecht University, 2014 ; Virginie Collombier, and Olivier Roy (dir.). *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, London, Hurst, 2017, to be published.

<sup>4</sup> Islamism is a contemporary political movement which portrays Islam as a ideology and a political system. Olivier Roy, *L'échec de l'Islam politique*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> This is taken from Tine Gade, « Liban : les paradoxes du salafisme jihadisme levantin », *Moyen Orient*, 33, January 2017, pp. 56-61.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis, see Tine Gade and Morten Bøås, « Pathways to Reconciliation in Divided Societies: Islamist Groups in Lebanon and Mali », in Imad Salamey et. al. (dir.), *Post-Conflict Power-Sharing Agreements. Options for Syria*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, August 2017.

Salafist jihad appeared in Lebanon at the end of the 1990s as a result of the establishment of a network of young Lebanese activists and the development of the transnational jihadist nebula. Around 200 Lebanese young men participated in the Afghan Jihad during the Soviet war (1979 – 1989). As Lebanon was still under Syrian tutelage, many Lebanese Islamists who were opposed to the Syrian army fled the country after the end of the 1980s. Lebanese jihadists thus sprung up in Lebanon through the intermediary of Lebanese Islamists living at the heart of the diaspora, in Australia, in the United States and in Denmark.<sup>7</sup>

The spread of Salafist ideology was synonymous with the depreciation of political institutionalism and flagrant corruption during the Syrian military presence after the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990). The Sunni crisis of representation, from the start of the Palestinian commandos of 1982 and exacerbated by the Syrian tutelage, left the door open for a long time to jihadist support. The rise of Salafist ideology can be largely credited to the absence of the State. Thus if jihadi preaching found interested individuals in the northern suburbs of Tripoli, for example in the neighbourhood of Al-Mankoubin, it wasn't only because of the political and economic frustration of those concerned. More importantly, it was due to the strong presence of Jihadi families and networks in the region. In addition, as the neighbourhood was considered to be particularly influenced by jihadi ideology, the youth were particularly targeted for arrest which increased the spite held towards the State by a significant part of the population. For many of the unemployed, Salafist ideology also represented an alternative way out in a society that doesn't offer many opportunities to its youth. Thus it was not only transnational and Gulf incentives that explained the rise of Salafist ideology and its importation into Lebanon, it was also the product of local context and appropriation.

## 2 – Pragmatic Jihad in Lebanon

Another dimension of such malleability can be found in Lebanese jihadists who have never aimed to create an Islamic State through the use of force in Lebanon.<sup>8</sup> Given the demographic breakdown of the country, with Sunnis only making up a third of the population, jihadists assume that they would lose if they took on the State. Strategies of international jihadists, such as those of the Syrian Abou Musab al-Souri (Moustapha Setmariam Nasser) have in fact forewarned against the opening of a front in Lebanon and rather called for the use of Lebanon as a rear base and training ground for

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Rougier, *Le jihad au quotidien*, Paris, PUF, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> For a deeper analysis, see Bernard Rougier, *L'Oumma en fragments. Contrôler le sunnisme au Liban*, Paris, PUF, 2015.

international jihad.<sup>9</sup> These functions have continued and even accelerated since the start of the Syrian war.

When violent episodes arose, as in December 1999 in the northern region of Danniyeḥ or in May 2007 in the camp of Nahr el-Bared, near Tripoli, these did not entirely represent attempts to open up a battle front but rather a result of revenge attacks or “preventive” attacks. Lebanese jihadists did not want to control the State, but rather to “privatise” certain territories in the mountains, difficult to access, so as to put in place military training camps for foreign fighters such as the Chechens at the end of the 1990s or those sent to Iraq in 2003. In these areas, they also tried to assert a “purified” Muslim identity. This was undertaken by an abundance of jihadist flags and the enforcement of a moral code that was both a mirror to Hezbollah and yet opposed the societal model of resistance society which it has established in the south. Tens of Lebanese and Palestinians also went to Iraq as early as 2003 to join in the insurrection.

In May 2007, Fatah al-Islam attacked the Lebanese army itself, slitting the throats of 26 soldiers in their military post of Al-Mahmara, near the camp of Nah el-Bared in Akkar. However, this assault was neither a premeditated action, nor was it socio-revolutionary. Rather, it was an excessive reaction to a raid committed the night before by national Security Forces to an apartment which harboured members of a group that had held-up a bank. A three-month battle followed and the number of dead in both camps caused great animosity. This explains the subsequent attacks against the army between 2007 – 2010.

### 3 – Salafists and Lebanese: the entrance of transnationalism in the local political game

In the crisis period in Lebanon which started with the assassination of the old Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005, Lebanese Salafists underwent a process of “Lebanonisation.” Through this time they were dragged into national and regional politico-confessional polarisation.

Saad, the son of Rafic Hariri, inherited the political movement ‘Future Current’ from his father.<sup>10</sup> Helped by Saudi Arabia, he received the unconditional support of the Lebanese

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<sup>9</sup> Umar Abd al-Hakim (Abu Musab al-Suri), *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (in Arabic) (Place and publisher unknown), December 2004, p. 784. For a biography of al-Souri, see : Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2007/2012.

<sup>10</sup> Son of Rafic Hariri – Prime Minister from 1992 to 1998 and from 2000 to 2004, assassinated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2005 – Saad Hariri is the head of Future Current. Head of Government from 2009 to 2011, he was returned to this position as of 2016.

Sunni population after the Syrian withdrawal. Constrained by a context of politico-confessional polarisation, he opted for a *modus vivendi* with the institutional Salafist camp which allowed him to unify the Sunni community against Hezbollah and its political allies. Certain Salafist leaders then benefitted from “political covers” granted by individuals close to Future. This marriage of convenience between two actors who opposed themselves to Hezbollah, for various different reasons (notably doctrinaire for Salafists and political for Future), illustrates the role played by Salafist ideology in the inter-community game.

The Salafists of Tripoli were the principal protagonists of sectarian confrontations which opposed Bab al-Tebbaneh, a Sunni and marginalised neighbourhood of Tripoli to the Alawite ghetto of Baal Mohsen. Although the mutual hostility between the two neighbourhoods can be traced back to the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990) and the Syro-Palestinian war of the same period (1983),<sup>11</sup> the dynamics of their rivalry were expressed differently in the noughties. At that time a new actor was pulling the strings, important Tripolitan public figures. After the occupation of West Beirut by Hezbollah on 7 May 2008, Future Current and its political allies looked for an alliance with Salafists to promote a more “muscular” image. Sunni crowds thus expelled Hezbollah’s allies from the north of Lebanon considering that this violence could help to restore the honour of their community. Sunni public figures equally gave the green light to Salafists to pressure the Alawite neighbourhood of Baal Mohsen in Tripoli. However, they underestimated the resistance that would emanate from the district and armed violence broke out for three months. The fighting restarted in January 2011, the date of the fall of Saad Hariri’s first government (2009 – 2011). At that time, the battle between Baal Mohsen and Bab al-Tebbaneh became an expression of the ongoing confrontation between Saad Hariri and Najib Mikati, a key figure of the Sunni political class and former Prime Minister (2011 – 2014). The two men aimed to outbid one another by sending political messages in the form of military strikes on the Alawi ghetto. The Salafist fighters thus became clients of these public figures, whilst at the same time attempting to promote their personal, economic and religious agendas. Though these Lebanese Salafists are militant and keen to participate in armed conflict, they are not jihadists as their involvement remains limited to the Lebanese community system. Thus, national and local identities represent more important incentives than transnational identities.

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<sup>11</sup> ICG, “Nouvelle crise, vieux démons au Liban. Les leçons oubliées de Bab Tebbaneh/Jabal Mohsen”, *Briefing Moyen Orient* 129, 14 October 2010; Tine Gade, “Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad regime. 1966-2014”, *Syria studies*, 7:2, April 2015, pp. 20-65.

## 4 – The Syrian crisis: avoiding at all cost the contamination in Lebanon

The Syrian Crisis has exacerbated Lebanese division and notably increased Sunni-Shi'a tensions. If the opposed Lebanese camps have adopted a principle of neutrality (*al-na'ī 'an al-nafs*) towards the crisis,<sup>12</sup> there are many violations. Hezbollah, whose military strength is much stronger than that of the Lebanese army is militarily engaged since 2012 alongside Bachir Al-Assad with between 6 – 10,000 men (according to needs and with varying degrees of investment). In contrast, around 900 jihadist fighters who come from the Lebanese Sunni youth are present in Syria and swell the ranks of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, Daesh and the Salafist-nationalist Ahrar al-Sham.<sup>13</sup> It is important to highlight that Sunni and Shi'ite contributions to the war in Syria are very different in nature. On the one hand, Hezbollah has been organised by its central leadership whereas Lebanese jihadists leave on individual initiatives. The institutional and parliamentary Sunni leadership, especially Future Current, hold that since 2011, intervention in the conflict has been neither in the interest of the Lebanese nor that of the Syrians. Hence it put an end to its provision of weaponry to the Syrian opposition in 2012.<sup>14</sup>

If Hezbollah is already under pressure due to the costly war it is waging in Syria (3000 dead and 4000 wounded according to some estimates),<sup>15</sup> Future seems to be the party that could end up as the greatest loser from this war. Although Hariri is still one of the rare nationalistic Sunni leaders, his political strength has been losing momentum since 2010. In contrast to the Salafists, he does not have military structures. Moreover, due to failures in his attempts to unite the Sunni community between 2005 and 2011, it is uncertain that he may still be the recipient of the international and Saudi aid which he was receiving previously. Militarisation would probably be beneficial to military actors, Islamists and local chieftains as has been demonstrated since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011 as well as the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990) which had made Sunni public figures lose their grip on their electors.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the leadership of Future Current is increasingly contested by secular public figures, such as Achraf Rifi. This former general director of the Lebanese Internal Security

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<sup>12</sup> Permanent mission of the UN in Lebanon, Baabda declaration published by the committee of national dialogue on the 11 June 2012. New York, UN Security Council.

<sup>13</sup> The departures started in 2011, so most probably before the involvement of Hezbollah in Syria.

<sup>14</sup> The (Shi'ite) deputy of the Beqaa, Okab Sakr, is accused of having delivered weapons to the Syrian opposition (the Free Syrian Army) in 2012 on behalf of Saad Hariri. Radwan Mortada, "Exclusive: Inside Future Movement's Syria Arms Trade", *Al-Akhbar*, 29 November 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Interview, Radwan Sayyid, professor and political advisor of Future Current, Beirut, August 2016.

<sup>16</sup> See also, Michael Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840- 1985*, New York, Ithaca Press, 1986.

Forces (2005 – 2013) who was a close advisor of Saad Hariri, turned against his mentor and is now attracting an increasing number of faithful. During the municipal elections of 2016, the electoral list which he was supporting, allied to members of **civil society**, obtained two thirds of the votes in Tripoli. He is currently a candidate for the legislative election in the spring of 2018 and an analysis of the different lists of electoral registers suggests he could receive a high score.

The posture of Sunni Lebanese Islamists since the start of the war in Syria is perhaps ambivalent but undoubtedly paradoxical. On the one hand, Lebanese Islamists have benefited politically from the existing frustrations in a segment of Lebanese Sunnis who fear the rise of Hezbollah at the heart of the State and amongst security institutions. A number of Islamists fuel the frustrations of Sunni populations by denouncing the passivity of Future Current and its concessions to Hezbollah. For example, certain Islamists close to the Association of Muslim Scholars (hay'at 'ulama al-muslimin), such as Sheikh Salem al-Rifai, have adopted very critical postures towards the Lebanese army and its leadership. They have condemned the fact that the army operates double standards regarding Sunnite and Shi'ite fighters respectively. This has been evident when they have prevented Lebanese Sunnis returning from Syria into Lebanon but allowed free access across the border to Hezbollah fighters. Such critiques of the army have created amongst the wider Lebanese a fear for the unity and integrity of the Lebanese military institution, which counts for around 40% of Sunni soldiers in its ranks.

On the other hand, a great number of Lebanese Islamists have adopted more moderate positions since the start of the war in Syria. They fear the attraction of Daesh on a significant part of the Sunni population and attempt to fight against its hyper-radicalism. The Association of Muslim Scholars has played a mediating role between the State and the Salafist youth, attempting to calm public opinion. By forming new contacts outside the Islamist framework, with the State and Christian as well as Shi'ite politicians, the Sheikhs who follow this line of thought have gained media visibility. For Salafists and other Lebanese political actors, a war would bring to the fore a myriad of diverging interests and may prove too costly.

Islamist sheikhs in Lebanon, as well as Islamist organisations such as al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya (the Lebanese branch of the Muslim brotherhood), have had vast networks of charitable and educational institutions implanted in Lebanon for decades (since the 1950s for al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya). Since the Syrian presence in the 1990s, these public figures and organisations have shown themselves to be willing to embrace political compromise. This has been demonstrated in their diverse and regular meetings with different Lebanese and foreign intelligence services as well as their acceptance of the creation of political support structures and alliances with non-Islamists and Shi'ites. The motivations have been political and financial as much as religious. This is due to the fact that Lebanese Islamists are dependent on external financing. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Lebanese

Islamists attempt to limit the risks so as to guarantee the future of their institutions and safeguard their external financial support. **Typo in french** Whilst, they are likely to make violent declarations in periods of crisis, drawing media attention on themselves, they are not capable of using physical force inside Lebanon without loosing their legal, existential justification.

The example of the Salafist sheikh Ahmar Assir demonstrates this. He was arrested in 2015 at Beirut airport as he was attempting to board a flight to Nigeria after being pursued in Lebanon for two years. Cleric who was in Sidon until 2013 benefited from the anti-Hezbollah climate present in the southern town after the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2008. He became popular for his fierce declarations made against the Shi'ite group and through a renewal of the image of the Islamist sheikh. For example, he took his followers to ski in the Lebanese mountains, thereby defying the social and special sectarian splits in the country.<sup>17</sup> Yet, a conflict with Hezbollah sympathisers who were occupying a bloc of flats opposite his mosque brought him into direct confrontation with the Lebanese army. When one of his supporters was arrested by the army in June 2013, other followers stormed an army checkpoint. In retaliation, the latter attacked the al-Assir mosque. During the open fighting that followed, sheikh al-Assir called on 'noble' Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'ite, to leave the Lebanese army.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, while large protests took place in Tripoli earlier in the same year to call for the liberation of members of the al-Assir group who were arrested by the army, nobody obeyed the order to join the fight. This shows the wide spectrum of interests of Lebanese Islamists and their will to maintain their institutions in a context that is increasingly dominated by Hezbollah. This is especially the case in Southern Lebanon where the town of Sidon is principally Sunni but the hinterland is populated by a Shi'ite majority. Additionally, this illustrates the argument according to which the choice of radical or moderate alignment is often strategic, situational and has the potential to alter in the midst of action.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Meier, "Réfugiés de Syrie et tensions sunnito-chiïtes. Le Liban entre défis et périls", *Maghreb Machrek*, No 218, September 2014 (41–60), 58 ; Daniel Meier et Rosita d. Peri, "The Sunni Community in Lebanon: From 'Harirism' to 'Sheikhism'?", In *Lebanon Facing the Arab Uprisings: Between Internal Challenges and External Constraints*, Dir. Daniel Meier and Rosita d. Peri. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 35-53.

<sup>18</sup> Tine Gade and Nayla Moussa, "The Lebanese army after the Syrian crisis: Alienating the Sunni community?", in *Situating (In-)Security: A United Army for a Divided Country*, Dir. Are J. Knudsen and Tine Gade, to be published, Palgrave Macmillan, July 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Mats Utas et Henrik Vigh, "Radicalised Youth: Oppositional Poses and Positions", in *Africa's Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape*, Dir. Morten Bøås and Kevin Dunn, 2017, 23–42. Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner.

## 5 – Jihad and mechanisms of control for public opinion

Apart from the interest for Lebanese and regional institutional actors to avoid the destabilisation of Lebanon, certain events have confirmed the existence in Lebanon of profoundly radical smaller groups and *agents provocateurs* who would be capable of triggering a war.

It should be underlined that such *agents provocateur* are of different faiths and political orientation. The likely culprits of the two bomb attacks which targeted two (Sunni) mosques and caused 43 deaths, were members of an Alawi militia close to al-Assad's Syrian regime. These terrorist attacks and the Sunni Islamist counter-mobilisation which they triggered have intensified confessional fighting between the two Tripolitan neighbourhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Baal Mohsen, the stronghold of the previously named Alawi militia.

Daesh controls sleeper cells in Lebanon and since 2013, terrorist projects are sometimes discovered. Whereas the Lebanese jihadists can be more easily controlled by conventional forms of solving confessional conflicts (such as family pressure), non-Lebanese jihadists, Arabs and/or Europeans would be more dangerous.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, they are not part of local networks of neighbourhood or patronage which are prevalent amongst Salafist public figures and/or Sunni deputies or ministers.

In August 2014, in the town of Arsal, close to the Syrian border, infiltrated Jihadists from Syria launched a huge assault on the army in retaliation for the arrest of a commander of an Islamist brigade. The army lost 17 soldiers. 28 men, both military policemen and army, were taken hostage. Following Qatari mediation, 16 of them were released in December 2015 in exchange for 13 Islamist prisoners in prison in Lebanon. The others were still being held captive in July 2016. Despite the ongoing fighting against them since 2014, in coordination between the army and Hezbollah, Syrian jihadists still control mountainous zones in this region. In July 2017, the Syrian army also intervened, initiating bombing runs in the mountains of Arsal.

Since 2015, with the loss of momentum of Daesh in Syria and Iraq as well as the terror attacks throughout Europe, certain analysts feared that the terrorist group might strike Lebanon so as to turn attention away from the Iraqi-Syrian front. Since 2014, several bomb explosions have targeted Shi'ite neighbourhoods in the capital with the most violent case taking place on 12 November 2015. In this context, it can be deduced that the paths of terrorists who commit bomb attacks in Lebanon differ from those of Lebanese jihadist fighters in Syria. Lebanese fighters in Syria originate from local Islamist social backgrounds and are often motivated by confessional hatred against Hezbollah.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, Fidaa Itani, Beirut, August 2016.

On the other hand, those who are responsible for bombings (including explosive belts and car bombs), often come from the outside and are motivated by transnational ideologies that are not well suited to the reality of Lebanese society. A Franco-Comorian who had previously been in Raqqa in Syria, was for example arrested in January 2014. With other members of Daesh coming from several countries (including Saudi Arabia), he had planned attacks that targeted Hezbollah strongholds in the southern suburbs of Hezbollah.

Apart from the north of Lebanon, Salafist jihad has been particularly successful in recruiting individuals in prison. This has proved a true breeding ground for meetings of all types of Syro-Palestinian-Lebanese jihadi Salafists, including Jabhat Fateh al-Cham and Daesh. Additionally, the Palestinian camp of Ain al-Hilweh, which the Lebanese army is not allowed to enter, has become a refuge for Lebanese criminals and an area where Palestinian, Lebanese and international jihadi militants can rub shoulders with one another. What's more, although Daesh does not have a real presence in Lebanese mosques where the established clerics, including Salafists, fear its radicalism, the terrorist group mobilises through a relatively atypical network. This is exemplified by online videogames and / or sports teams. This shows the lack of local implementation of members of Daesh and the generational break that exists between radicalised youths and their parents. This marks a contrast with Al-Qaida where sympathy for Bin Laden as a "Sunni symbol" transcended age in Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> Regarding Daesh's operational support, it is limited to the younger generation, in opposition to their parents and to transnational activists and/or jihadists who have returned from Syria.

It is above all confessional one-upmanship and resentment towards Hezbollah which could lead a number of more important young Sunnis to take up arms. With the heightened presence of Daesh sleeper cells in Lebanon, the ties between the young Sunni urban poor and Daesh's professional recruiters could in the long run push a large part of these youths toward jihadist organisations. If Daesh or Al-Qaida hedge their bets in this direction and if political and economic frustrations of a certain proportion of Sunnis does not ease under the new government, there are certain risks of violence and civil disorder in the long term.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis insists on the pragmatism of Lebanese Salafists, their will to keep their institutions running is the key to their decision-making / a strategy to avoid armed confrontation with the Lebanese army. Lebanese Salafists are often deeply entrenched in local networks and are sometimes mediators between the poor urban youth and the

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<sup>21</sup> Participant-observer in Tripoli, August 2009.

army. Often, political and material interests of Islamist sheikhs take precedence over religious interests. This makes a consensual position towards Sunni political elites and the phenomenon of Lebanonisation of Salafist ideology possible, through the medium of patronage networks.

However, by contrast, Daesh militants have an international anchorage which would make them more dangerous, as they are less easily influenced and controlled by Salafist public leaders or political elites. They are young and in opposition to their parents and community. Nevertheless, as the youth of Daesh claim to follow Salafist ideology, important Salafists are still held in high regard by some of them. Thus, the inclusion of Lebanese Salafist sheikhs in the negotiation process with Daesh continues to be of great importance.

Finally, Future Current and Hariri, are increasingly contested by Sunni electors. Hariri's greatest rival is not embodied by Salafists but by other leaders who are more in line with the ideals of the community, such as Achraf Rifi.